

# Connecting Kids to Nature

*Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!*

For over 30 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 from PLT that introduces the concept of forest cycles.

## Activity 78: Signs of Fall

In this activity, children look for signs of autumn. They observe the annual change of seasons, and investigate why leaves of deciduous trees change color in the fall.

### Doing the Activity

As autumn approaches, take children on a walk through a wooded area, schoolyard, local park, or neighborhood sidewalk to look for signs of fall. Point out the differences between *deciduous* and *evergreen* trees. Have children find at least five of each and collect sample leaves and needles. Create leaf rubbings by covering a leaf with a piece of paper and rubbing a crayon over it. The leaf’s margin and veins will appear. Use crayons to match the fall colors found in the leaves. Encourage critical thinking by asking:

- What signs of fall can you see in the trees and on the ground?
- How many different leaf colors can you find?
- What will happen to the leaves?

#### Deciduous



Deciduous trees lose their leaves annually.  
Example: Oak

#### Evergreen



Evergreen trees keep their leaves (needles) year-round.  
Example: Pine

Have children use the colorful fall leaves to create a picture. For ideas, see *Leaf Man* by Lois Ehlert, published by Harcourt Children’s Books, 2005, ISBN: 0152053042.

Adapted from Activity 78: Signs of Fall from *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
- Contact your MN PLT State Coordinator, [laura.duffey@state.mn.us](mailto:laura.duffey@state.mn.us) or 651-259-5263, or visit [www.plt.org](http://www.plt.org).

Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation. In Minnesota, PLT is sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources.

www.plt.org

### WHY DO THE LEAVES CHANGE COLOR

With fall’s colder temperatures and shorter days, the cells of deciduous tree leaves begin to die. The dead cells block water and nutrients from the leaf. *Chlorophyll*, the green pigment in the leaves, breaks down and the yellow and red pigments begin to show through. Native Americans had legends to explain the fall colors. Invite children to create their own imaginative stories.

