

## San Antonio Parks and Recreation

As you practice social distancing, check out these 10 ways to engage your little ones in nature right now!

1. **Bug hunt anyone?** Overcome your fear of insects and go on a bug hunt and discover the many types of insects living around you. Click [here](#) to start learning! All you need is your curiosity, a magnifying glass if you have one, a notebook, a pencil, and an optional field guide, or check out this [bug guide](#) from Texas Parks and Wildlife. Remember to Leave No Trace—nearly every insect has an important job to do in nature such as pollination and decomposing, so please observe using only your eyes.
2. **Discover legends and folktales** of some of Texas' coolest wildflowers like the Indian Paintbrush, Bluebonnet, and Indian Blanket! Not only do these wildflowers teach us about the natural world, they can teach moral lessons too. Take a step outside, look for wildflowers, and read some of these fun [folktales](#) to your curious kiddos.
3. **Love the prickly pear cactus?** We do, because we love the color red! Wait, prickly pear cactus isn't red, but tunas (fruit on the cactus) and the cochineal insects that live on cactus pads are both red! Did you know cochineal bugs can be used for food, textiles, and make up? Step outside and search for a prickly pear cactus and look for the white "fluff" on the cactus pads. For a more extensive hands-on cochineal activity, check out the National Park Service about life in the missions and using cochineal for dye [here](#).
4. **How can you tell which direction the wind blows?** Use your finger as a weathervane and learn about evaporation! Click [here](#), but remember, this activity depends on how much evaporation is in the air and won't work as well at helping you estimate wind direction on humid or muggy days. When the weather is humid, it means that the air is already filled with water vapor that will carry away the additional moisture from your finger more slowly.
5. **What kind of bird is THAT?** Most of us can't always identify birds by their call, but there are definitely some cool apps to help us get started! Check out [All About Birds](#) for learning songs as well as watching live bird cams! Don't miss the Barred Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, and the Royal Albatross live! [eBird](#) is especially important for recording what you're observing or hearing around you. For more resources on birding and other activities, check the link [here](#). As you enjoy a bird walk, listen for all the different songs and calls you might hear and record those on eBird.

6. It's Springtime and that means the birds are singing and deciduous trees are leafing out again! We love leaves, but especially we love leaf hunts and making cool things with the fallen leaves we find on the ground. **Explore leaf shapes** on your next nature walk and check out this [site](#) for the younger kiddos to see and do. Pro Tip: We once made our own Fiesta confetti by hole punching fallen leaves—recycle, reuse, and reduce is our motto!
7. **Thinking of planting a garden?** Whether it's a veggie garden or flower garden, it's important to determine what type of soil you're working with. Of course, you can send it into a lab for soil testing, or you can give it the old tried and true Mason jar test to determine how much sand, silt, and clay you have. Check it out [here](#)! Besides, who doesn't love playing in dirt? Dig in and have fun!
8. **Collect acorns and grow oak trees!** Will it grow into a mature oak tree in your lifetime—maybe, but it depends on the species (there are over 600 species!). With some basic supplies, a lot of patience, and some soil, air, and sunlight, you might see a tiny seedling soon! Check out this [website](#) to learn the parts of an acorn, along with a super fun craft activity for your little ones. Still curious about how acorns become trees? Watch this short video and learn the process of seed germination [here](#).
9. **Listen for Golden-cheeked Warblers!** These elusive songbirds are singing up a storm these days as they return to their Hill Country nesting sites. If you live near Hill Country habitat, in particular where dense Ashe Juniper grows, you might be lucky enough to hear these special birds. Listen [here](#) for the songs and calls of the Golden-cheeked Warbler and remember them as you walk through nature. For more hands-on learning about Texas birds, click [here](#).
10. **Did you know Monarch butterflies travel thousands of miles** to their overwintering spot in [Michoacán, Mexico](#)? In Spring, typically mid March, they leave Mexico and head north again and begin laying eggs on milkweed during their journey. They fly along what we call the Monarch [superhighway](#). Now is the perfect time to spot Monarchs as they head north. Enjoy these assorted [activities](#) as you begin to learn more about butterflies and the Monarch.