

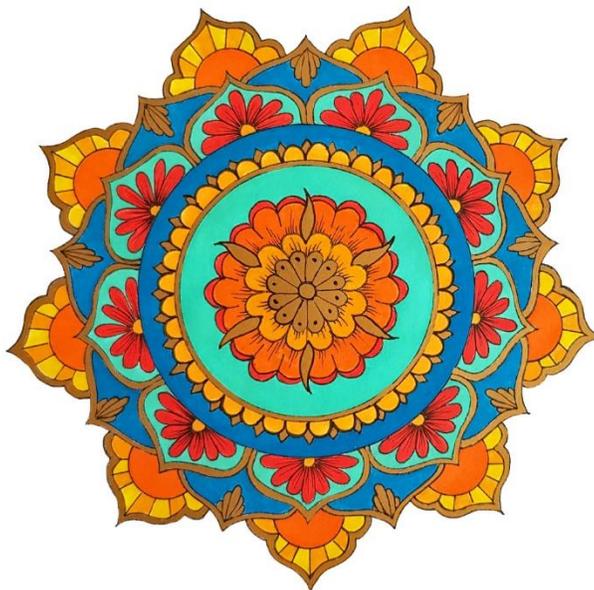
Nature Mandalas

What shapes do you see in nature-When you go outside, when you look up at the stars, when you stare out at the sea? Patterns are all around us, creating beautiful natural art in our surroundings. Making Nature Mandalas is a beautiful way to connect to nature, and also to ourselves!



The Meaning of the Mandala

In Sanskrit, the meaning of the word mandala is circle. The mandala is a spiritual and ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism that represents life and the universe. The circular design symbolizes the interconnectedness of all things. The mandala also represents spiritual journey within the individual viewer. When we look at mandalas, we are challenged to understand the unity in the cosmos and also our own individual place within them. The process of both creating and looking at mandalas is used to aid in meditation. An exercise in mindfulness, the designs help to remove troubling thoughts, center the body and mind, and allow the creative mind to run free.



How to Make a Nature Mandala

- **Gather Your Materials:** Head outside and search for a peaceful spot out in nature to create your mandala. Next, collect natural materials that look pleasing to you—twigs, leaves, grasses, flowers, berries, pinecones, acorns, rocks, shells, even dirt.
- **Create Your Mandala:** Spread your materials out on the ground so you can see them clearly. First, place a meaningful item in the center. Use something that is significant to you, as it will be your unifying center. Next, begin to build your mandala out, beginning near the center first and then continuing to move outward from the center.
- **Complete Your Mandala:** Continue to make patterns until all your natural items are used up and you like the look of your creation. Feel free to gather more items to add to it as you go along, or to change it along the way! Remember, this is your creation, and half the journey lies in creating it.
- **Meditate on Your Mandala:** Sit back and take a few deep breaths, then spend some time simply staring into your mandala. Notice the patterns, the colors, the textures, and the interconnectedness of the design. Allow your mind to get lost in its beauty.

Opportunities for Expanded Learning

Seasons

Make a Nature Mandala for every season! These can be made on the summer and winter solstices and spring and autumn equinoxes to honor and learn about the official shifting of seasons, or whenever the foliage in your particular area begins to change in such a way that would create a different mandala than the last season's creation. Use this as an opportunity to research more about what plants appear, disappear, thrive, and go dormant during the different seasons.



Identification

Download the iNaturalist app or Google Lens app and take photos of your found natural materials. These apps will lead you through a series of steps that will help you identify your objects, and learn more about them. iNaturalist will even let you log where and what time you found them and add them to a global database that will help scientists better understand the biodiversity of our surroundings!

Environments

Visit different physical environments and create Nature Mandalas at each of them. When you explore the environment looking for your natural items, notice the different types of plants, rocks, animals, insects, and more that make up that ecosystem. How are the items you find in a forest different from those you find at the beach? How does your desert mandala look compared to your backyard mandala?

