



## Exploring Nature In and Around Your Home for the City Nature Challenge

Ideas and resources to help you look for, find, attract, and document nature in your house or yard!



### Getting Started with iNaturalist

For your nature observations to count for the City Nature Challenge, you'll need to document what you find and add it to [iNaturalist](#) or your city's chosen platform. All observations you make during the challenge week will count for the CNC! The basic steps are:

1. Download the iNaturalist app and make an account.
2. Take photos of wild plants and animals to make observations. If you know that what you're photographing is not wild, mark it as captive/cultivated.
3. Upload your observations to share with the iNaturalist community.
4. Learn more as your finds get identified!



To help you get started with iNaturalist, here are some useful resources - we definitely recommend reading them and/or watching some of the videos to help you understand how to contribute your observations and how to become part of this global community.

- [iNaturalist Getting Started Guide](#)

- [iNaturalist Guide](#): making observations, tips for photography & using computer vision, what happens to your observation once it's uploaded
- [Video: How to make an iNaturalist Observation Using the App](#)
- [Video: How to Add Another Photo to an Observation in the App](#)
- [Video: How to Mark an Observation as Captive or Cultivated in the App](#)
- [Video: How to use iNaturalist's Photo Uploader on the Website](#)
- [Video: How to take Identifiable Photos](#)

## Searching for and documenting nature in and around your house

There are many ways to look for nature in your home, backyard, or neighborhood. The key thing to keep in mind is that the City Nature Challenge is all about trying to find the **wild** species in and around metro areas. While we know there are probably many flowers and hedges that have been planted in your area, as well as lots of household pets in your neighborhood, we encourage and challenge you to go look for the plants that are growing on their own and the wild organisms that live in and around our houses and yards! What are the *wild* plants that are growing in your yard or neighborhood? Taking photos of weeds is fine! Can you find the insects and other creatures that use the cultivated plants in your area as habitat or food?

### Arthropods in our Homes



Did you know there are, on average, 93 different species of arthropods (insects, spiders, and their relatives) living in our homes? Don't worry - most of them aren't pests and are totally harmless! How many can you find in your house? Document them using iNaturalist to have them count for the City Nature Challenge, and if you want, add them to the [Never Home Alone](#) project too!

- [The Public Science Lab: Learn more about your arthropods!](#)
- [Vox: The dozens of bug species that live in your home, in one chart](#)

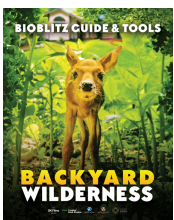
### How to Find Insects

Insects are probably some of the easiest organisms to find in and around your house, since they're abundant and incredibly diverse! But where should you look to find them? What can you use to catch them? These sites provide some guidance on how to find and temporarily hold insects - so you can photograph them and post them on iNaturalist!

- [BugCollectors: Where to Find Insects](#)
- [WikiHow: How to Catch Small Bugs](#): we recommend trying the ones that don't kill the insects, so you can release them once you've taken some photos!



### HHMI Tangled Bank Studios *Backyard Wilderness*: Education & Engagement Materials



These guides & toolkits were created in partnership with the California Academy of Sciences to promote outdoor exploration and learning in support of the film [Backyard Wilderness](#). There are family activity guides designed for exploring your backyard with the tools you have at home, Educator Guides for getting students excited about scientific observation and the natural world, and a Bioblitz Guide and Toolkit with detailed information about how to best use iNaturalist and resources like regional field guides and biodiversity bingo activities.

- [HHMI Backyard Wilderness Education and Engagement Materials](#)

## Attracting Nature to Your Yard

You can get ready for the City Nature Challenge by adding some things to your yard to help attract more wild species!

### Attract Birds to Your Yard

There are quite a few ways you can bring birds to your yard! While the most obvious way is to put up some bird feeders, there are other things you can do to attract birds to your front or backyard, or even to a deck or porch.

- [National Wildlife Federation: Four Can't-Miss Ways to Attract Birds to Your Yard or Deck](#)
- [Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Make Your Own Feeder](#)



### Create a Backyard Herp Haven

There are many things you can add to your backyard that will attract herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians), and the bonus is that many of these will also attract insects, slugs and snails, and other organisms that like moist and/or dark habitat. Put these in place 2-4 weeks before the City Nature Challenge to make sure they're there long enough to attract your new backyard friends. We recommend trying the first one - a cover board, which is easy and can even be as simple as a thick piece of cardboard if you don't have plywood.

- [Reptile Magazine: 4 Ways to Create a Backyard Herp Haven](#)

### Moth Lighting

Setting up a light and a sheet to attract moths is a simple and easy way to bring more nature into your backyard! Photographing moths on the sheet is really easy, and you'll definitely attract other flying insects as well! Science Friday has a great set of instructions for observing moths, and the California Center for Natural History has instructions for building your own moth light to attract a wider variety of moths.

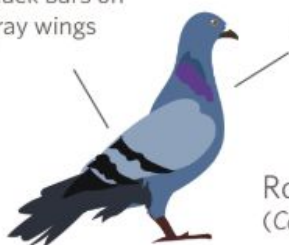
- [Science Friday: Go Mothing!](#)
- [California Center for Natural History: DIY Moth Light](#)



## Helping with Identifications for the City Nature Challenge

Black bars on  
gray wings

Metallic sheen on neck



Rock Pigeon  
(*Columba livia*)

Another thing you can do from your house is help with identifications during the City Nature Challenge. Once the challenge starts there will be observations to ID! We need people to help with identifications all the way through the end of the challenge!

In the same way that anyone can be an observer, anyone can help identify observations. In iNaturalist, go to your city's project, click "Observations" and you'll see an "Identify" button pop up just below it. Clicking this will take you to the iNaturalist Identify page and show you all of your city's observations that still need to be identified. From this page, you can restrict what it shows you by taxon, which helps if you know how to ID certain groups. If you're not an expert in any group, you can still help by identifying the "unknowns" - the observations with no IDs at all! Click the "Filters" button and then select the dashed-line leaf with a question mark in it:



This will show you all the observations that are currently listed as "unknown." It's really helpful to go through these and add high-level IDs like "plants" or "insects" or "birds" or "fungi" - whatever you know about the organism - so people who do know how to ID these groups down to species can find them! [Here's a short video about using the Identify page.](#)

No matter what, **please only add an ID of which you can be reasonably sure** - it's fine if you don't know what something is, and it's fine to only add a [genus or family or even kingdom level ID](#). The main thing to keep in mind here is that it's not useful to add a higher-level ID if there's already a lower-level ID, unless you don't agree with the lower-level ID.

If you want to help identify observations from any city, not just yours - great and thank you! [Click this link to go to the Identify page for the entire City Nature Challenge.](#)