

# Reconnect with Nature

BY: MARY FRENCH

It's summer time! A great time for people of all ages to get out and reconnect with nature – there are birds and bugs waiting to be watched and identified, rivers to paddle, shady trees to sit under and day dream.



After months of being inside classrooms, students are more than ready to be outdoors. The City of Tualatin offers an assortment of options to do just that – such as Summer in the Park which includes Creepy Crawlies camp to explore the world of insects and amphibians; and Teen Adventure Camps that include whitewater rafting, horseback riding, rock climbing, beach combing and river kayaking. For those who prefer a quieter pace, the Wetlands Conservancy offers a monthly guided Bird and Nature Walk around Sweek Pond – all ages are welcome. The City's Get Out Guide has all the details you need for these activities and more. The Guide is mailed to your home; you can also pick up a copy at the Tualatin library or go online: [tualatinoregon.gov/recreation/getout-guide](http://tualatinoregon.gov/recreation/getout-guide)

A more focused connection with nature can be experienced at the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge in Sherwood, at their Creative Nature Camp. Two week-long camp sessions will be held in July; one for ages 8 – 10, and one for ages 11 – 13. Each camp will center on environmental education and art activities including photography, nature journaling, paper making, and other wildlife crafts. They will even keep a blog so families can enjoy daily reports of the fun. Find all the information you need including how to register at: [friendsoftualatinrefuge.org/News/details.cfm?id=59](http://friendsoftualatinrefuge.org/News/details.cfm?id=59)

A bit farther from home are the Summer Camps sponsored by Portland Audubon Society. These camps are for all ages, first grader to high school senior. Different types of camps are available; Excursions – week-long programs with field trips each day; Mobile Adventures – week-long overnight trips where transportation, food and lodging is provided; and On-Site Programs for the younger participants, offered in half or full day sessions and held at the Audubon Society's center on Cornell Road. In the words of Portland Audubon: "Summer Camps inspire children to love and protect nature, in the very best way – by exploring, learning and having fun." Get all the details and a link to the calendar of events at: [audubonportland.org/trips-classes-camps/camps/summer](http://audubonportland.org/trips-classes-camps/camps/summer)

But perhaps you would like to reconnect with nature in a more unstructured way – maybe even in your own backyard or neighborhood. One way to start is to find a sit spot.



## What's a sit spot, you ask?

According to the Wilderness Awareness School, a sit spot is a place in nature that is near your home, where you feel safe, and one that you will go to! It is a place where you will learn to sit still, quietly, and get to know the area as a best friend. A place where you can observe the rhythms of a single place and create an intimate connection to nature. For as Yogi Berra tells us: "You can observe a lot by watching."

The most important thing to remember when finding your sit spot is that it is a place you will feel safe sitting for up to 20 minutes, and that it is a place you will go to as often as you can – daily if possible. Your spot may be in your backyard under tall, swaying Douglas Fir trees or smack in the middle of your vegetable garden. Your sit spot can be on a bench in a quiet corner of one of Tualatin's many parks, or overlooking the wetlands of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge. It may even be beneath the wooden roof of a picnic shelter. Anywhere in nature that you can observe plants and animals at close range, with as little interruption as possible, is a sit spot.

When you sit quietly in nature like this, the birds, bugs and animals become used to your presence, and they will begin to go about their day accepting you as part of the landscape. This can provide educational and downright amazing glimpses into daily rhythm of nature – an American Robin taking a worm to her young in the nest, a chipmunk or squirrel digging through the leaf litter for a nut or mushroom lunch, a bumble bee buzzing lazily from flower to flower. All ages of children can participate in sit spots. Allow the child to pick their own spot, with their favorite outdoor chair or a pillow to sit on, a nature journal in hand for drawing and writing after their time is up, and you'll find they will be ready to "sit" every day. Remember, this is quiet time for observation and reflection – please turn down the cell phone and keep it in your pocket or purse.

To find other ways to reconnect children, and parents, to nature, I recommend two books that you can check out through the Tualatin library.

*I Love Dirt!* 52 activities to help you & your kids discover the wonders of nature by Jennifer Ward. The book lists activities to do in each season, with summer activities including digging in the dirt and mud, watching ants and other insects, and things to do outside on warm summer nights (an often overlooked time to explore nature). The book also includes a section on "A



Thinking Place" – a version of the sit spot described above.

*Sharing Nature with Children* by Joseph Cornell. Also full of excellent nature activities for children, especially groups. And for the parent or "nature guide" of these children, the book gives some great advice on how to act as that guide, giving everyone a rewarding and full experience. This book too devotes an entire section on how to "Journey to the Heart of Nature" by finding and enjoying quiet time alone with nature.



Summer in Tualatin is a great time to be outdoors – for we know that before long the school bells ring again and we all go back inside. Get out and reconnect with nature during this special time and remember these words by poet Gary Synder:

"Nature is not a place to visit, it is home."



**Mary French** is a native Oregonian who lives in Tualatin. She is a Volunteer Naturalist with the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, and has completed the Oregon Master Naturalist program with Oregon State University.