

Keeping a Timeline of Nature - Phenology



You've probably noticed that things in nature progress in a repeating cycle every year. For example, in spring as the day length gets longer and the snow and ice begin to melt, you notice the birds are singing more, you can smell the skunks again, and before you know it the peepers will begin to sing. Watching and studying these cyclical and seasonal changes in nature is called phenology. Studying these subtle changes and recognizing the annual patterns is a great way to feel connected to the natural world. It is very easy to do, just make a few daily, or every few days, observations and you will be studying phenology!

Getting Started – It's Easy!

Who: all ages (younger children may need more guidance)

Where: inside or outside, in a city or in a rural town

Materials: a notebook and pencil or pen

Length of time: 15-30 minutes or more

Location: near home or somewhere you go every week

****Note* It is good to make your observations about the same general area, so no more than an hour drive away, but if you do just make sure you record that it is a different location.***

Let's Begin:

Grab your notebook and pen and go to a window, or when outside, make observations to write down. You can make this a part of a daily routine. It is even fun to get the whole house involved, kids and other adults in your home may have some observations to share as well. Here are some tips and examples:

What to always include:

This information will help you when you look back at your observations made and compare them to another year, month, etc. and you can notice patterns.

- date MM/DD/YYYY
- location (good practice, you might have a new location someday)
- temperature (just look at what it says in a weather app for your area)
- weather (sun, clouds, snow, rain, etc.)
- wind (again check your weather app)

When recording observations here are some tips:

- these are notes not full sentences
- can be quick observations like- "20 goldfinches at the feeders, some bright yellow"
- can be about things you notice rather than see- "smelled a skunk last night"
- can be about a progression about watching changes in one thing
 - in the first observation note what and where such as "tree near house has small buds"
 - in the next observation "tree buds looking bigger today"
 - with each next observation you don't always have to say the exact tree because you will know

Studying phenology has been going on for centuries. It is a great way to learn about local nature and feel a stronger connection to the land. Studying phenology is a great hobby and a way to feel a stronger sense of place. There are many great resources online just make sure you are looking for information around Maine or New England. Have fun!