

The Choir of Creation

Psalm 104:24-30

Pay Holy Attention in Nature

"There is no formula to the practice of holy attention. All that is required is your human body fully present to wherever it is.

Once, when sitting on the ground at the beginning of spring, I picked up a perfect skeleton of a leaf. The fleshy centers were all gone, but a body of veins was perfectly intact. I held it with reverence and delicacy in my hand for whole minutes wondering how something so fragile could have survived the winter. I studied its details and felt the knots of anxiety within me loosen as I focused my attention outside of myself for once. To someone who has never taken the time to examine the skeleton of a leaf, it might be perplexing to say that I encountered nothing less than the presence of the incarnate God. If you are curious about how this is possible, I dare you to try it! In the words of the poet Mary Oliver, 'Attention is the beginning of devotion.'



All of life takes place in the context of God's presence. As the Psalmist reminds us, there is nowhere we can go where we are not in God's Spirit (Psalm 139). Paying attention is the first step to waking up to God no matter where you are.

May you find a hundred reasons this week to notice the divine presence in the world around you... intentionally, as grace, in awe." -Katie Harmon-McLaughlin

Take Action

1. Consider a Native Garden!

To plant a garden is to express hope for the future. To plant a garden is an act of faith which requires that we be present in nature—in the colors, fragrances, sounds, and the touch of the soil. It is a place where creatures can dwell and where God will take care of them. Where they will find protection and nourishment. The garden is where oxygen is made, pollen is scattered, and the soil replenished.

Did you know?

That native plants provide essential food, shelter, and pollen for insects, birds, and butterflies?

That native plants have developed their own defenses against many pests and diseases, all but eliminating the need for pesticides?

That native plants are drought tolerant, having adapted to our local climate? Once established, many native plants require minimal irrigation.

That October thru early Spring is a perfect time to plant a California native garden?

2. Consider the birds and other pollinators.

- **Turn off outdoor lighting** during spring and fall migrations (March to May, September to November). Birds use the stars to navigate, and artificial lighting can confuse and disorient them. <https://www.audubon.org/our-work/cities-and-towns/lights-out>
- **Keep cats inside.** In the United States, cats kill 2.4 billion birds per year in addition to other mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Spay/neuter feral cats. Consider building a "catio" to allow your cat to have some outside stimulation while keeping it and other wildlife safe: <https://catiospaces.com/>
- **Use native plants.** This will cut down on your water bill and also help to increase pollinators (hummingbirds, butterflies, bees) in your yard!
- **Avoid synthetic pesticides and herbicides** on your lawn. These chemicals can permeate throughout the soil, harming beneficial soil microbes, and some may also be washed away into local watersheds, harming aquatic life. Also avoid rodenticides. They easily make their way into other wildlife like owls, hawks, snakes, coyotes, and even mountain lions. If you need need traps, mechanical traps or live traps are better. Also, securing food and food waste helps a lot too!!

Read More!

Birds of Southern California
By Brian E. Small, Jon L. Dunn,
Kimball L. Garrett, et al.

California Trees By Matt Ritter
and Michael Kauffmann

*California Amphibians and
Reptiles* By Hansen, Robert and
Shedd, Jackson D.

*Field Guide to California Insects:
Second Edition Volume 111* By
Daniel Rubinoff, Jerry A. Powell,
Joyce Gross, et al.

Wildflowers of California By:
California Native Plant Society

Web Resources

Calscape: Catalog of California Natives. You can filter by type, zip code location, care requirements, pollinators attracted, etc. calscape.org

California Native Plant Society: cnps.org

Conejo Valley Audubon: educational resource, field trips, lawns to habitat grants, and Heritage Garden. conejovalleyaudubon.org

Theodore Payne Foundation: educational resource and retail nursery. theodorepayne.org

Growing Works: A program promoting mental wellness; extensive offering of California natives; nursery open to the public the second and fourth Saturday of the month. growingworks.org

Matilija Nursery: retail nursery. matilijanursery.com

Turf replacement program: socalwatersmart.com

- **Feed the birds!** Hummingbirds/orioles will come to sugar feeders (1 part sugar, 4 parts water). Just make sure to clean thoroughly to prevent mold (dishwasher or using a 1 part bleach, 9 parts water solution). Seed feeders are great for finches, jays, titmice, and sparrows. Buy either Black Oil Sunflower seed or No Mess Sunflower Blends. *Wild Birds Unlimited* in Thousand Oaks is a great resource!

3. Stop and pay attention.

- **Get a pair of binoculars!** You don't have to fork over thousands of dollars. Basic, but perfectly fine binoculars can be bought for \$300. For birdwatching, go for 8x42: <https://athlonoptics.com/product/argos-g2-8x42-uhd/>
- **Join a local birdwatching group!** *Conejo Valley Audubon* hosts weekly field trips, and apps like *Merlin Bird ID* can help you identify what birds you see! Other apps like *iNaturalist* help you identify ANY living thing with a picture.
- **Start a nature journal.** Sit outside for ten minutes a day and write/draw what you notice. Engage all your sense. What do you see, hear, feel, smell, even taste? How does the world around you change from season to season?