

Leaf Litter Critters

Parent Notes: If available the following items make good tools for this activity; Four closely sized sticks, a magnifying glass, pencil and field guides. However, they are not necessary to explore leaf litter critters. You can use the back of this sheet to document what you find in each square.

Considerations: Follow Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles; Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces, Respect Other Visitors, and Leave what you find. Be sure to scatter the leaves or cover the critters back up in the area you explored when you are done. LNT Principle - Respect Wildlife

Let's Begin:

Find 4 sticks that are about 12" - 18" long or close to similar length and arrange them in a square on top of the leaves. Then take some time to slowly go through the leaves in the square to discover what leaf litter critters might be hiding. If you have access to an insect field guide, use it to identify what you are seeing; centipedes, millipedes, worms, ants, potato bugs (rollie pollie's), and maybe an amphibian like the red backed salamander. Soil and leaf critters play a vital role in helping to break down the leaf litter and improve soil quality by creating space in the soil for water and air to flow through.

After searching through the square, return the leaf material back and move to a different spot. You can do this several times. Compare your findings;

- Did you find anything new in a different spot?
- Sunny vs Shady location?
- Hillside vs. Flat area?
- Grassy area vs. Wooded area?
- Wet vs Dry area?
- Fall vs. Spring? Do you think you would get different results? Why?
- Heavily traffic area vs. low traffic area (referring to the number of people that walk/hike, picnic, play in that area).
- What about other wildlife in the area? Could they affect what you find; birds, squirrels, raccoon sign, opossum sign, etc.

Fun Fact: Many species of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and flies, etc. will utilize leaves & other dead plants for overwintering/hibernating. So, while many people rake and remove all the leaves from an area, it is important to leave some areas with this type of habitat for those special critters. Leave the Leaves!