

## **THE 12 LAST MINUTE GIFTS OF NATURE** **And Now for a Completely Different Shopping Experience**

This holiday season, give a partridge in a pear tree. If you can't find a partridge, here's a dozen suggestions for other natural gifts. Some of these can inspire direct experience. Others can *be* the experience. All of them can last for decades.

**1. Make an Outdoor Coupon Book.** Give your child or other family member an envelope with several coupons for day hikes, fishing trips, tree-climbing, star-gazing, wild watching, a mound of dirt (chapter than a video game) or any of the gifts below. These coupons can be redeemed during the holiday or throughout the year.



**2. Go on a Family Techno-Fast.** Recently, a modern farmer said to me: "I grew up in a three dimensional world; kids today grow up in two dimensions." To buffer your children and yourself from tech-excess, rent a cabin, pitch a tent, go on a day hike and leave *all* electronic gadgets behind when exploring the natural world. Think of this as the gift of the senses — the exercise of as many as 30 human senses, most of which we spend much of the day pushing away.

**3. Together, Build a Tree House or Clubhouse.** It's best when kids do most of the heavy lifting and design with a *little* help from adults, who can help best by providing the lumber and tools.

**4. Give a G.O. Bag.** Stuff a duffle bag with daypacks, compass, binoculars, nature guides, maybe a topo-map of your bioregion. Add granola bars, hats, gloves, fleece vests, sunglasses, collapsible hiking poles, some old hiking shoes or other comfortable footwear, and water bottles. Wrap it up with a bow, unwrap it in the morning, and stash it in your

car trunk. Now, on a moment's notice, you get G.O. (Get Outside)!

**5. Make a Backyard Park Pack.** Here's another use for a duffle bag or covered plastic bucket. Assemble seeds for native plants, trowels, kneepads, other garden tools — along with a guide to local native plants and animals (or download and assemble your own guide from online resources; and, if you wish, include Doug Tallamy's book, "[Bringing Nature Home.](#)" Then: a.) research native plants of your bioregion; b.) tear out your lawn, or part of it; c.) plant the plants; d.) keep a record of all the native insects and other critters that show up to rebuild the food web.

**6. Purchase a Park Pass.** Buy an annual park pass for the whole family (in California, they're called Adventure Passes). People 62 and older can buy a National Park Service lifetime pass (\$10 onetime fee). Here's how it works out for the gift giver: If someone with a seniors park pass has kids under 16 in the car when they arrive at the park, the kids get in free.



**7. Create a Snow Fort, or Buy a Tent, and Use it.** Or help them make a canvas tepee, and next summer, leave it up until school starts. Join the NWF's Great American Backyard Campout. <http://www.nwf.org/great-american-backyard-campout.aspx> Or skip the tent, and just head for the hills.

**8. Bring the Outside In.** Create natural tree or table ornaments from sticks, rocks, leaves — and if possible, make all of these in advance with your kids. For a more elaborate, year-round gift, create a “living wall” of ficus, hibiscus, orchids, and other plants; or an indoor vertical vegetable garden with a drip-irrigation system. Such walls, available from commercial outlets, can reduce indoor air pollutants.

**9. Give a Book that will Inspire a Child or Young Adult to Go Outdoors.** In a recent guest essay for C&NN, author Sara St. Antoine offers this terrific list of suggested gift books (see below) for children and young people. And she wrote a great one, herself, for young adults: *Three Bird Summer*.

**10. Give a Book that will Ignite a Revolution.** Here's my list of 16 suggested gift books (see below) for the holiday season that will inspire the imaginations of adults and older children, help them experience the natural world more deeply, and encourage them to join the children and nature movement. Give these books as gifts and spread the word. Lots of words.

**11. Exchange Holiday Love Lists.** One December, a reader of mine who did not enjoy shopping, decided that, rather than buying each other presents, each of her family members would write a love letter to the others, and these would be read aloud on Christmas morning. Each would include at least 25 reasons why the person receiving the letter was loved or valued. My family tried it, and many of our listed reasons for loving each other included our shared adventures and misadventures in nature.

**12. Radical Amazement.** The great teacher Abraham Joshua Heschel once said that our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. This holiday season, pass along this gift. As Heschel advised, take nothing for granted: Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.” Along with sharing time, radical amazement is the best gift you can give, best delivered by example. And you don't even have to wrap it.

[http://blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/12/13/the-12-gifts-of-nature-and-now-for-a-completely-different-shopping-experience/?utm\\_source=Children+%26+Nature+Network+Subscriptions&utm\\_campaign=987f2ec86b-RSS\\_EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_e0808fca17-987f2ec86b-39435405](http://blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/12/13/the-12-gifts-of-nature-and-now-for-a-completely-different-shopping-experience/?utm_source=Children+%26+Nature+Network+Subscriptions&utm_campaign=987f2ec86b-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e0808fca17-987f2ec86b-39435405)

*Richard Louv is Chairman Emeritus of the Children and Nature Network. He is the author of “THE NATURE PRINCIPLE: Reconnecting With Life in a Virtual World” and “LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder,” which includes an appendix of 100 Actions for families and communities.*

## **Sara St. Antoine’s Booklist**

### **Picture Books**

*The Complete Adventures of the Mole Sisters* by Roslyn Schwartz

*If You Want to See a Whale* by Julie Fogliano and Erin Stead

*Ladybug Girl* by Jacky Davis and David Soman

*Ladybug Girl and Bingo* by Jacky Davis and David Soman

*Me...Jane* by Patrick McDonnell

*Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen

*Stella, Fairy of the Forest* by Marie-Louise Gay

*Tracks in the Snow* by Herbert Wong Eye

### **Early Readers**

*Grasshopper on the Road* by Arnold Lobel

*Henry and Mudge and the Green Time* by Cynthia Rylant

*Henry and Mudge and the Starry Night* by Cynthia Rylant

*Houndsley and Catina, Plink and Plunk* by James Howe

*Mouse and Mole: Fine Feathered Friends* by Herbert Yee

*Zelda and Ivy and the Boy Next Door* by Laura McGee Kvasnosky

### **Middle Readers**

*Abel’s Island* by William Steig

*Birchbark* series by Louise Erdrich

*The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* by Jacqueline Kelly

*Gone-Away Lake* by Elizabeth Enright

*My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

*Wildwood* by Colin Meloy

*The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame

### **Young Adult**

YOUNG ADULT

*Crow Lake* by Mary Lawson

*High, Wide, and Lonesome* by Hal Borland

*The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien

*Ordinary Wolves* by Seth Kantner

*An Owl on Every Post* by Sanora Babb

*The Red Pony* by John Steinbeck

*A Ring of Endless Light* by Madeline L’Engle

*Winterdance* by Gary Paulsen

## **Richard Louv’s 16 Suggested Gift Books**

The Thunder Tree *Robert Michael Pyle*  
What the Robin Knows *Jon Young*  
The Great Work *Thomas Berry*  
Birthright *Stephen Kellert*  
Earth in Mind *David W. Orr*  
Wild Play *David Sobel*  
Bringing Nature Home *Doug Tallamy*  
The Sense of Wonder *Rachel Carson*  
A Natural History of the Senses *Diane Ackerman*  
Sharing Nature with Children *Joseph Cornell*  
Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature *Jon Young, Ellen Haas, and Evan McGown*  
Shelters, Shacks, and Shanties *D.C. Beard*  
The Great Animal Orchestra *Bernie Krause*  
The Nature Connection *Clare Walker Leslie*  
Thinking Like a Mountain *Robert Bateman*  
Fed Up with Frenzy *Susan Sachs Lipman*