

MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS  
IN A MODERN WORLD

# relating

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## 5 Ways to Connect with Nature

WELCOME WARM WEATHER WITH THESE EASY IDEAS  
FOR REVELING IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS.

By Sharlene Breakey

OFFSET

1

**Stop and smell the wildflowers.**

Wildflowers are everywhere. Simply head to a state park, local field, or grove of trees and hunt for spots of color. One spring, I was walking through a woodland area flooded with sunlight. The whole forest glowed pink because the redbud trees were in bloom. I couldn't stop grinning. Just be respectful: If you pick a flower, it won't be available to produce seed for the next generation. And don't trample the flowers on your way to a selfie. Consider zooming in on a petal or seed pod and focusing on its unique markings.

**ANDREA DeLONG-AMAYA** IS THE DIRECTOR OF HORTICULTURE AT THE LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER IN AUSTIN, TEXAS.

2

**Find feathered or furry friends.**

It's amazing to watch animals do what they do. Creatures are going about their lives all over the place, which makes being outdoors endlessly fascinating. Walk *reeeeally* slowly and look for areas of motion. That's going to be a squirrel catching an acorn, a blue jay building a nest, or a mother deer walking with her babies. Sit still, don't stare straight at them, and animals will often come close. If you find a bird that has fallen from its nest? Assuming it's not injured, carefully scoop it up and put it back if you can. Contrary to what we're taught, the mother bird *will* welcome it back.

**ALISON HERMANCE** IS THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT WILDCARE, A WILDLIFE HOSPITAL AND NATURE EDUCATION CENTER IN SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA.

3

**Climb into a kayak.**

Kayaking always recenters me. Even in hard white water, I find calm and serenity. Worries and stress fade away, and I inhabit the moment—breathing fresh air and using my muscles. Every time I feel a splash on my face or maneuver my kayak down a chaotic set of rapids, I sink deeper into nature, deeper into peace. Gliding on a lake or a lazy river is also an awesome way to get outside and out of your head.

**DARCY GAECHTER** RUNS SMALL WORLD ADVENTURES, A WHITE WATER KAYAKING BUSINESS. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *AMAZON WOMAN: FACING FEARS, CHASING DREAMS, AND A QUEST TO KAYAK THE WORLD'S LARGEST RIVER FROM SOURCE TO SEA*.

4

**Forage for food (safely).**

Foraging is the original multi-generational activity—ancient families gathered food together. It's better than hiking because you stop seeing the forest as a solid green wall and start seeing its details: morels, ramps, edible flowers, asparagus, berries, nuts. But don't pick without permission—or try anything until a professional guide (there are many offering tours across the country) has told you it's safe. Painting or drawing your discoveries is cool too, and kids often love making spore prints with mushrooms.


**ALAN MUSKAT** IS THE FOUNDER OF NO TASTE LIKE HOME, A FORAGING ECO-TOUR COMPANY IN ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA.

5

**People-watch at the park.**

Every morning, my wife, Caroline, and I walk in Brooklyn Bridge Park, which my firm designed. I enjoy seeing people use it in ways I never imagined. There's a garden enclosed by the remains of a warehouse, and people take photos by the frame of its now missing window—couples kissing, girls dressed up for their quinceañeras. I love watching runners flash by, or parents tend to little ones in strollers, or teenagers playing soccer and basketball. You feel a sense of connectedness when you're surrounded by every stage of life. That's community.

**MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH** IS A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT WHOSE FIRM DESIGNS PARKS, PLAZAS, AND OTHER PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES.

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