

# Nature Clubs

Going Out In Nature in Greater Des Moines • July 2009 Newsletter  
From the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department, Polk County Conservation and Friends of Des Moines Parks

## Staying cool in deep summer

The school year is a distant memory, gardens are in top form, and hazy hot days have arrived. It's tempting to stay inside with the air conditioning on, but who can resist playing under shady oaks, canoeing or kayaking down a river, or splashing in cool water at one of our local swimming holes? Slather on some sunscreen, pack a cooler with cold drinks and go anyway! I'll see you out there. - editor

### Things to see and do

#### Trace the water's edge

Before you take a dip at the beach at Big Creek State Park this month, take some time to explore the shore. A paved recreational trail invites you to cruise under hundred-year old oaks, past restored prairie, along meadows and near marshy areas. You can pick up the trail near any of the picnic shelters. Start at the beach, and you can roll all the way back to Des Moines if you wish. *Find Big Creek State Park 20 minutes north of Des Moines. From highway 415, take S. 3rd St. north to the main intersection in Polk City. Turn west on N. Broadway St, and follow it to the park entrance.*

#### Cool your toes

Find some relief on a sweltering afternoon by taking a walk in a local creek. Camp Creek, at Thomas Mitchell Park, and Four-Mile Creek are shallow, narrow waterways that offer cool, clear water and rocky bottoms. Look for signs of life as you wander downstream. Crawfish and insects like to hide under the rocks and wildlife leave tracks along the water's edge. *Find Thomas Mitchell Park on NE 46th Ave. between Altoona and Mitchellville. Camp Creek is a short walk from Shelter #1. Find File Creek off Easton Blvd. east of downtown. Park at the Four Mile Community Center (3711 Easton Blvd.), then walk west, over the bridge to the Marilyn Kay Smith Woods trailhead. Follow the trail under the bridge to access the creek.*

#### Find a place to paddle

If there's a cool breeze this month you'll likely catch it on the water. Bring your own canoe or kayak to a local lake, or rent a boat for a small fee. In addition to its paved trail and sand beach, Gray's Lake offers a boat launch, and boat rentals daily. Blue Heron Lake, at Raccoon River Park in West Des Moines, offers swimming, boating and an accessible fishing pier. To the south, Indianola's Lake Ahquabi State Park, popular with anglers, offers boat rentals, a boat launch, a sand beach, and a gravel recreational trail that encircles the shore. *Find Gray's Lake on Fleur Drive in Des Moines, south of downtown. Blue Heron Lake's boat launch is near the main gate at Raccoon River Park, on Grand Ave in West Des Moines. Lake Ahquabi State Park is 6 miles south of Indianola off highway 65/69. Turn west on Nevada St. (SW 18th Ave), then south on I 18th Ave.*

### Natural Resources

Looking for other city and county parks? Find listings, maps and directions at [leadingyououtdoors.org](http://leadingyououtdoors.org), and [dmparks.org](http://dmparks.org)

### “You said it!

I was not an outdoors person growing up, so I need help to change that with my kids! - Louisa

I'm trying to find more opportunities to be with my son, particularly away from electronics. - Kristin

We have three granddaughters who stay with us during the summer months. We want them to experience Iowa's great outdoors. - Ruth

It's interesting to go to places or do things at place you haven't been to before. - Ann ”

### Nature Clubs

Going Out In Nature in Greater Des Moines

#### Assistant Organizers:

Heidi Anderson

Alecia Kates

Janel Lewandowski

Tina Hadden-Mowry

Ginny Malcomson

Cheryl Rainford

Melanie Sadeghpour

Send ideas for newsletter articles to Newsletter Editor Cheryl Rainford at [cherylrainford@yahoo.com](mailto:cherylrainford@yahoo.com)

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Find out about upcoming events, meet members and share your thoughts at [meetup.com/nature-clubs](http://meetup.com/nature-clubs)

## Kids reap benefits from gardening

Convincing children to eat their vegetables doesn't have to be a chore. Did you know that kids who connect vegetables to where they come from tend to be more willing to eat them?

Research from Texas A&M has shown elementary schoolers who garden develop better attitudes about vegetables, and are more likely to choose them for snacks. Studies also have found kids increase their interpersonal relationship skills, and score higher on science achievement tests after taking part in gardening programs. (More: [childrens.wcroc.cfans.umn.edu/pages/links/researchLinks1.php](http://childrens.wcroc.cfans.umn.edu/pages/links/researchLinks1.php))

The benefits are numerous. Still kids are kids. Keep them safe with some simple rules:

### 5 Rules for Garden Safety:

1. Keep all chemicals away from children, in their original containers, preferably locked up.
2. Put away sharp tools after use.
3. If you put down a sharp tool like a rake or hoe, make sure the sharp side faces down.
4. When pruning, avoid leaving cut stems or stalks at your child's eye level.
5. Always supervise children closely, especially toddlers, and make sure they understand some things are not meant to be eaten.

## Look in a book!

Des Moines Public Libraries offer wonderful resources for nature lovers of every age. Drop by your neighborhood library to check out these timely titles for the month of June selected by Audrey Jones, youth services coordinator:

• *The Butterfly Book: a Kid's Guide to Attracting, Raising, and Keeping Butterflies* - by Kersten Hamilton  
Explains how to attract, identify and raise butterflies.

• *Quiet in the Garden* - by Alikei  
Sitting quietly in his garden, a little boy observes the eating habits of birds, bugs, butterflies and other small animals. Includes instructions on how to make your own garden and a detailed illustration of plants typically found in a garden.

• *Gardening with Kids* - by Catherine Woram and Martyn Cox  
The authors tell you everything you need to know. How to choose and prepare your site, grow seeds, bulbs and cuttings and choose plants from the local garden center. Themed plant lists help you choose what to grow, and highlight plants to avoid.

• *Planting a Rainbow* - by Lois Ehlert  
A beautifully illustrated book about a mother and child planting a rainbow of flowers in their garden.

• *Garden Crafts for Kids: 50 Great Reasons to Get Your Hands Dirty* - by Diane Rhoades  
More than 50 easy, fun projects for kids of nearly all ages, with clear, simple explanations of plant physiology. A great teaching resource and how-to book.

• *Last Child in the Woods* - by Richard Louv  
This book encourages adults to re-connect children with nature, and gives advice on how to do so.

Visit [desmoineslibrary.com](http://desmoineslibrary.com) or call 515.283.4152 for hours

## Upcoming nature events for families

### July 10 at 9:30 a.m. Tiny Trek to a Butterfly Garden

Take a short, stroller-friendly walk to the butterfly garden just north of the Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center. We'll explore, identify butterflies and do a simple butterfly-themed activity.

Sign up at [meetup.com/nature-clubs](http://meetup.com/nature-clubs)

### Saturdays through Sept. 9:00 a.m. Yoga in the Park

Maximize your relaxation by practicing yoga at the shore of Gray's Lake. All ages welcome. Sessions are informal and accessible. Just show up!

### July 15 10:00-11:30 a.m. Nature Play Date

A Polk County Conservation Naturalist leads a play date at Easter Lake Park, Shelter #4. A morning of adventure and discovery. Bring your curiosity.

### July 29 10:00-11:30 a.m. Nature Play Date

A Polk County Conservation Naturalist leads a play date at the Jester Park Playscape. A morning of adventure and discovery. Bring your curiosity.

### August 6, 5:30 p.m. Kids and Veggies

Get your kids excited about vegetables! Local garden expert Stephanie Bruner will lead a tour of the Franklin Avenue community garden as she shares tips for gardening with children. Storytime to follow. Sign up at [meetup.com/nature-clubs](http://meetup.com/nature-clubs)

### August 15, 10:30 a.m. Send Wishes Afloat

Build a leaf boat with artist Sandra Gustafson. Create simple boats using biodegradable materials. Make a wish as you set your boat adrift on Gray's Lake. Sign up at [meetup.com/nature-clubs](http://meetup.com/nature-clubs).

 Find more events at [meetup.com/nature-clubs](http://meetup.com/nature-clubs)