

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 3 of this list coming soon!

### Build a Rock/stick labyrinth

As a family, gather an armful or two of rocks and sticks to make a labyrinth in your backyard. You can make a path with two sides, or just have participants follow a single line—smaller children will love laying out the rocks and sticks! Labyrinths differ from mazes in that one does not get lost in them—labyrinths have one path, taking twists and turns along the way. You are along for the ride! Traditionally, [Jewish labyrinths have seven turns](#), representing the seven days of creation. But you can build yours however you’d like to—it is a journey in itself, let it guide you! Once completed, you can walk as a family or solo, meditatively or for fun. Enjoy!



### Get acquainted with the outdoors by doing a Sit Spot (*hitbodedut*)

In order to build a connection with nature, one must learn to observe it, and observe how it changes you. Find a place in the forest or your yard to sit and get comfortable. Encourage your child or children to spread out so that they can’t easily see you or each other. Then, explain that they should use as many of their senses as they can to observe what unfolds both in nature and in themselves. A similar practice, called *hitbodedut*, was used by Avram, Moshe, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, and the Baal Shem Tov, and continues to be practiced by many Jewish people today. Check out our [Camp Director Miki](#) explaining how we do sit spots at our summer camp!

### Draw a Map

Draw a map of your home/backyard/forest. Mark your favorite spots, interesting things to see, places to avoid, etc. Give to another person and see if they can use your map to find all the places and things!





## Play “Meet a Tree”

Meet a Tree is a game meant to orient players to the uniqueness and awesomeness of trees. It is powerful way to form relationships with the immense beings that nurture the forest and its creatures. The game is played in pairs—each pair gets a blindfold, with one person as the guide, and one as the explorer. The guiding partner leads their exploring friend to a tree, making sure to verbally and physically guide them to step over or go around hazards. When at the tree, a smart guide might choose to slowly spin their partner around to disorient them (more on that later). Then, the guide should help the explorer get to know their trees and feel their uniqueness. The explorer should feel the ground around the tree, its roots, the soil, and maybe even other plants around the tree so that they can recognize it later. Ask the exploring partner questions like "Is this tree still alive? ... Can you put your arms around it? ... Is the tree older than you are? ... Can you find plants growing on it? ... Signs of animals? ... Lichens?... Insects?"

When the first person is finished exploring, the guide should lead them back to where they began by taking an indirect route. This part of the game has its fun side, with the guides leading their partners over imaginary logs and through thickets that might easily have been avoided. Now, remove the blindfold and let the person try to find the tree with his or her eyes open. Suddenly, as the explorer searches for their tree, what was a forest becomes a collection of very individual trees! If they find their tree, they win! If they don't, they get a chance to try and (kindly) fool their partner when they switch roles.

## Nature mandalas

A nature mandala is a sculpture created using objects from nature and is meant to be impermanent (rather than permanent, like a painting or a clay sculpture). Building nature mandalas is a lovely and calming activity to do any time, but especially on Shabbos afternoon—because it is meant to be disassembled soon or immediately after assembling, you might not consider it as an act of *melachot* (creation/work). As you spend more time in your backyard and start to notice the different colors and textures of the plants, growing or fallen, use this inspiration to create impermanent art! An artist we are inspired by, [Andy Goldsworthy](#), creates sculptures in nature using only collected plants and sticks. Often his creations take the form of geometric patterns, but you and your children should feel to make something more abstract! Nature mandalas can be made outside under a tree, or you and your family can gather materials to create something in your home. It's totally up to you, the creators. When you are done, you can simply take the sculpture apart and make something new!





### Press Flowers

Springtime is the perfect time to capture and preserve the beauty of all the flowers around us! All you need are a few towels, some heavy books and the flowers of your choice! Children can gather the blossoms they want to preserve and arrange them in a bouquet or just single flowers. Then, have them place the flowers between 2 towels (ones that can absorb the moisture) and put a couple of heavy books on top. Leave them for 2-3 days then check to see if they are dried—this part is especially exciting for kids. When they are all done, you can glue the flowers to birthday cards, or frame them and put them on your wall!

### Experiment with Pickling!

Here at Pearlstone, pickling and fermenting are long treasured past-times. Jews have been pickling food for as many years as we have existed as a people, and is thus a process preserved in our tradition (see what I did there?) to the present day. As we are all cooped up in our homes—and at the same time stretching our groceries to limit trips to the store—this is a great opportunity to try preserving your produce! Pickling is a great way for children to get involved in cooking—it requires very simple cutting techniques (that is safe with close adult supervision), and equally simple ingredient measuring. And contrary to what you might expect, in our experience kids love trying pickled foods when they are involved in the process!

Note that pickling can be done multiple ways—through lacto-fermentation with a salt brine, or quick-pickling with a vinegar-based brine. If you need some ideas for what to pickle, cucumbers, onions, radishes, carrots, eggs, beets, and even avocados are perfect for the process. Check out Pearlstone's time-honored lacto-fermented cucumber recipe [here](#), and an online treasure-trove of lacto-fermented and vinegar-pickling recipes [here](#).



Thanks for reading! You'll find next week's Part 3 list, videos, and more online learning opportunities in the coming weeks at [pearlstonecenter.org/online](http://pearlstonecenter.org/online). For a fun Shabbat prep video, check out this [Havdallah besamim bag crafting tutorial](#) with Lead Educator Sarah! Shabbat Shalom, see you soon!