Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!
For over 35 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of systems.

Activity 41: How Plants Grow
A plant is a living system. It needs sunlight, water, air, nutrients, and space to function and grow. In this activity, children design an experiment to test these requirements.

Doing the Activity
While exploring a park, farm, or other green space, challenge children to find signs of new plant growth. While examining samples, ask what factors are necessary for plants to grow (sunlight, water, soil, space). Ask children how they might design an experiment to test the necessity of these requirements. Help them write and illustrate the steps to their experimental design.

Ask children to look at the drawings below. Of the four options (A, B, C and D), which two should be used to test how sunlight affects plant growth? Use this example to explain the importance of experimental control.

If possible, obtain two plants of the same size and species to give the experiment YOU designed a try. Allow one plant access to a single requirement, while denying the same requirement to the other. At set intervals, let children measure the seedlings. After a period of time, measure and compare the two plants. Ask whether they look different, and if so, why?

Try the following:
• Take digital photos every few days, and use presentation software to create a visual timeline of plant growth.
• Compare children’s growth to that of the experimental plants by measuring child height at the beginning and end of the experiment.
• Create a “flip-book” that shows plant growth in animation. Index cards work great!

Adapted from Activity 41: How Plants Grow of Project Learning Tree’s PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!
• Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
• To contact your local PLT State Coordinator, visit www.plt.org or call 202-463-2475.

www.plt.org

Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation.