Week 4—Traveling Seeds

*Anyone can cut an apple open and count the number of seeds. But, who can look at a single seed and count the trees and apples?*

*—Dottie Walters*

This week, now that we know what plants the seeds came from, and what they look like, let’s find out how they travel to make new plants.

Look at their shape. Are they in a pod that cracks open to let them float on the wind to make new plants further away? Do they count on dropping to the ground and being carried away as food by birds and squirrels? Do they just fall and plant where they fall? Open your seeds and seed pods that you’ve collected and see for yourself.

Make some guesses and then look up the plants to see if you’re right.

The owner of the site Exploring Nature has given me permission to share this page with you to include in your journal. Plant Adaptations For Pollination And Seed Dispersal will help you understand some of the ways plants help their seeds to travel.

*Older students might want to write what they have learned about seed dispersal in their nature journals. Younger students might want to draw a picture to illustrate what they’ve learned. As always, nature study should be an enjoyable exercise, so even just looking it up and talking about it is going to help your children learn and retain.*
Plant Adaptations For Pollination And Seed Dispersal

Some plants are pollinated by birds – like the hummingbird.

Bright colored blossoms attract bees, flies, butterflies, and moths inside to collect nectar and pollen. Sometimes lines on their petals will guide the insects down into the blossom or a sweet smell will attract pollinators from a long way off.

The seeds of the sugar maple are built into a flat propeller, called a samara, that helicopter away from the parent tree. The elm has a round samara that works in much the same way, where the linden tree has a long, flat wing attached to its seed stem that spins it away like a wind-driven top.

Plants are also tricky about getting animals to carry off their seeds. Many plants develop a fleshy fruit around their seeds to attract animals to eat them. This works especially well with animals like squirrels and chipmunks that collect the seeds and “hide” them for later use. For an acorn, this is not only spreading the seed, but getting it planted in the ground as well.

Some plants – like fuzzy goats beard and dandelions – have a globe of fluff that break up into a mass of parachutes, each holding one seed, called an achene, spinning off far and wide in the wind. Sometimes seeds burst from a pod, like the milkweed, and float off on silken strands.

A few plants even get their seeds spread by making them stick to whomver walks by. They use hooks, barbs, spurs and burs.

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