

RECOGNIZING PLANTS IN THE FIELD

Leader Guide

Field trips and hikes are an ideal way for young people to learn about plants. Leaders can plan and conduct numerous successful learning experiences.

The experience can take one of several forms! A brief walk around the neighborhood or farm to observe plants in the lawn, farmyard, and the fields; a spring or summer field trip planned specifically to learn more about plants; or a few minutes of a livestock tour to identify and discuss plants growing in pastures, along roadways and ditches. Direct the group's attention to beneficial plants as well as those that are injurious or poisonous to animals.

The amount of advance planning will depend upon the situation. In any case, the leader must prepare to identify the plants encountered. An inspection of the area before the tour will help the leader note plants to bring to the attention of the tour group and to prepare for questions.

The leader must consider the level of understanding of the club members. Before the field trip, members should be familiar with plants in general, their features, and some of the terms used to describe them. The slide sets "Introduction to Grasses" and "Introduction to Legumes" could be used in a training meeting held prior to an actual field experience.

Do not try to introduce too much material on a field trip. Judgement on content can be based on the response of the members. Maintain the interest of the members without overwhelming them.

Resource people in the county or neighborhood should not be overlooked. Every community has individuals who have knowledge of plants and who might be willing to work with members. Extension agents and others with training in plant identification can be of assistance with new or difficult-to-identify plants.

Leaders should be acquainted with the use of keys and other reference material available to aid in plant identification. Encourage beginning groups to limit their attention to the more common plants. After gaining experience, direct attention to the less common plants.

A club activity might be developing a list of plants commonly found in your area, grouped according to the locations in which they grow (roadsides, pastures, grain fields, low lands, and native range land). These lists help the club member to recognize that some plants are restricted to certain environments while others are adapted to many environments. Use this list on field trips.

The "Pocket Guide for 4-H Hikes" has a checklist of plants that you may want to use on a tour or hike. This guide is available through your county Extension office.



An important part of field activities is collecting plant materials for review or teaching. Always be prepared with a plant press and tools to take plant specimens. Instructions for collecting and preserving plants and making plants mounts is included in "Collecting, Preserving and Mounting Plant Materials" (4-H 1007).

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