



Winter

Wildlife Sketching

One School
One Farm



Overview: Drawing wildlife from observation can be thrilling- but also overwhelming! Living things don't tend to stay still very long, and it can be difficult to pay attention to your subject while also trying to get a drawing 'just right.' Gesture sketching is a practice that focuses on capturing the energy of a life subject, rather than exact details of anatomy. Practicing this strategy ahead of time can help prepare you to observe animals on-site and record observations in your nature journal in real time.

Capturing the story of the experience is also an important part of this journaling strategy. Adding notes about how the observation unfolds, how we feel in the moment, and what other actions or follow-up events occur add a personal and memorable layer to your journal pages.

Your Goal: Observe animals in their natural environment while practicing wildlife gesture sketching. Sketch animal movement and write about the behaviours and reactions that you notice and wonder about. Incorporate landscape elements to describe the location of your observations. Create a journal page that brings this information together and see what you discover about your subject when paying it close, prolonged attention.

Nature Journaling Strategy: Gesture Sketching

It's important to remember that gesture sketching is about developing skills in observation rather than making pretty pictures. It may be useful to focus on sketching *efficiently* – developing skills and strategies, rather than sketching *quickly*, which may denote being in a rush!

- On practice paper, try holding the pen/pencil loosely and further back than you would for writing. Try some loose shapes and mark-making. Include gross-motor motions from the arm and shoulder while drawing.
- Observe and sketch simple shapes as a starting point. If looking at an animal, start with lines and shapes to convey direction of movement and general body mass. Add more lines to show direction of limbs, wings, tails.
- If the animal remains in the field of view, more details may be recorded. Use arrows to illustrate movements or direction of travel.

To build confidence with these concepts, try some practice sketches in advance. Use photos to observe and sketch for brief periods to get a feel for working efficiently. Decrease time with practice. See if you can capture your gesture in three minutes; two minutes; one minute, before moving on to live views.

Try sketching household pets, aquarium life, or birds outside the window. When travelling as a passenger, try capturing small sketches of the landscape, and gestures of any birds or other animals you happen to see.

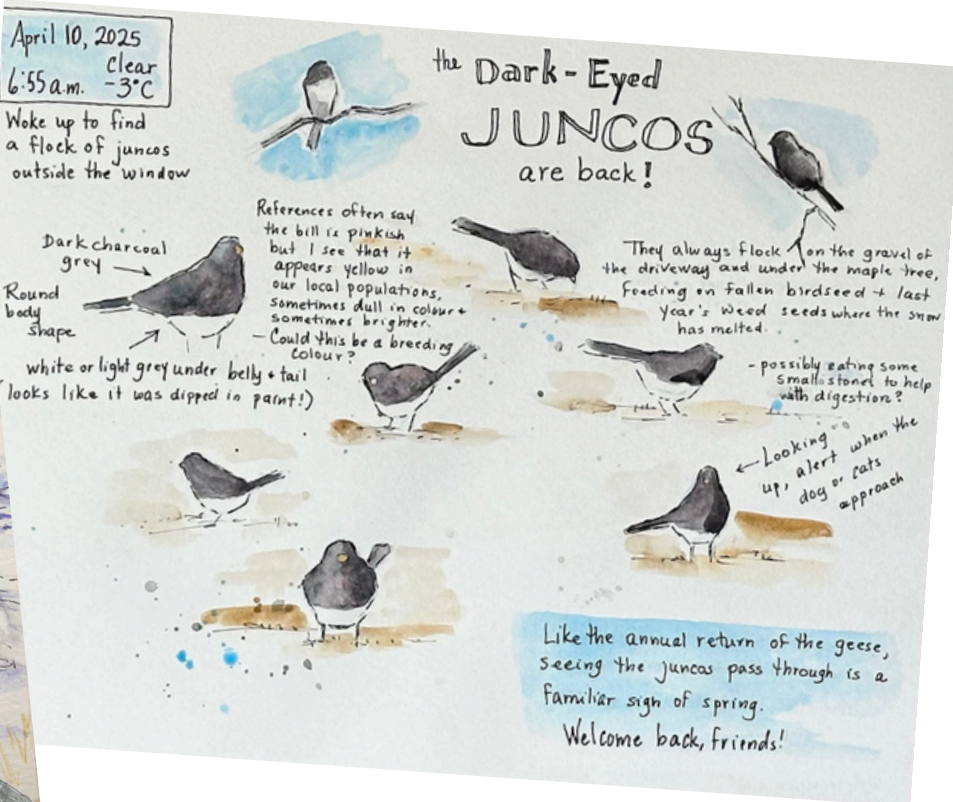
Two-minute mice: Finding a mouse in the pet food bin became an opportunity to practice gesture sketches. A dozen or so quick photos were snapped before releasing the little creature. A two-minute timer was used for each gesture. Note the light pencil marks showing the main shapes of head, body, and tail, sketched before adding contour lines.





Winter Window Watching

- Depending on the location of your land partner site, you may be able to observe animals through a window, which can be helpful as the temperatures dip.
- This might be a window in a home/school/office or the window of a parked car or bus if your site is more remote.



Cold Hands, Cool Art

- You can use the cold weather to your advantage! Drawing outside with winter gear and gloves on might encourage you to use bigger whole arm motions, which are ideal for gesture work, rather than fine finger movements.
- Coupled with the temptation to get inside and warm up, cold weather gesture drawing might push you to be more efficient in your technique, too!
- Remember, something might happen today at your land partner site that will never happen again (John Muir Laws). What a gift it might be to witness such a thing, even if your fingers get a bit cold...



Fast sketching, mittens on: Nature unexpectedly lends a hand when cold conditions lead to interesting textures as the water freezes on the brush and page. No wildlife was spotted, but animal sounds were noted.



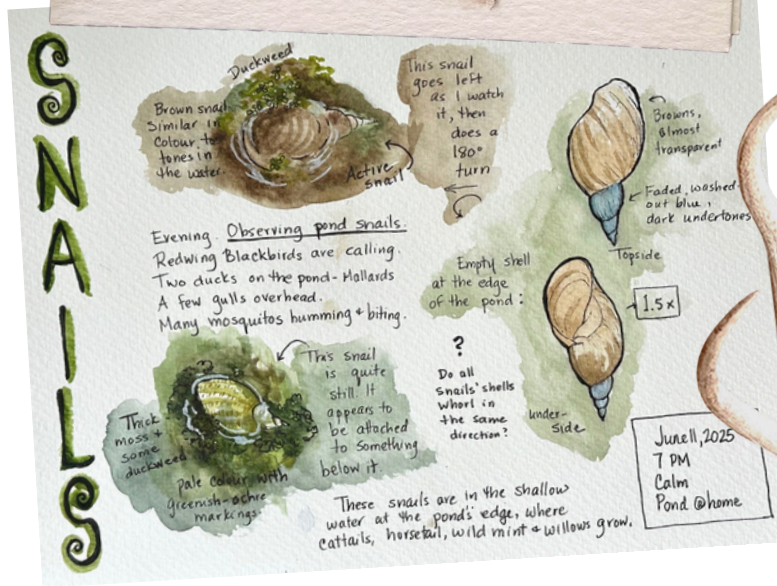
This is an actual progression of my ability to draw a deer accurately. Notice the assumptions and incomplete understanding of anatomy at the top of the page with my first attempts. As I learned more about deer, their structures, and behaviours while watching live cams and tutorials over a couple of days, my skills improved drastically.



Live Feed Drawing

Practicing observation of animal behaviour using trail/live cams or even nature documentaries can have multiple benefits:

- If you can find footage of animals that might be part of the same ecosystem as the stewardship site, it can help you to get to know them and the site more intimately.
- It can give you the time and space to focus on developing your sketching skills in a low pressure environment. Try nest cams, feeder cams, trail cams, or river cams.
- It can help you notice, wonder and connect to relationships within the stewardship site.
- You can incorporate strategies of looking at the big picture to bring in basic landscape shapes - horizon lines, tree lines, and other main features - to draw connections between the animal and land, or create a web of how species are interconnected.



Wildlife sketching at a snail's pace: not all creatures move so quickly that they are difficult to sketch in real-time! In winter you can practice your sketches on sleeping pets and terrarium or aquarium animals. In summer, snails can be wonderfully cooperative, slow-moving subjects.

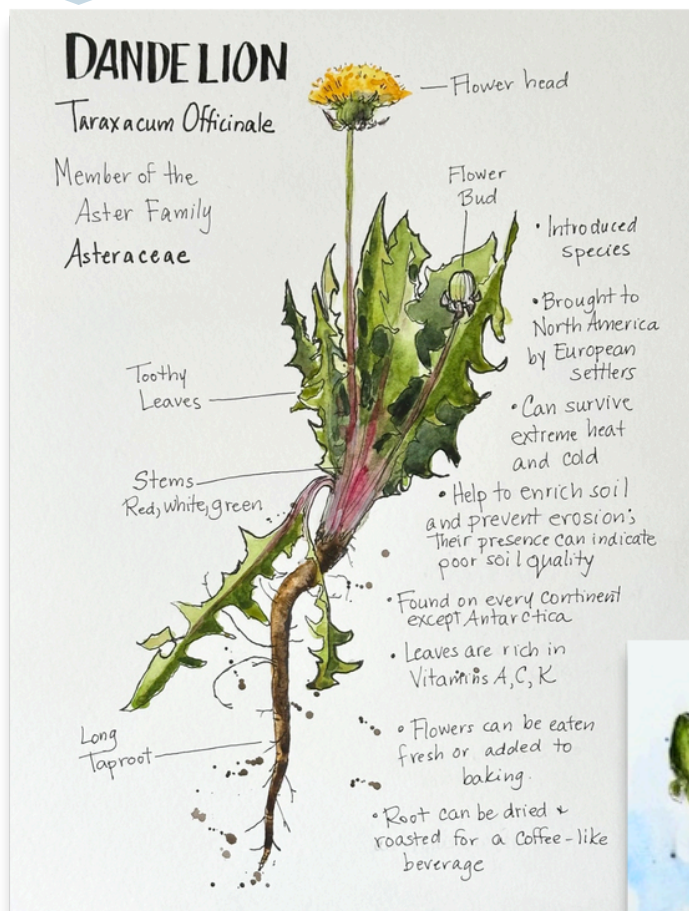


Sketching from exhibits in galleries and museums is a time-honoured practice in art and science. It's another way to hone your sketching skills during the winter months. (Photo taken at the Humboldt and District Museum)



Winter

Introduced Plant Species



It's important to remember that there are many **right** ways to organize a nature journal page. Try not to get caught up on the 'best' way to do it, because the possibilities are endless! Consider these two pages featuring dandelions, for example. You may return to the same subject over and over, yet each page will be unique.

Overview: Introduced plant species have become a part of our ecosystem. Whether we think of them as weeds, crops, garden plants, or landscaping, they are likely here to stay. Examining these plants and the impact they have on a land partner site is an important part of developing an understanding of the interconnectedness of the natural world.

Your Goal: Use nature journaling strategies to learn about an introduced plant species identified as part of the land partner site. Identify introduced plants in a variety of stages of growth in outdoor spaces and consider their role and the impact they have on the landscape or specific ecosystems. Build on the skills of making a study of a specific species and learning to recognize it in different stages of development

Nature Journaling Strategy: Sequencing

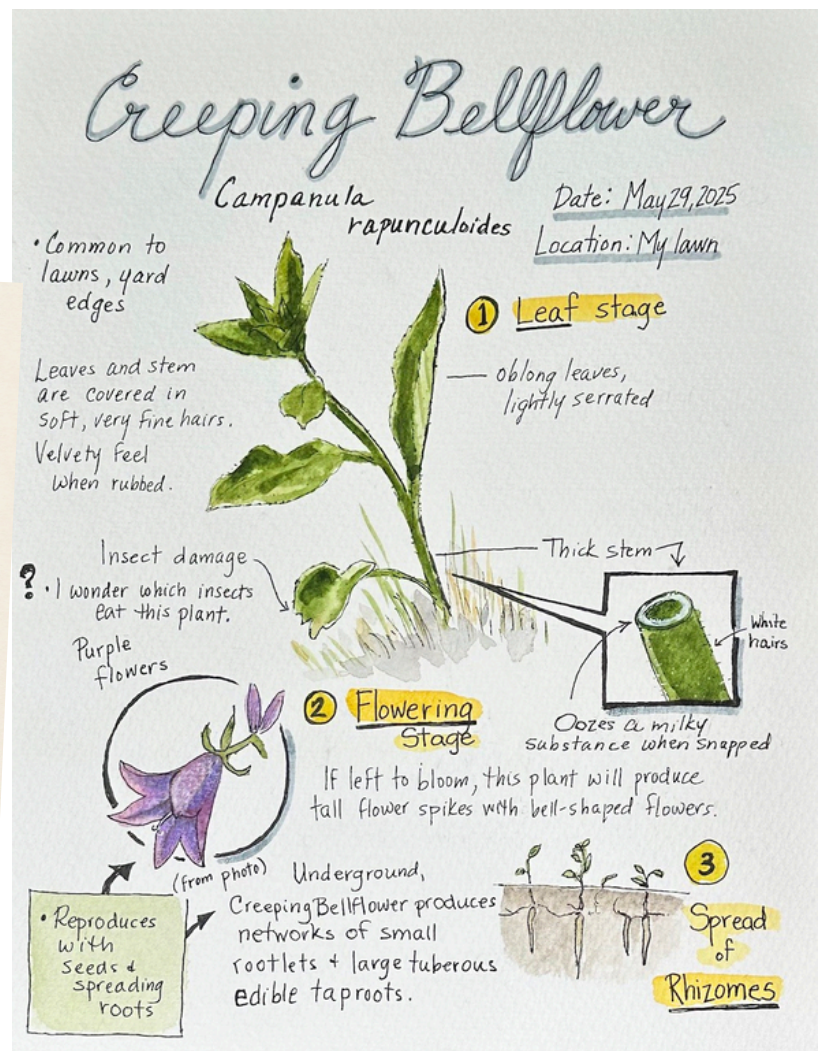
Sequencing is a strategy that uses words/pictures/numbers and/or a graphic organizer (comic strip, timeline, cycle, chart, calendar etc) to illustrate chronological changes in a subject over time. You can use sequencing for any natural phenomena that changes over time- plant growth, animal behaviour, site regeneration or seasonal cycles, for example.

A sequence can capture a timeframe as short as a few minutes, or as long as a decade or more. It can capture the growth and change of the plants in our landscape. You can journal the sequence of a flower from budding to seeding, or the sequence of a plant from seed to harvest.

It can be difficult to plan a full page before you have witnessed all of these stages, so try starting near the top left of your page and gradually working your way to the right or downwards as you record the growth/change of your subject. If you run out of room, move on to the next page or use the margins and bottom of the page. Numbers and arrows can help to lead the eye in the right direction.



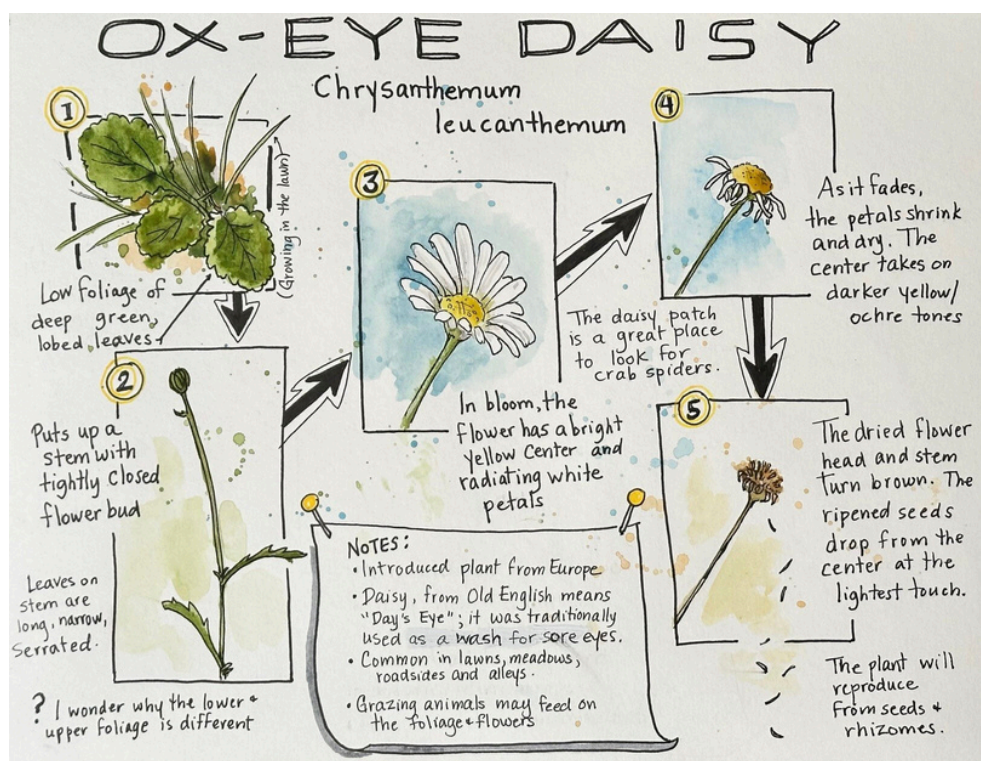
If it helps, you can use a graphic organizer or create your own to get you started on a page like this. The smaller boxes can make a composition feel more manageable.





Introducing... Introduced Species!

- Define and discuss the idea of an introduced plant species. What makes a species *introduced* vs *native*? Try to suspend judgement while exploring words like *introduced*, *invasive*, and *weeds*.
- Make a list of some of the introduced food crops, flowers, trees, grasses, and shrubs that you know. Take a walk, either through the land partner site or somewhere else nearer by, and see if you can identify which plants are introduced species. This is a good opportunity to use field guides and other plant identification books.
- You may like to collect cuttings of branches, seed heads, or grasses available above the snowline to bring indoors for further observation.
- What are some of the effects of introduced species in our communities and nature?



This illustrated sequence of growth and development uses a graphic organizer with boxes, numbers, and arrows.



Storyboard a Species

- Every species has a story! Make a journal page study of the stages of growth of an introduced plant. Consider where it came from, how and why, where it lives, how it spreads, what it is currently or traditionally used for, and how it affects the landscape.
- Try to find references (images or actual specimens) of your introduced plant in a variety of stages of growth and/or growing conditions.
- With your references at hand, how can you organize simple diagrams of each stage/growth habit on the page in a way that will tell the story of the plant? Lines, boxes, arrows, a linear or circular sequence or numbered images can help show the plant as it grows and develops.
- Sketch the main shape(s) of the plant. Add notes about observations and questions.
- Remember that diagrams can be added to look closer and study details such as buds, seeds, flowers, and roots, or you can use mapping to show the bigger picture of a crop, a shelterbelt, or a landscape.





Plant Pen Pals

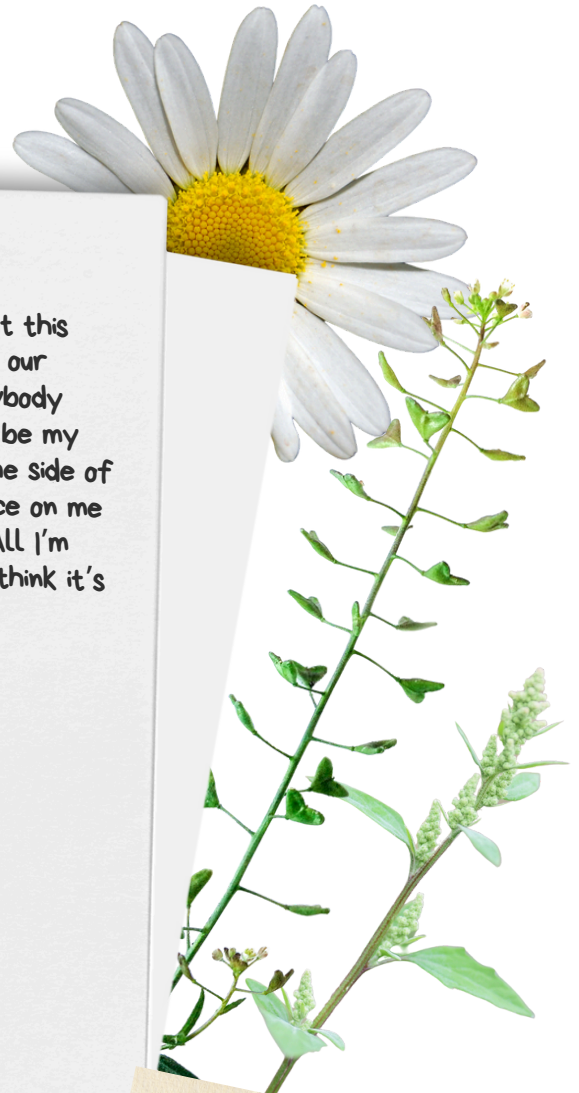
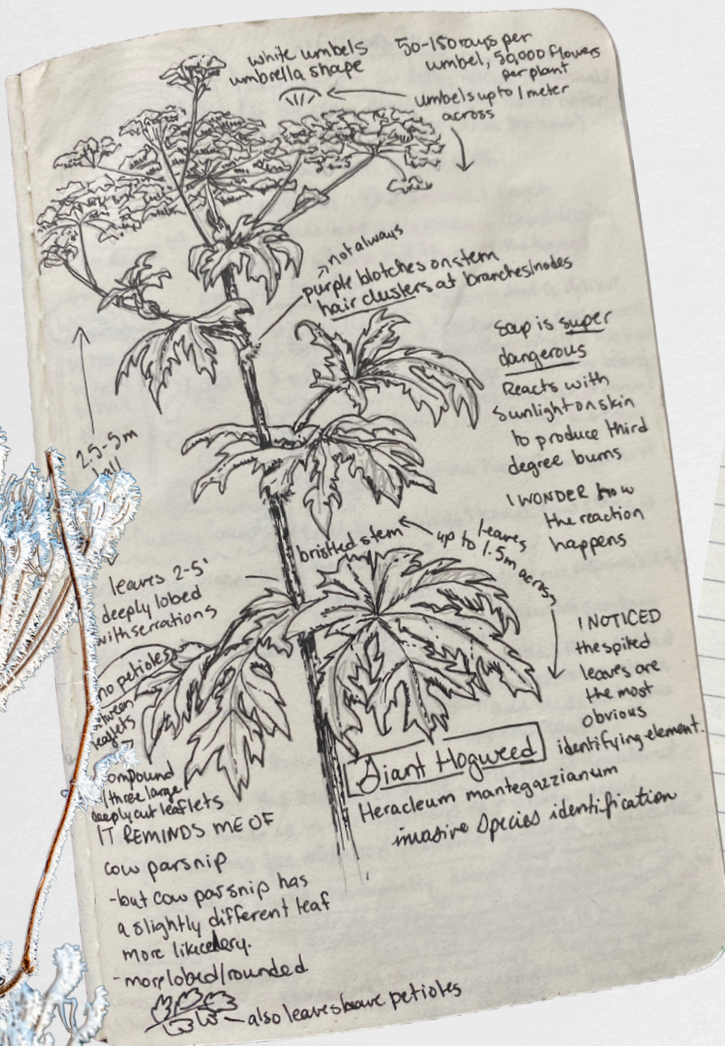
- Write a note or a letter in your nature journal to or from your introduced plant.
- What would you say, and how would you introduce yourself and tell your story?
- Try writing in correspondence by having another student reply to the letter from the perspective of another species.

Dear Giant Hogweed,

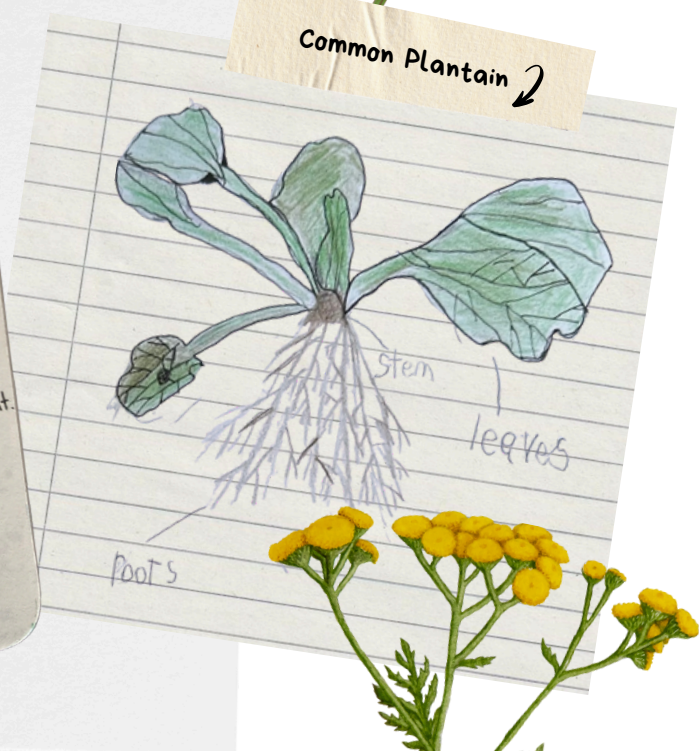
It's me, your cousin, Cow Parsnip. Rumour has it, you might be coming out this way. I have to say, you are not welcome! I'm sure you've heard about our other cousin, Wild Parsnip, and all the grief they've caused me! Everybody around here already mistakes me for you, and now nobody wants to be my friend. I'll just be minding my own business, lounging in the shade at the side of a trail. All of a sudden, someone will walk past and call the RM office on me without even taking the time to notice my beautiful palmate leaves. All I'm saying is that I've lived around these parts for a loooooong time, and I think it's best if we just keep our distance.

Sincerely,

Heracleum sphondylium ssp. montanum



Common Plantain 2

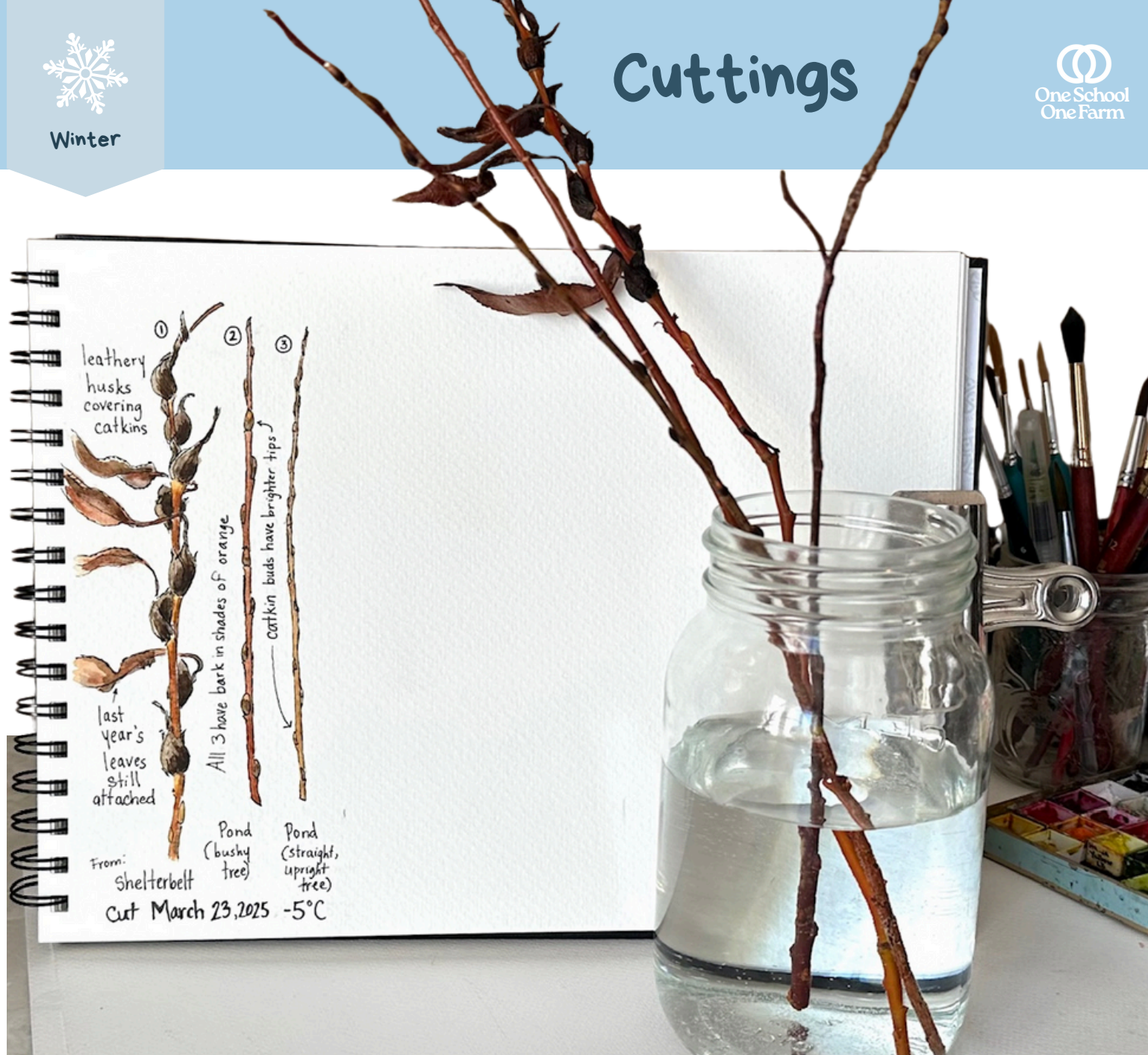




Winter

Cuttings

One School
One Farm



Starting a page with willow cuttings; leaving room for future observations. See inside for completed page!

Overview: Before the snow melts and the grass turns green, trees and shrubs are already slowly waking up! Cuttings are a great way to get up close and personal with that process. You might be surprised to know that woody plants already have their leaves and flowers ready and waiting all winter inside the buds. In this activity, you'll work with plant cuttings to look at the fine details of twigs, buds, flowers, and catkins. By drawing a cutting at actual size, you'll train your eyes (and hands!) to slow down and really notice the structure of a plant. This careful observation helps you recognize similarities and differences between species—especially in winter, when plants can be harder to tell apart.

Your Goal: Use the nature journaling strategy of scale drawing to observe cuttings up close and in detail. Get to know the physical structure of woody species and experiment with growing your own by rooting cuttings in water.

Nature Journaling Strategy: Scale Drawing

Try a simple scale-drawing technique in the nature journal by placing material directly on the page. Place it on the side opposite your dominant hand so that you will be drawing closely alongside it. As you sketch the basic shape, try to make it the same size and length as the actual cutting. When adding details such as winter buds or catkins, sketch them consistent to the cutting next to you. Keep the cutting in place while adding colour. You can even try adding a layer of shadow to the sketch, consistent with the way the cutting casts a shadow on your page. Finish the page by adding some identifying labels or colour notes- remember, if you can't quite get a detail right in drawing, you can use notes to describe it more accurately.



Willow Walk

- One of the first signs that spring may be just around the corner is willow flowers- and they are one of the most unique flower structures to observe closely.
- Take a walk to look for different species of willow.
- Compare the colour of bark, bud shape, and catkin development. Which are most similar? Which are most different? Make a quick sketch or list in your journal.
- **A note of caution:** willow tends to grow in wet areas, and near the end of winter, there may be water flowing beneath what appears to be a solid snow bank or ice surface. Stay away from potential safety hazards.



Sequence Sketch

- Try rooting some cuttings by standing them upright in a jar of water.
- If willow catkins haven't yet opened when collected, they will likely bloom indoors.
- Record observations of root and catkin development using sequencing diagrams and descriptive notes of what you notice or wonder.



3 stages, 3 cuttings: Background colours were used to help separate the three stages of observation. Additional information was added in the remaining space.



Spooky Shadows

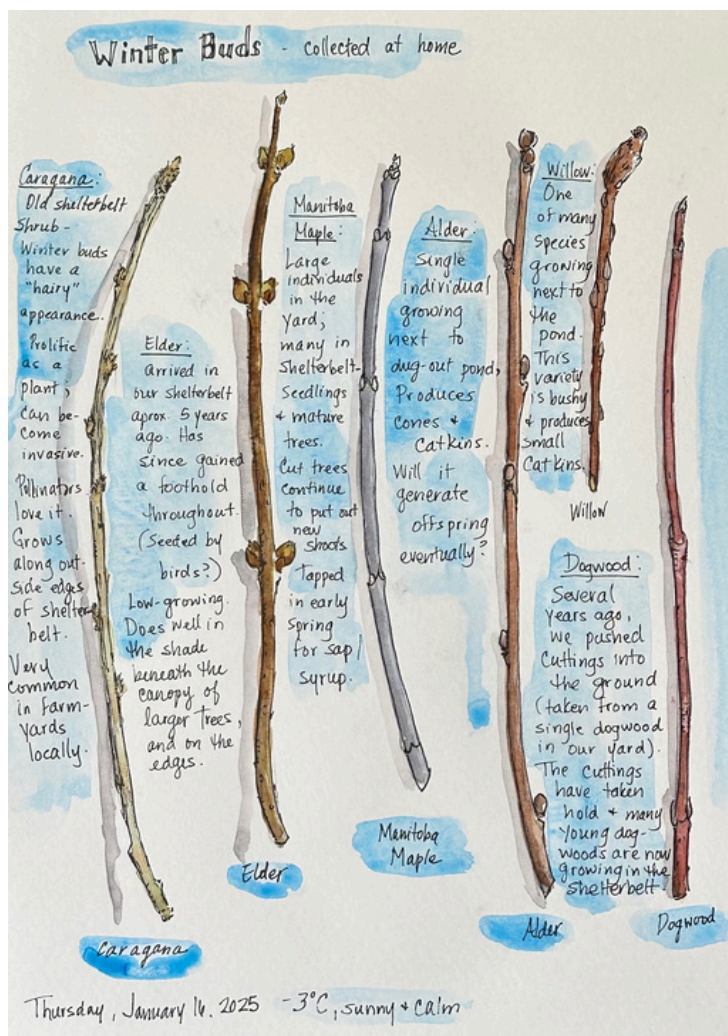
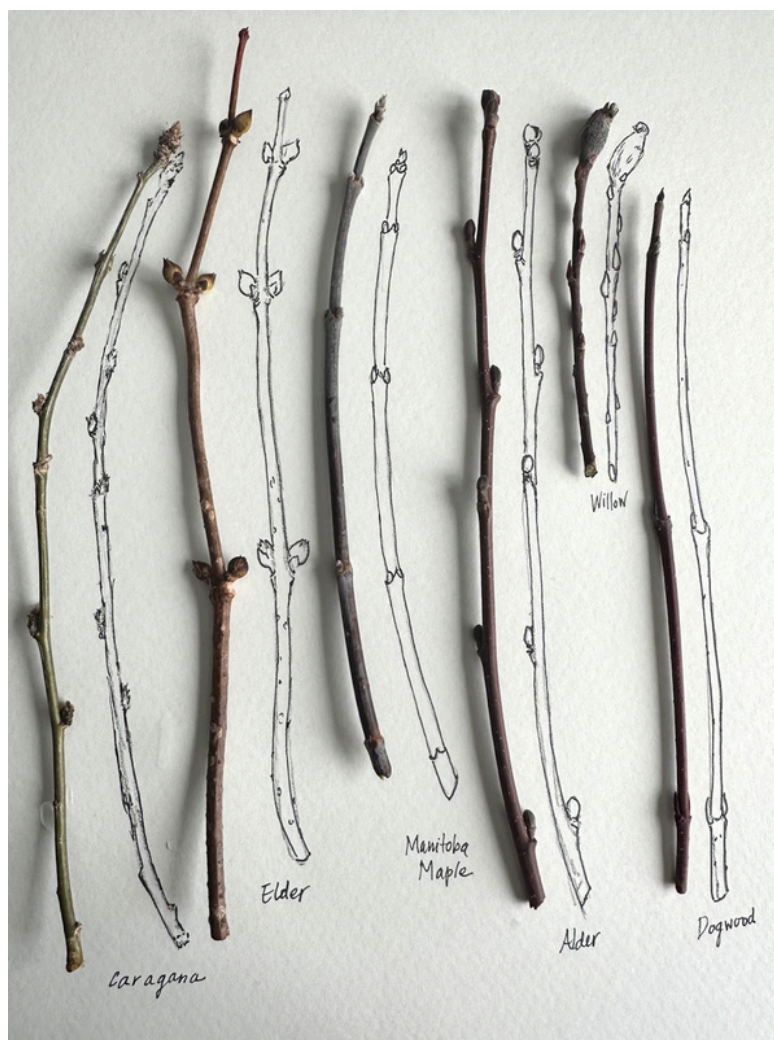
- A variation of scale sketching which can be done indoor or outdoor is to use a light source (natural or artificial) to cast a shadow of a cutting or branch on your page.
- Notice how moving the cutting/branch, paper, or light source can change the scale and sharpness of the shadow.
- Try to find the best combination of lighting and distance to create a crisp, visible shadow of your cutting/branch as close to its actual size as possible.
- Choose a dark medium (marker, charcoal, paint) to carefully shade in the area where the shadow falls on the page. When you finish, compare your shadow sketch to your cutting/branch.
- Note the scale by laying the cutting/branch over the painted shadow. What similarities or differences do you see? Add these observations to your journal page.





Scale Sketch

- Sketch cuttings by laying them on the page and carefully drawing to scale. This will help with comparing/contrasting the different types. Note details of colour and winter bud/catkin placement.



Laying the cutting on the page to help with accurate scale drawing.



Branches and Buds

- Challenge yourself to find at least five different winter twig structures.
- Look at how buds are spaced—are they opposite or alternate? Are they pointed or rounded?
- Record your findings in a chart, sketch, or labelled diagram in your nature journal, using the scale drawing strategy to sketch quickly and confidently.

