

Use your common senses

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I just found a neat garden scavenger hunt used at the Des Moines Botanical Center. I've adapted it so you can try it in your own yard, during a visit to a garden center, at the zoo or when you're visiting an arboretum or botanical garden with your family. I'll give you some examples of plants and animals you might see, but you'll probably find different "answers" every time you use your senses to play this game.

1. Can you find a leaf that feels fuzzy? One common garden plant with fuzzy leaves is called Lamb's Ears. The leaves are very soft and gray-green in color. A weed plant you might find with fuzzy leaves is Velvet Leaf. Some elm trees have fuzzy leaves, too.
2. Now, start looking around with your nose and see if you can find something that smells nice. Many people think of roses or lilac flowers when they think of a nice smell, but I also think grass smells good. Close your eyes and concentrate, what do you smell when you're outside?
3. What can you find that feels soft? A pile of leaves or grass clippings feel soft, but smaller things like the center of a daisy are pretty soft, too. One of my favorite soft things is the underside of mushrooms growing in the lawn. If you touch a mushroom, be sure to wash your hands afterwards.
4. Do you hear any sounds you like? If you play this game at a garden center, you'll probably hear unnatural sounds like trucks and cash registers, but in your neighborhood park you'll probably hear bees buzzing, birds singing and children playing. I like all those sounds!
5. Can you find a leaf that's not green or has two or more colors? Pulmonaria and hosta are two plants that grow in the shade and often have colored, polka-dotted and even striped leaves. Some maple and crabapple trees have reddish leaves all summer. While you're looking at colors, see if all lawns are the same shade of green, you'll be surprised!
6. Are there any flowers around that are bigger than your hand? Some of the most popular flowers of spring are big red and pink peonies. If you're looking in the summer, you'll have better luck looking for clusters of flowers that are big, like delphiniums.
7. Do you see any animals with wings? You've probably already spotted birds and bees, but don't forget to look for butterflies, bats, and lady bugs!
8. Can you find any plants that protect themselves from animals? You shouldn't have to look far to find a rose bush or thistle, but be careful! Plants that protect themselves from animals by being poisonous, thorny, or sharp can hurt you.
9. What are some plants that grow in water? This is too easy, I shouldn't give you any hints! You'll be able to find plants growing along lake shores, floating on the water and even completely submerged under the water.
10. Try to find ten insects in five minutes. Some are noisy like bees or colorful like butterflies, but you'll have to get close to the ground to find the quiet, little ones like ants and beetles.

Using your senses when you're outside is a lot of fun, isn't it? I hope you use this game all spring, summer and fall. Speaking of fall, this is the last Kid's Corner until then, so you'll have to use your imagination or the library to find more garden activities to do this summer. Be sure to go to the Dakota County Fair, which runs from August 5th through the 11th, and visit with us in the Star Spangled Farm next to the Children's Barn. See you then!