

Care for Our Common Home Spring Ideas for Your Family

2024



Care for Our Common Home

We have only this planet, this Earth, which we share with countless other members of our own species, Homo sapiens, though we also carry forward genetic inheritance from other hominids long gone from our forests and mountains - Homo neanderthal and Homo denisova. It took all of human history up to 1800 to reach 1 billion. In 1970 there were 4 billion and now there are over 8 billion.

We share our earth with billions of other life forms – everything from mold, fungi, viruses, to reptiles, birds, and insects to animals, with which we share lots of DNA.

We need to get away from our computers and smart phones in order to meet our relatives, competitors and friends waiting outside our front door.

We hope that you will find something in these pages that interests you, that you will want to get out and experience further and that in turn will encourage you to care for our common home so that all life can thrive together.



Prayer for our Earth

By Pope Francis, taken from Laudato Si'

All-powerful God,
You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,
Help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

Take some time as a family to discuss Pope Francis' prayer. What does it mean for each of us in our family this Lent? Write down ONE thing you plan to do this Lent that is a result of your family discussion:

Six Projects for Lent

Lent has been a time when people take a close look at how things are going in themselves, in their relationship with God, with members of their family, with other people in their community, and with the whole earth – how they use the gifts of God, the people in their lives and all the wonderful things in creation.

Most times, if we stop to look at things, we can see areas we can do better in. So here are some activities to try in Lent that may help us to look after God's creation better.

Think birds:

Keep feeding birds – food is scarce while birds have begun nesting, so birds which eat seeds rather than insects are looking for extra nutrition they need at this time of the year.

Try to have separate feeders or feeding stations with different seeds. Some birds, like chickadees, warblers, and jays, like their food in the air in trees or in feeders. Ground feeders, like sparrows, juncos and doves, prefer not to perch to eat. Some, like crows, will grab whatever they can wherever they can from whatever other bird they can. Like you, different birds like different foods, so you want to have a variety of food to offer them.

What to offer:

Black oil sunflower seeds appeal to the greatest number of birds. Peanuts, other nuts and dried fruit appeal to woodpeckers, nuthatches and titmice. If you use a bag of mixed food from the supermarket which usually contains a lot of millet and cracked corn in your feeders, you may find that the perchers will eat the sunflower seeds and drop the millet and corn to the ground where the ground feeders will eat their fill. On the other hand, you may just end up with a lot of unwanted millet and corn on the ground. You need to keep cleaning up the leftovers, otherwise the millet will spring up as a large weed later in the summer and mice will be visiting the buffet you have left them! Record for a week what came visiting to your feeders when and what they ate:

Think water:

We need to think about conserving fresh water in our world. We are using up more water than the earth can replace. We have an increasing number of people needing more water as our climate heats up. So, what can each of us do?

Try a navy shower:

Turn on your shower and get wet all over. Turn off the water and lather yourself all over with soap or body wash. Then turn on the water again to rinse off. You will have saved gallons of water that you didn't need to use to get clean.

Never use the shower as a way of waking yourself up in the morning, standing half-asleep in the water doing nothing!

Try a sponge bath:

Like our ancestors, once a week, try a sponge bath. Stand on a bath mat or towel beside a hand basin. With a wet soapy washcloth or sponge, soap down your body, or just parts of your body needing cleaning, perhaps like your neck and ears, your underarms, your navel (aka tummy button,) between your legs, and your feet. Then turn on the water to wash the soap out of the washcloth and wipe off the soap from your body, rinsing out the washcloth as you need to. Result: you will again save lots of water and still be clean enough. If you really need to take a bath:

As we try to fight climate change, we need to remember the baths our great grandparents had during World War II – the key was six inches of water only in the bath. It saves water and the electricity or gas used to heat the water.

Record what you have done during Lent to save water:

Will you continue to save water? Why or why not?



Think insects, particularly the pesky ones:

In a perfect world, all creatures would go about their lives not bothering other creatures. But that is not our world. There are some insects that we regard as a nuisance and would prefer them not immediately around us – think mosquitoes or horse flies for example. And sadly, many creatures probably find human beings a nuisance or threat!

In our gardens, we may want to banish some insects for our comfort or the protection of our plants, however, adding to the poisonous load of pesticides and insecticides in the world is NOT a good idea. We should choose to grow plants that gently dissuade particular insects from visiting.

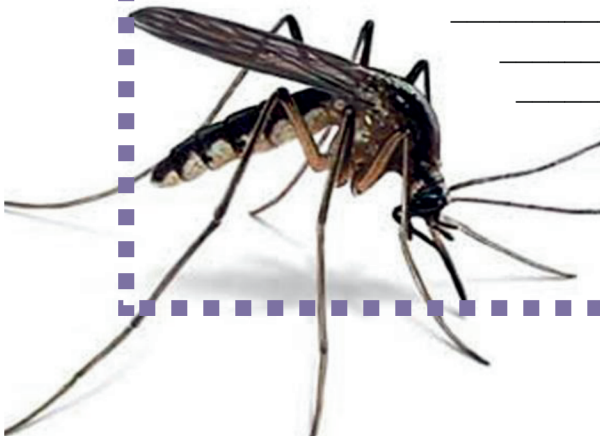
When planning what seeds to plant or plants to purchase this spring, think the following:

1. Citronella grass – mosquitoes hate the smell. It won't harm bees, but honeybees and bumblebees will avoid the smell, so you may wish to have some in a pot to put in the garden when you are having a barbeque and keep it indoors the rest of the time.
2. Petunias – easy to grow almost anywhere, they will repel lots of insects including aphids and mosquitoes. Bee friendly as the smell does not bother bees.
3. Lavender – great smell that mosquitoes hate and lots of nectar to attract bees.
4. Nasturtiums – easy to grow, these community-minded flowers protect not only themselves from hungry creatures like slugs and snails, but also the plants around them. Bees and other pollinators will visit them happily.
5. Rosemary – this plant is useful in the kitchen for cooking and outside to keep away mosquitoes and wasps. Its pollen and nectar is loved by bees.
6. Marigolds – easy to grow, these keep away mosquitoes, wasps and hornets, also some humans who do not like the smell of them! Bees and butterflies are attracted by the bright colours.
7. Monarda (aka bee balm, bergamot or Oswego tea) – pretty flowers that attract bees and butterflies. The smell does keep away other insects and, in fact, you can crush the leaves and rub them on your skin to keep away mosquitoes.
8. Ageratum – mosquitoes can't stand the smell of a chemical produced by the plant called coumarin (often used in commercial insecticides.) Bees and butterflies are attracted by the flower colours.

Note: Do NOT plant if you have cats or dogs as this plant is poisonous to small animals.

Thanks to the Country Living magazine, online edition for the above information.

Did you plant any of the above plants? Have they started to grow well in your garden?



Think time:

Did you know that you can tell the time roughly with flowers? Flowers want to be visited by pollinating insects, that is, insects like bees and butterflies, which come for nectar and accidentally carry away pollen to other flowers, fertilizing them and enabling them to produce seeds and spread. Flowers attract these insects by their scent, colour and shapes. They also open and stay open at different times of the day, just like stores looking for customers.

You can actually plant different flowers in a circle like the dial of a clock and see them open at different times as if a giant hand was ticking off the minutes of an hour.

This project is long term project – it will take you a fairly short time to plan out a circle in a sunny spot in your garden, prepare the soil for planting and plant seed or small bedding plants. But then you will have to wait for some weeks to see the results, especially if spring is a little cool this year or we have a late snow or frost.

Remember you don't have to plant at the place of every one of the numbers on a clock face, but here is a list of plants you might want to include with the time they open and therefore where you should plant them on your pretend clock. Notice too that the flowers listed span more than a 12-hour period, starting at 2 a.m. and ending at 9 p.m. so you might want to eliminate some flowers. You should also put small markers at each planting with the name of the flower and the time of opening. The main thing is to put them so that there is a steady movement of opening round the circle.

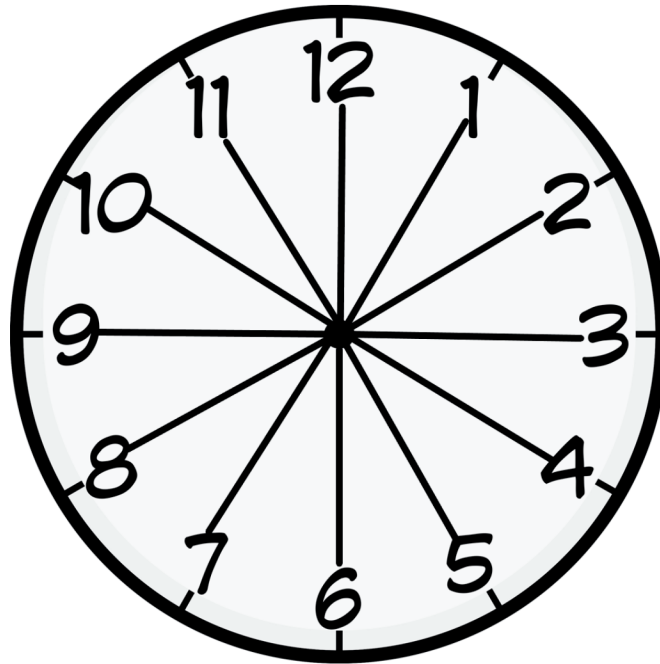
Here are plants you might wish to use:

2 a.m. convolvulus	10 a.m. California poppy
3 a.m. goatsbeard	11 a.m. sweet pea
4 a.m. spiderwort, flax	12 noon wild daisy
5 a.m. chicory	4 p.m. four-o'clock
6 a.m. morning glory, daylily	5 p.m. evening primrose
7 a.m. African marigold	6 p.m. moonflower
8 a.m. fringed pinks	7 p.m. sweet white nicotiana
9 a.m. marigold, tulip	8 p.m. night-scented stock
9 p.m. sweet rocket	

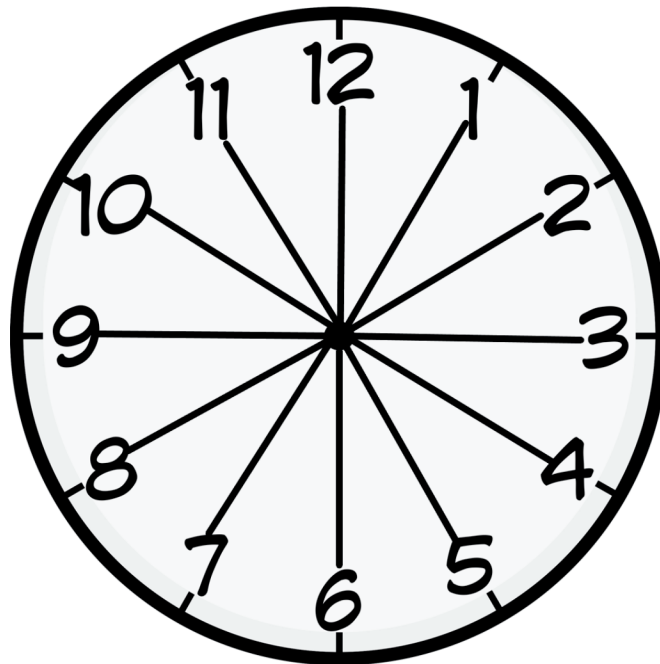
If you plant, a flower clock, please take a picture of it and we will share your photo with everyone passing through the church.

Use the space below for planning your clock, marking down what you plan on planting in the right space of its time of opening. Remember where the number 1 would be on a clock face is where you would plan your earliest opening plant and work from there round the clock to the latest opening one near where the number 12 would be on a real clock. Add the names of the plants to the clocks below.

AM Clock:



PM Clock:



Thanks to kids GARDENING.org for the list of suggested plants.

Think Bees and other Home-seeking Insects:

Bumblebees and honeybees are social creatures – they live together and work co-operatively. But most bees in Canada are solitary bees. They live and work alone. They also help to create our food supplies by pollinating plants, so they should be encouraged by us. Other useful insects include ladybugs which will clean out any aphids which are sucking your plants dry.

One way we can help is to provide them with a home. Here is how to make an insect apartment building:

1. Get a small box – preferably wooden or plastic in order to keep the inhabitants dry.
2. Cut some hollow-stemmed plants like reeds or bamboo onto lengths the depth of your box.
3. Layer the cut stems in the box filling it up tightly. Now when the box is sitting on its side you will see nothing but round holes in the frame of the box.
4. Set the box on a window ledge or somewhere out of the rain. If you want to hang it up, screw eyes into the top and add a chain or cord for hanging.
5. Hopefully bees will find your box and lay their eggs in the tubes, where the grub when it hatches, will find a pollen plug left by the bee for it to eat. Insects like ladybugs and lacewings may also come and shelter in the tubes over the winter.
6. If you have insect visitors, you need to clean out the box of any leftover debris in order to keep your apartment from getting cluttered with disease causing fungi and small parasites like mites



Think Balloons:

Have you ever been to a party where you all got balloons and then let them all float up into the air at the same time? A really BAD idea.

Why?

If the balloon goes high enough and becomes cold enough, it can shatter into tiny pieces which all fall back to earth. These pieces, depending on whether the balloon was made of latex(rubber) or foil, can take a year or more to biodegrade.

If the pieces fall into the earth's rivers and oceans, they can join the tons of small pieces of plastic already floating in the water and get eaten by marine life. A diet of plastic is really bad for the health of sea creatures.

If a balloon does not rise high, it can still be dangerous to birds which peck at the balloon. If it falls to the ocean still inflated, it can be mistaken for food by creatures like sea turtles and birds. The bits of rubber get stuck in the animal's gut and cause it to starve to death.

So, if you are planning a party this spring, no balloons! Why not celebrate with these ideas:

1. Plant a small tree – it will last for years and remind you of what you were celebrating and what fun you had. OR
2. Make some seed bombs – this is the really fun option!

Recipe for seed bombs

1 cup of compost or potting soil

½ cup flour

1 teaspoon seeds (anemone, aster or tick clover for immediate flowers, or quick growers like zinnia, cosmos and calendula)

Mix the compost and the flour, then add the seeds and gently mix.

Add 1 tablespoon of water at a time to make everything stick together.

Divide into small pieces and roll into balls the size of small marbles.

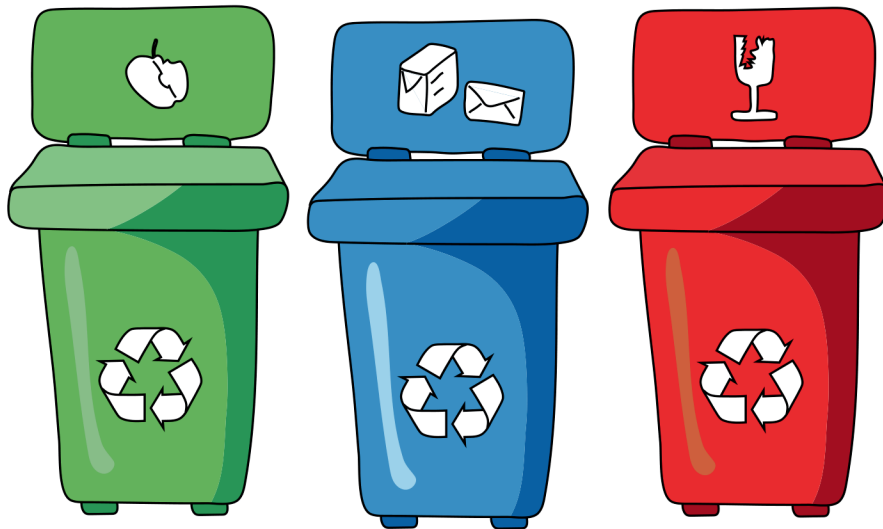
Let dry for 24 hours. Then let the fun begin – throw the balls underhand at each other somewhere you want a lovely display of flowers!

Thanks to the Chicago Community Gardeners Association for the recipe.

How long does it take for garbage to decompose?

Match the garbage item with the length of time you think it takes for it to decompose.

Disposable diaper	1 month
Cigarette butt	10 years
Plastic bottle	20 years
Glass bottle	80 years
Aluminum can	250 years
Paper bag, apple core	450 years
Plastic straw	Never



Here are the answers – how many did you get right? Next time you use one of the above, think about how long it will be around in our soil, water or air when you throw it away.

Diapers – 250 years; cigarette butt – 10 years; plastic bottle 450 years; glass bottle – never; aluminum can – 80 years; Paper bag, apple core – 1 month; plastic straw – 20 years.

Thanks to the Church of Ireland Climate Justice Journal for the puzzle.



Foraging

Finding Food in the Wild

Have you ever found a wild strawberry out in the woods and eaten it before a bird got it– they love strawberries? Or have you chewed on a piece of grass? If yes, then you were foraging, finding food out in the bounty of God's creation.

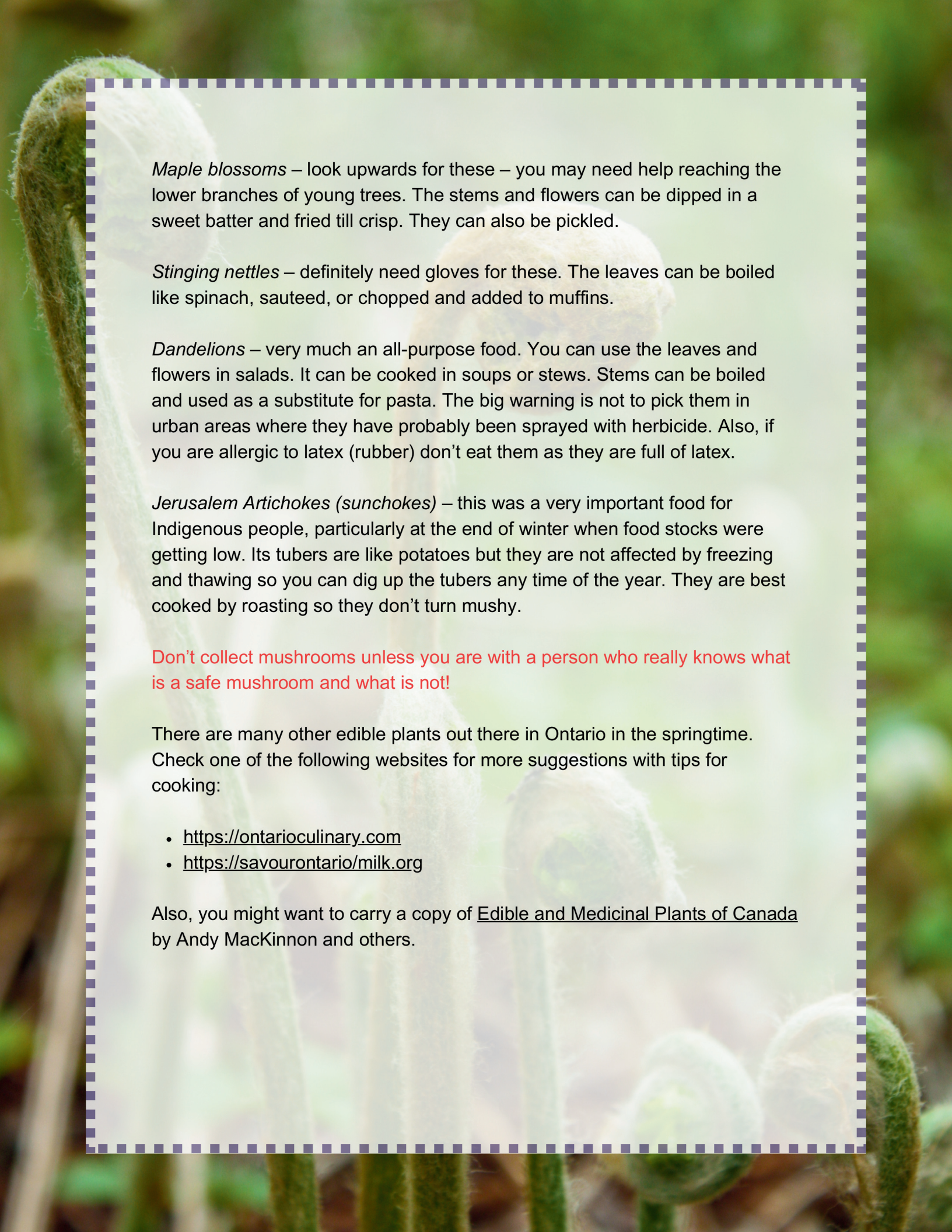
When white people first came to Canada, the Indigenous peoples already here shared with them their knowledge of what food could be found in this environment that was unknown and different from the settlers' home lands. This sharing saved many settlers from starvation.

You too can find good things to eat free and growing all around you – you just need to know what you can eat. But first some rules of foraging:

- You can't forage in provincial parks
- If you want to forage on private land, you need to get permission from the person who owns the land
- Make sure the land around what you find is clean and unpolluted
- Don't be greedy and take everything you find - leave roots and bulbs and most seeds you find so that the plants will grow further
- Make sure what you pick up is not a protected endangered species

So, if you are ready for a hike, have a bag or basket to carry what you find, and perhaps a small trowel, and secateurs (a pair of pruning clippers for use with one hand), some water to drink and some gloves, and a field guide to plants so you know what you are looking for, here are some plants you might want to look for this spring:

Fiddleheads – These are young ferns, tightly curled into the shape of a violin head. You can eat them raw in salads but better sautéed in butter. Make sure you wash off any dirt and the brown husks in cold water. Always boil or steam for 15 minutes before sautéing.



Maple blossoms – look upwards for these – you may need help reaching the lower branches of young trees. The stems and flowers can be dipped in a sweet batter and fried till crisp. They can also be pickled.

Stinging nettles – definitely need gloves for these. The leaves can be boiled like spinach, sauteed, or chopped and added to muffins.

Dandelions – very much an all-purpose food. You can use the leaves and flowers in salads. It can be cooked in soups or stews. Stems can be boiled and used as a substitute for pasta. The big warning is not to pick them in urban areas where they have probably been sprayed with herbicide. Also, if you are allergic to latex (rubber) don't eat them as they are full of latex.

Jerusalem Artichokes (sunchokes) – this was a very important food for Indigenous people, particularly at the end of winter when food stocks were getting low. Its tubers are like potatoes but they are not affected by freezing and thawing so you can dig up the tubers any time of the year. They are best cooked by roasting so they don't turn mushy.

Don't collect mushrooms unless you are with a person who really knows what is a safe mushroom and what is not!

There are many other edible plants out there in Ontario in the springtime. Check one of the following websites for more suggestions with tips for cooking:

- <https://ontarioculinary.com>
- <https://savourontario/milk.org>

Also, you might want to carry a copy of Edible and Medicinal Plants of Canada by Andy MacKinnon and others.

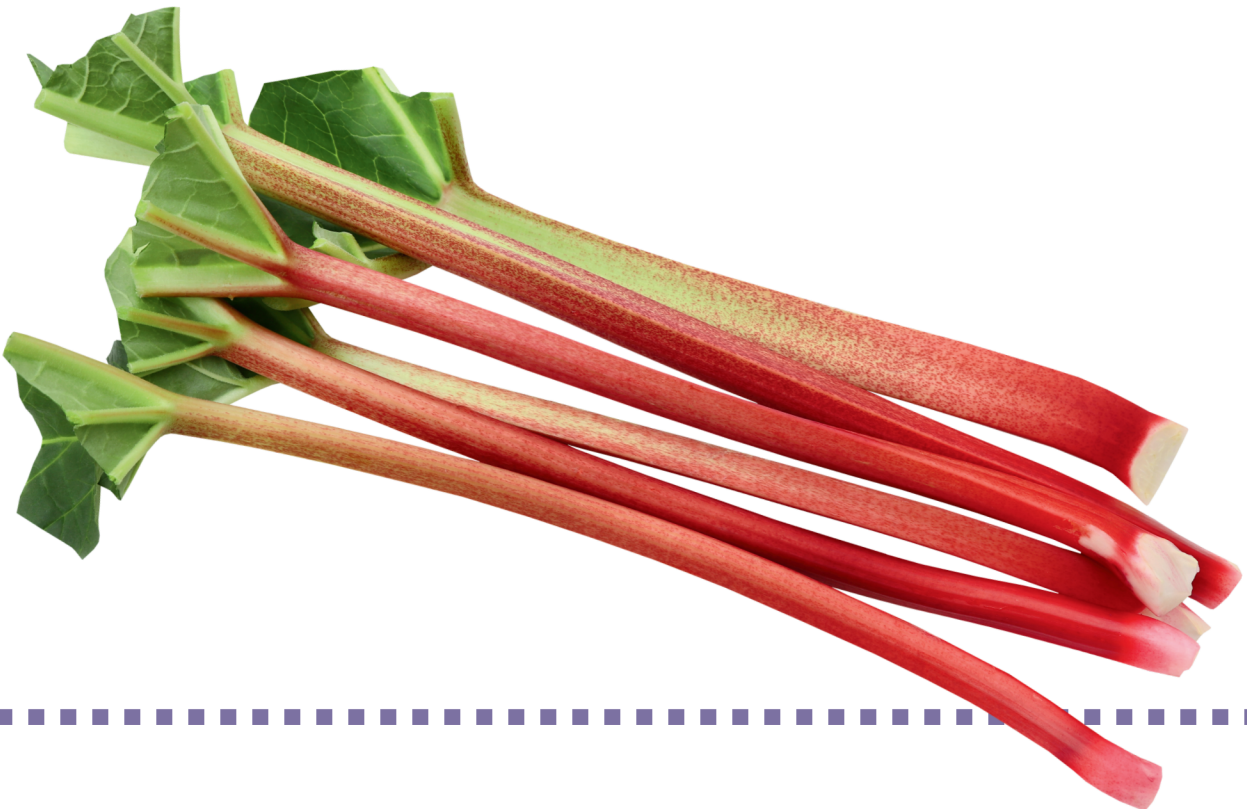
Rhubarb & A Poke of Sugar

A Sign of Spring

A sure sign of spring for our great grandparents was the sprouting of rhubarb outside the back door. Before frozen food and the shelves of the supermarket loaded with fruit flown in from countries the other side of the world, fresh fruit was in short supply by the end of winter. So, people were very happy to see the frilly leaves unfold and the stalks redden on the rhubarb plant.

Kids didn't wait for pies and cobblers to be made. They got a stalk of rhubarb and a small bag of sugar, in Scotland called a poke, and simply dipped the end of the stalk in the sugar and bit off that piece. Then repeated that action. A little face-pulling might happen but most of us persevered till the end of the stalk or the end of the sugar. Try it – it's delicious, and a great way to know that the earth is waking from winter again.

If you would prefer something more cooked, then try the recipe on the next page!



Easy Rhubarb Crisp

Prep time: 20 mins.

Cook time: 1 hr 5 mins.

Total time: 1 hr 25 mins.

Ingredients:

1 cup flour 4 cups diced rhubarb

1 cup brown sugar 1 cup white sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup oats 1 cup water

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter 2 tablespoons cornstarch

1 teaspoon cinnamon 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



Directions:

1. Gather all the ingredients. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit (175 degrees Celsius). Grease a 9x13 inch baking dish.
2. Mix the flour, brown sugar, oats, butter, and cinnamon together in a bowl till crumbly. Press half of this mixture into the bottom of the baking dish. You can use the bottom of a glass to press down the mixture so it is evenly flat and compacted.
3. Sprinkle rhubarb over the mixture in the dish.
4. Combine white sugar, water, cornstarch, and vanilla in a saucepan over medium heat. Cook stirring till thick and clear – about 5 minutes.
5. Pour the sugar mixture over the rhubarb.
6. Sprinkle the remaining oats crumb mixture on top.
7. Bake till lightly brown and bubbling – about an hour.

Especially good with a scoop of ice cream or whipped cream or floating in some English custard. Serves 10.

Nutrition facts:

per serving (not counting the possible addition of ice cream etc.)

Calories: 329; 10 grams of Fat; 59 grams of Carbohydrates; 3 grams of Protein.

Easter

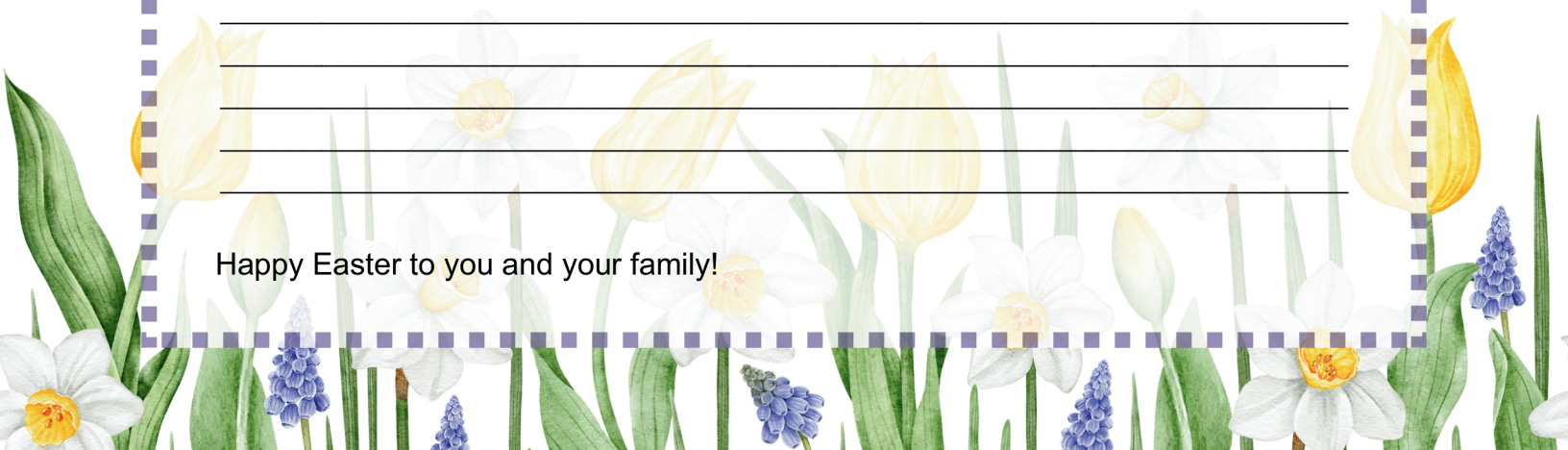
Spring in our part of the world is a time when things are beginning to stir from their winter sleep, birds return from their winter homes and begin nesting, plants start pushing through the soil up to the light, the weather gets warmer and there is a generally joyful feel of newness in the air.

What do you see new around your house, your neighbourhood, your school, your church?

What makes you happy at Easter?

In church we celebrate Jesus rising to a new life on Easter Sunday. How do you think He felt on Easter Sunday? How do you think you would feel if you had risen from the dead like He did?

Happy Easter to you and your family!



The original inspiration for this series of seasonal family activities in God's world is the Faith Action for Nature series, created for the Church of Scotland and various partners, including the RSPB Scotland.

This document was created by the Environment Committee of Springbank Catholic Family of Parishes, 2024.