

In times like these, where going outside feels abundantly necessary for mental and emotional wellbeing, we educators at **Pearlstone** huddled together and asked—what can we offer families in this moment without being physically present with them? How can we truly be in service to children and families seeking nature connection?

We settled on sharing some of the tools that we use in our programs all the time—games, crafts, activities, and ideas—that are simple, fun, flexible, and intentionally Jewish, using materials or spaces that are commonplace or easily accessible. In this list you’ll find a mix of Shabbat-friendly and weekday specific activities so that it can be useful for the whole week. May it be so that these help you find joy and connection with family, plants, creatures big and small, spirit, and yourself. Thank you, and have a rejuvenating Shabbat! Look out for Part 2 of this list coming soon!

Create an outdoor sanctuary

Take a walk in the forest, your backyard, or your neighborhood to find rocks, sticks, and other natural materials that speak to you and your kids. Then, work together to arrange them in a quiet or meaningful place outdoors to create a space where you can think, pray, or just sit. Doing this activity with kids is a great way to prepare them and yourself spiritually for Shabbat!



Play “Poke’ach Ivrim”

The words "pokeach ivrim" come from a blessing in the Birkot Ha'shachar {morning blessings} which challenges us to open our eyes to the beauty around us. Find a partner and use this game to share how you see the beauty in the world!

This is a Shabbat-friendly partner game! Have one partner close their eyes, while the other partner leads them to an interesting object/scene that they would like to record on “retinal film”. The object/scene can be framed close up or far away. Make sure the person is standing directly in front of the object that you would like them to see. When the person is positioned in the right spot, gently tap their shoulder to activate the shutter. At this time the “camera” opens their eyes for a brief moment to observe what they are being shown in detail – or, “take the picture”. After each photographer has taken a few photographs, the two individuals can discuss what they have jointly recorded, or draw what they saw!

Make upcycled instruments and have a neighborhood Parade!

Use aluminum cans, plastic or glass bottles, milk cartons, and other materials to create percussion (or even tonal!) instruments, and have a parade in your neighborhood (or backyard)! Upcycling, or reducing waste, is a Jewish value called “Baal Tashchit” (no waste), so doing this activity is its own mitzvah! Spreading a little joy can’t hurt either. This [website](#) has some great ideas for instruments that you and your family can make!





Paint on objects outdoors with water

Bust out your paintbrushes (new or used!), dip them in water, and “paint” on wood, rocks, cement, asphalt, or anything! Watch as the color of the object changes as you paint it with water—and how it changes as the water dries up. (Hint – painting with water on smooth surfaces is especially satisfying!) This activity helps us find joy and awe in familiar objects and places, which engages a sense of “radical amazement”—a term coined by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Make a bird feeder from a pinecone

Go outside and find a beautiful pinecone. Fill it with your favorite nut/seed butter, sprinkle with seeds (any will do), and hang it outside a child-accessible window—watch as many a bird come to visit! The tradition of bird feeding has been practiced by Jews for hundreds of years on Shabbat Shirah, for a few reasons mentioned [here](#). For detailed feeder-crafting instructions, click [here](#).



Identify plants in your backyard or on a nature walk

Download the Plant ID app [PictureThis](#) and get to know the plants in your back yard or on your daily walk. This is one great way to get to know your plant neighbors—sit down and schmooze for a while, they’ll listen! If you would like to do something like this on Shabbat, you can instead keep your eyes out for interesting plants you would like to identify on your Shabbos walk! Try using the activity “I notice, it reminds me of, I wonder” so beautifully explained by [Amir Project](#) on Instagram.

Search for tiny life forms

Using a magnifying glass, search for the tiniest life forms in your backyard or neighborhood. Tall grass, underneath leaves/decaying logs, and bushes are great places to find them! This activity can be done without a magnifying glass if participants are willing to crawl on the ground and look very closely. This is a great way to find out if your backyard grass is *halachically* edible! Just kidding. Have fun out there!



Thanks for reading! You’ll find next week’s Part 2 list, videos, and more online learning opportunities in the coming weeks at pearlstonecenter.org/online. For a fun Shabbat prep video, check out this [Haydallah besamim bag crafting tutorial](#) with Lead Educator Sarah! Shabbat Shalom, see you soon!