

Welcome to Empowering
Homeschool Conversations,
your authority in
navigating the world of
homeschooling diverse learners.

Featuring Peggy Ployer from
Sped Homeschool,
Annie Yorty from AnnieYorty.com,
Leilani Melendez from Living with Eve,
Stephanie Buckwalter from ELARP Learning,
and Dawn Jackson from Dawn
Jackson Educational
Consulting and Tutoring.

With over seventy five years
of combined homeschooling expertise,
experiences and perspectives,
this group is eager to
share their wealth of
wisdom to empower your
homeschooling journey.

So grab your favorite mug,
settle in and get ready for
insightful discussions,

valuable insights and practical tips.

Give your homeschool the
power boost it needs to
successfully educate the
unique learners in your home.

welcome to empowering
homeschool conversations

I'm annie yorty your host
for today today we're going
to talk about rooted in
learning embracing nature's
classroom in homeschooling
and our guest today is joy burns now
Joy is, let's put her picture up here.

Joy is a retired homeschool
mother of three who now
works as a garden educator at the J.C.
Ralston Arboretum at North
Carolina State University in Raleigh,
North Carolina.

Joy brings both her
professional experience in writing,
editing, and communications,

plus her experience as a
homeschool teacher to
develop and present nature programming
in the garden setting.

She enjoys working with
public and private school teachers,
homeschoolers, families,
community volunteers,
and children of all ages.

So Joy,

I am so excited to have you here today.

Welcome and thank you for being with us.

Good morning.

I would like to start off
just to give you an
opportunity to tell our audience
a little bit more about
yourself because you
haven't been on here before.

Please share a little bit.

Sure.

Well, I'm a proud Buckeye.

I live in North Carolina now,

but I'm from the state of

Ohio and I'm proud of it.

I graduated with a degree in

communications and worked

about fifteen years before

starting my family in

non-profit communications.

That was my niche.

I really liked working for

mission-based organizations.

and writing,

editing and creating programming.

And eventually met my

husband and married and had

three children.

And I soon realized that I

just really loved being at

home with my kids and that

I liked learning right alongside them.

And so that led me into homeschooling,

which I never in a million

years thought I was gonna do.

But I loved the idea of

being home with my kids and learning,
like I said,
right alongside them and
become a lifelong learner myself.
And when my youngest was in high school,
you know,
almost done with her high school career,
I realized I needed to do
something to keep myself going.
and cause they were moving on.
And so I kind of started
what I call my encore
career because I never, again,
in a million years thought
I would be working at a public garden,
but I saw a position for a
garden educator at NC State
and I had really come to
love nature study with my
kids when we were homeschooling.
And so that kind of, you know,
I was really more formally
introduced to nature

study in through because of homeschooling,
but that's what led me into
this new career of working
with kids and their
families and with public school teachers,
um,
in coming to visit the garden and
helping to arrange those
visits and teach them while they're,
while they're there.

So.

Yeah.

Sounds, sounds like a great, uh,
like we often have things we don't expect,
but our path leads into
these interesting little, you know,
seasons of life, right?

Right.

Well,

why is it important for kids to go
outside and spend time in nature?

And I'd like to just talk
about some of the benefits

that we find from doing that.

Well, yeah.

I think we intuitively know

that being outside is good for us.

We might not think about exactly why,

but you don't have to

search very far to find

studies that show that

being outside is indeed good for us.

And just the physical

aspects of walking and

hiking and biking and tree climbing and

um or you know just being

outside breathing fresh air

is good for us physically

it promotes strong muscles

and healthy hearts and um

even the sun generates a

vitamin that we need

vitamin d that helps with

our bones and our teeth growth and

strengthens our immune systems,

helps us to fight off infections.

So there's a lot of physical
reasons why we want to be outside.

Being exposed to the sun can
help us regulate our sleep cycles.

And you know what it feels
like when you've been
outside and you've been
working hard or playing hard,
and then you come in and
you rest for a minute and
how good that deep sleep feels.
after you physically have
exerted yourself.

So lots of physical benefits.

Even mentally positive, a very,
very positive person,
improves our mood when we go outside,
just can help us to manage
anxiety and stress,
because we all have that.

And exposure to just natural
trees and water and
sunlight can actually lower

our cortisol levels,

which reduces stress and anxiety.

Being outside can be very

creative and inspiring.

And just immersing ourselves

in beauty can take us to a

new place with new ideas and inspiration.

And then finally, just socially.

you know,

spending time with others outside can,

can create, um, positive,

fun interactions and

strengthen our relationships.

Thinking about how fun it is

to sit around a campfire

and tell stories or roast a marshmallow.

Um,

all of those things are benefits of

being outside.

They, um, yeah,

whether it's physical or

mental or socially,

there's lots of good

reasons to go outside,

but do we do it enough?

Maybe.

Well, probably not.

Um,

I mean, I'm inspired,

I'm ready to head outside.

Now it's really cold here,

but there are benefits of

being outside during any time of the year,

right?

You don't need to wait for good weather.

Right, yeah, there's that old saying,

there's no inappropriate weather,

just inappropriate clothing.

Yeah.

If you are dressed for winter,

you're going to love being outside.

What kid doesn't love to put

on their mittens and boots

and hats and go out and go sledding?

Well,

maybe there are a few kids that don't

like to do that because

they're not used to doing that.

But if we can get outside and have

the rain jacket that sheds

water or boots that help us

keep our feet dry.

That's helpful,

but it still doesn't make it impossible.

I think we've become very

accustomed to being very

comfortable physically.

I'm even thinking that in the summer,

obviously it gets pretty

hot in North Carolina and

sometimes I have to push

myself more even in the

summer to go out than I do

in other seasons because

it's a little bit milder here.

for winter season, for instance.

But I think it's important

to push ourselves to that

little bit of discomfort

and to help our kids push
themselves towards a little
bit of discomfort.

It's good for us to be
exposed to different
elements and to experience
the world in all of those
different settings and seasons.

Oh, yeah.

And while we, as moms,
homeschooling,
we may need to train ourselves too.

And to set the example to go
out there with our kids.

And we may face a little bit
of resistance if it hasn't
been part of our normal
routine to get outside.

But we can train our
children and just overcome
the fussing about it if there is some.

And just get out there and show them.

It's fun to just run around and enjoy

the world outside.

And so they'll get there.

You need to bring them along

with patience and just

teach them to experience it.

Yeah.

Right.

Right.

Help cultivate that sense of wonder,

because if you are

interested in it and you

think something is unusual or interesting,

they're going to wonder,

what is it that she's so taken by?

Yeah.

So definitely it is a lot of modeling.

from a parent's standpoint

or a teacher's standpoint.

I'm often just showing the

kids how to be curious about things,

which sounds weird.

Kids are born curious,

but I think we very quickly

get into these habits of, I don't know,
of thinking we know it all
and that nothing is all that
interesting.

I don't know.

But it is modeling that
curiosity for our kids and
letting them know that it's
okay to be curious.

Yes.

Well,
and in our world with all the media
and it's fast paced type of
media and it trains our
brains to just kind of
create that type of environment.

But we can retrain ourselves
to learn to appreciate
something that isn't
constantly playing on
you know,
over and over or jumping to a new thing,
you know, a new video or whatever.

We can train ourselves and
our kids through that.
So I think that that's, you know,
something I think
instinctively as parents,
we know that's good for our
kids to get them out of that rut.

So what are some activities
that you would recommend
for kids to do when they're
out in nature?

You know,
We especially when we're training them,
we need to come prepared to this.
And so let's talk about that a little bit.

Well, yeah, I mean,
if you just start with playing outside,
away from, like you said,
away from virtual worlds
and into the outdoors where
things are concrete and physical,
where kids are hiking and
biking and tree climbing and digging,

all of those things are
important physical
activities for them to participate in.

And then that might lead to something else,
caring for a garden where you're having
them learn with you
alongside you about the
tasks of caring for plants,
digging and planting and
watering and getting your
hands dirty and playing
with worms and figuring out
what those pests are or
figuring out what the
beneficial insects are for your garden.

And the joy of being able to
harvest something,
to clip a flower that you had planted
you know, months ago,
a seed that you'd planted
or pulling a vegetable off of a vine that,
you know, you had part in caring for.

Talk about satisfaction.

I mean,

that's just so satisfying to see

all of those things develop

and then you get to enjoy

the product of that plant.

So, I mean, you know,

those are just some really

natural things to me that you can do,

even if you're not planting vegetables,

if you've got a few,

flower pots on a patio and

caring for something,

caring for flowers like that.

That's fine.

It doesn't,

you can go as deep as you want.

It doesn't have to be a full

blown farm in order for you to enjoy

being outside.

In fact, you don't even have to garden to,

to enjoy, um, nature study and being out,

um,

taking advantage of the greenways that

are around you, the parks and the,
whether they're city parks
or county or state or national parks, um,
getting outside to explore
what those things have to offer.

Those are all things you can
do to start engage your
kids with outdoor activities.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

I would just echo the,
the sentiment that you
don't have to make this a big production.

I mean, you may want to learn how,
if you don't know how to garden, you know,
there's lots of research
sources on the internet, but you know,
you start at a reasonable
pace and it might just be a
couple of pots on your patio.

It might be something indoors, but that,
you know, in the winter time too,
that you get started there, but yeah,

but when you're outside,
it doesn't have to be like
an overwhelming thing.

Just start at a, at a small,
at whatever you, you might be able to do.

But, um, I mean, I confess I have a,
a brown thumb.

I am terrible at growing things, but, um,

I would plant a small garden
with a couple of raised

beds with my kids because I

knew that that was a good

thing for them to see even

the part about where does

our food come from?

To show them on a small scale,

something like that,

but then to get them

involved and just see

what it takes to produce that food.

And there is joy, a lot of joy for me,

especially when something

actually grows and I can eat it.

So yeah, I encourage you,
if you've never done
something like that before,
just start on a small scale.

Right.

And really, you don't even have,
like I said,
you can walk down the
sidewalk and admire the
weeds that are growing out
between the cracks of the sidewalk.

That's literally how...
how you can start with
nature study is just by
studying what's already
there in front of you,
whether you've had anything
to do with it or not.

So true.

That's true.

Yeah.

We,
we can just start by observing what's

in nature when you,
when you actually spend a
little bit more than, you know,
time running to and from a car,
you start to notice, I mean,
the world is full of wonder.

You use that word earlier
and it is indeed even the weeds, you know,
that, that we don't really think
we like,
but there's something interesting
about them and we can start
to learn to notice those things.

So as far as getting out
there with some of these
activities and we, you know,
you talked about nature studies.

How would you be like, how would you,
advise parents to study it
like what does that mean
for kids to go out there
and study nature yeah and
and um here's here's what

I've really realized since
being leaving homeschooling
and now working now with
more public school teachers
um the beauty of
homeschooling is that you
have the option of going
outside and it really
breaks my heart sometimes
public school teachers and
in a more formal setting like that,
they have so many demands
placed on them that there
often isn't the time or
sometimes even the safe
physical space for them to
take their students outside.
So homeschoolers have this
huge advantage of being able to use
outdoors as a classroom.
And yes,
there are public schools that are
doing are using the outside

as a public classroom.

But to really be able to

slow down and savor what is

around you is a gift that is really

should not be overlooked as

an advantage for homeschooling.

And so being able to use all

of your senses of sight and

smell and touch and being

able to slow down and use

those unique ways of

experiencing the natural world,

that I think is one of the

big advantages that we have

as homeschool families.

So yeah,

getting outside can be as easy as

go grab a nature book.

It can be a chapter book or

it could be a picture book.

There's lots of great picture books.

As a jumping off point,

if you want to tie this to

your academics as a homeschooler,
just go outside and read a nature book.

Read a book and then explore
and see what you can find
around you that has to do
with that theme or that idea.

In fact,
we do have one program at the
Arboretum where we invite
middle schoolers to come
and just hang out with us in the garden.

And I read aloud to them.
And it's been a really popular program.

We read the Secret Garden.
There's nothing like reading
the Secret Garden while
you're sitting outside under it.

It was very, very fun.

But anyway,
so books are central to homeschooling.

So I often start with a book.

If you're headed on vacation to the beach,
grab a few books that are about the beach,

the shells, the sea life, whatever.

and make some connections that way.

Maybe by introducing some

things through a book first,

it makes it more

interesting to explore it

then and really see if you

can find what's been

discussed in that book.

So that's one place to start.

Another idea would be

another way to kind of

connect some academics to

spending the time outside

is through nature journaling.

It can be a great way to combine

know things like using words

and pictures and numbers to

collect information and

record your natural

observations and record

your questions and your

connections and maybe the

way you might explain things

by writing it down.

Nature journaling,

I think people

misunderstand it to some degree.

It's not about art.

It is about collecting your

observations and becoming

better at observing what is

really right in front of you.

Because it's interesting,

you think you know

what a flower looks like

because we have this picture in our mind,

right, of what a flower looks like.

But when you sit down and

you take a specific flower

and you try to recreate it

physically as a picture, you know,

you have to slow down and really wait.

What is the center of this

flower and how many petals

does it really have?

Does it just have a whole
bunch or is there a
specific number of petals?

What is the shape and the
color and the texture?

All of those things require
you to just really slow
down and use really look
and see what's in front of you.

And when you begin to do that,
you begin to

Like I said,
you can make connections that
you might not have made before.

I like to start with three
phrases when I'm getting
people to start journaling.

By the way, journaling,
it doesn't require a lot of fancy tools.

It can be a single piece of
paper and a pencil.

You can have a journal,
you could have a book that

you use repeatedly,
but you can also make it
more like a scrapbook where
you're capturing things and
then cutting it out and
putting it in your book
later if you want.

There's no right or wrong
way to do nature journaling
in terms of what you
include or don't include,
it's really up to you.

But unlined paper, a pencil, maybe a pen,
Some people will choose to
use color pencils or
watercolors to add that information in.

Other things that would be
fun to have but you don't
have to have are a ruler to
measure things,
or a magnifying glass to be
able to see things more closely,
or a calculator to see

things more far away.

All of those things are helpful,

but seriously,

you can start as simply as

a piece of paper and a pencil.

And all ages can participate

in nature journaling.

It's a fun activity that is

good from the minute you

can hold a pencil.

Or even you could narrate

things that you see to mom.

If you're not quite writing yet,

that's fine.

Narrate.

Tell her what you see.

And she can jot down those

observations in a book for you.

But I like to start with

these three phrases.

Back to that.

The first one is just to think,

what do I notice?

What is it that I'm seeing?

And try to be specific about

what am I seeing with my eyes,

really seeing, not what do I think I see,

but what do I literally see?

And then what do I hear and

how does it feel?

What do I observe?

So what is it you are noticing?

Then get curious and say, I wonder,

I wonder what,

like what questions do you have?

Where did this come from?

Or why is it this way?

Or when or how?

Lots of questions.

What is it that you don't

know about this object or this setting?

And then to make connections,

think of the phrase, it reminds me of,

and then fill in the blank.

Connect what you're seeing

with things you already know.

And these are ways to capture.

These are phrases that help

me think about how to

capture new information or

my own observations about

what's right in front of me.

So those are kind of like the very,

very basics of nature

journaling and being good

at observing what's really

in front of you.

I absolutely love that.

Just those three questions

are such a great tool for

us to springboard off of,

because if you didn't grow

up doing this yourself as

your mom now trying to

model this for your kids, you may not.

really even feel equipped

yourself to be able to go

out there and know what to do.

Like just look at a flower.

Okay.

But, um,

but you actually have given some

tools and I love how you

point out that this is for all ages,

you know, um, as moms and dads who are,

and just going out together as a family,

um,

that no one needs to be

excluded from this.

And I would also just say for our audience,

this is for all abilities too.

The outdoors is important

for all our children,

regardless of what their

learning differences might be.

So I think we have to be

creative sometimes if we

have a child that learns differently,

we can be creative about how to do this,

but

it's important for all our

children to go out there

and feel things like you mentioned,
like concrete parts of the
world around us.

And so I would just,
as a mom to a child with Down syndrome,
you know, writing took a very long time.

And drawing wasn't, I mean,
when she would draw things,
It didn't look like any kind
of great work of art,
but you've already mentioned that.

There's no pressure about that.

The drawing is a great way,
however good or poor of an
artist your child may be.

They're using another part
of their brain to capture
what they're seeing and
recreate it in a way that
makes sense to them.

And so let them try to do
that if they're able.

I do like that you mentioned

like even a child can

dictate to a parent what

they're noticing.

If they're verbal, they can do that.

You can ask questions to get

all their senses involved

and let them dictate to you.

I mean,

we used to often go out in the

beginning of different

seasons and take nature

walks and have a camera.

where we would take pictures

of things that we were

seeing and then come back to the house.

And, you know,

I actually printed them out

and we made scrapbooks with them.

And then, you know,

depending on your child's ability,

they can write things about

the pictures that we've

included in the scrapbook

or look up more information.

Like you said,

bring in that connection point.

from outdoors,

something new they saw to

their own lives.

So you could also use video,

let your child explore some

part of nature and video

that on your phone and then

use that and look at it

again to reinforce what

you've been doing and

learning from your time

outside in nature.

So

I think the sky's the limit.

We don't need to say, oh,

my child can't do that

because there's something,

some way to interact with it.

Yes.

And, you know,

cultivating that sense of
wonder and appreciation for
the natural world.

It's, you know,
what we're hoping that leads to.

Not only is it a benefit, you know,
we talked about all the
benefits it is to us,
but we also hope that we're
leading kids to wanting to
continue to care for and protect their
what God has given us and to
steward the earth well and
if we don't understand how
it works or why um the
importance of natural of
natural items and and in
just the environment then
we're not going to care for
it as well or love it as
well you have to you know
we love things that we know
and if you don't know

the environment,
if you don't know what's
out there around you,
then you're not probably
going to care about it as much.

And so that's also what
we're trying to build that
appreciation among
ourselves and our children
so that they'll want to
care for the earth.

Right.

And I would say to think
outside the box a little bit,
just when we go out in nature, that
it may not be just about, you know, we,
we may think like nature
might be the trees or the
flowers or something like that.

Sometimes we just need to go
out there and lay on the
grass and look at the
clouds in the sky or just sit.

If you're near a beach sometime, just,
you know,

I like how you brought in this
idea about even when you go
on vacation and take
advantage of those new
environments to see what's
different there.

And, um,

And I'm a big book lover, too.

So I would have had shelves
full of those kinds of
books that would be about
different animals.

And the zoo is another place
to go and observe nature,
a different part of nature.

So I mean, the sky is the limit.

So anyways, well, let's just talk about,
you talked about some
questions to ask yourself
as you're observing nature.

And well, let's back up a minute.

I can just hear,
because I would have been
one of these parents that's saying,
oh my word,
I have so many things to do on
my own school day.

Right.

where would I find the time
to go sit and look at the clouds,
you know,
to sit for any extended period
of time and, you know, observe or,
or to dig around in the dirt,
just like it was time for that.

So let's talk about like, how,
how can we in reality make
this actually happen?

Well, again,

I think if you think that
these benefits are
important for your student
and for nature itself,
just that we be observant

that you'll find a way to schedule.

I think we schedule what we
think is a priority.

And so it's a bit of a
reordering of thinking, okay,

There are some natural ways
you can weave these into
your already your routine,
but sometimes maybe you
need to just schedule.

Make sure that one day a
month you're visiting
something that's outdoor
related or I mean,
People will approach it in various ways,
just weaving it in with the day-to-day.

I mean,
it could be as simple as just
driving to co-op with your
windows down in the car.

I don't know.

Really feel the temperature.

I don't know.

To really think about what
the weather's like outside.

I don't know.

Or you could actually schedule...
participating in some type
of outdoor activity.

As an educator at a public garden,
that's one of our major jobs.

Not because we are forced to,
but we love to share what
we have available at the
garden and we want people
to come and visit.

It doesn't do us any good to
create these beautiful
collections of plants if
there aren't people there
to see them and to learn about them.

So half of our mission is to
educate people about these
plant collections that we have.

And there are plenty of
other educators like that

in museums and zoos and
parks and botanical gardens
like ours that they have
the heart of a teacher.

They want
to reach out and share their
knowledge with you.

So beginning to access that,
lots of places now are
offering homeschool days,
but that's not the only day
that you can go and visit
these locations.

So making sure that you are with,
and go with friends.

That's what I was just thinking too.

There's nothing like a great
field trip with friends, right?
finding a place to go together, again,
it's going to improve
social skills and it's just
fun and learning something
together so that it makes

maybe it less of a burden

and more of a joy for you

to get your kids outside.

Yeah, I think that the priority,

we do have to set

priorities and priorities

mean that we make choices.

We may leave one thing behind to

choose another that we think is better.

So, and those choices are hard,

but I would encourage us to, you know,

everyone does need this.

There are so many great

benefits of spending time

outdoors that I think we can, you know,

just kids will,

you're going to see

benefits in your academics

and things like that as we go forward.

But

The other thing you

mentioned is friends going with someone.

And that always can make something new,

more attractive.

But I would also say, as I think about,
you know, when we go with friends,
find some friends who are
sort of like minded.

Yes.

About what you're trying to
do out in nature that you
are trying to teach your
children to slow down.
and appreciate the world and to observe.

So maybe not a whole horde of like,
you know,

I'm envisioning some of my co-op
field trips where, you know,
a horde of boys went, you know,
just all out.

And I've noticed that they
may not take the time to just like,
as they're just kind of in
their own natural state,
they're gonna just kind of
race from one thing to

another a lot of times.

But-

We can teach them and maybe
take a smaller group or
something like that that
fosters a little bit slower pace.

And the appreciation, right.

We work with large and small
groups of kids at the garden,
and always we are trying to
do things in a hands-on way too.

So if there is some activity
you can do together to kind
of help steer that energy,
toward exploration,
that's helpful as well.

But I do agree with you.

You do have to find some
like minded friends and
just and be on the same
page with other moms or
dads that are about what
you're trying to accomplish that day.

And and really, there's room for, you know,
we're taking in information
in lots of different ways
and there's room for
climbing trees,
and there's room for laying
quietly and staring at clouds.

Right,
because even if you're climbing the trees,
there's something to observe up there.

Exactly.

About the tree or about the
leaves or whatever.

Let me make it clear that...

If you're going to a botanical garden,
you're probably not going
to be climbing trees.

You do want to behave
appropriately in the
settings that you are in.

So anyway, just a little aside there.

Well, and also taking time to discuss.

Amongst yourselves,

like after you've spent
your time doing whatever,
whether it's hands on or
just sitting and observing
and noticing and and maybe
asking these three
questions that you you
talked about that you can
share with your friends.

What did you see?

What was exciting about that to you?

Uh, and, and they're going to start like,
one's going to notice one kind of thing,
another will notice something else,
but when they start sharing it, you know,
then everything blossoms for them.

So that's the cool thing
about having a couple
people going out together, you know,
with a friend or something
and the peers begin to
support one another to
enjoy these activities.

Right.

Exactly.

Well,

we've talked a lot about observations,

you know, that we're making observations.

And how does, like,

these activities improve

our ability to observe?

And then what benefits does that bring us,

you know, in other areas of life?

Right, yeah.

You know, most of our, well,

let me back up.

I read an article recently

about medical students who were,

they began to incorporate nature study

into the curriculum at medical school.

And I'm like, okay, what is that about?

And it was because they

realized that nature study

was a great way for these

students to really hone

their observation skills,

which is critical when you
are diagnosing somebody
related to any kind of
disease or physical problem
that they have.

And really, when you think about it,
observation is a critical
skill for all of us to have
to gather accurate information,
to not just get just not
repeat what we think is true,
but to really see what is
accurate and to understand
an object or a situation
better so that you can
provide accurate information.

Then based on that,
you can improve your decision-making.

You can make an informed
choice based on that
accurate information.

We all are making various decisions,
but it can also help you

with your problem-solving
to anticipate things that
might be coming your way
and to proactively address
a problem before it becomes
a bigger problem.

Just in general,
better observation will
lead to better
communication and effective
communication.

And who doesn't want that?

I mean, we,
it just enhances our life in so
many different ways.

And those skills are important,
not just for students, but for,
for all of us professionals for, for,
you know, if you're,
if you're in any type of relationship,
don't you want to be able
to communicate better with
those that you are in relationship with?

So yeah,

it can strengthen our
relationships with each
other because we are
communicating better.

And even really concrete
things like it can increase our awareness,
our safety awareness.

Like if you smell something
that smells like fire
burning or you smell,
you can identify a hazard
or something dangerous to
protect yourself or get
away from something.

There's so many different
ways that being a good
observer can improve your life.
and help you grow as a person.

Whether you're learning on
your own or you're learning
from your peers,
there's always room for

improvement and change and
being able to understand
yourself and others through
your observations can be huge and it can,
and can make life much more
interesting and meaningful
and productive and pleasant.

So, you know,
there is always room for
improvement for all of us
to increase our skill of
observation so that we can
be more attuned to what's, um,
what's going on around us
and how to interact with our environment.

So, yeah,
I don't think there's anybody
that wouldn't benefit from improving,
improving skill in that area.

And so this is just one fun way to do that,
you know,
to slow down and really be more
observant.

Well, that's, I mean,
that's really a rich
observation about observing
skills because, you know, think about,
how often we want our children to,
you know,
observe well in the academic world,
for instance, you know,
when they read a passage,
we want them to comprehend it.

And so what you're training
them to do with these very
concrete things, they now can transfer to,
you know, words on a page and
taking in the details of words on a page.

And I know, you know,
I'm not studying in a school setting,
but I, for instance, study my Bible.
And when I can slow down and
apply these observation skills,
I all of a sudden will see new meanings,
like seeing words that I
missed before or something

about the setting or
something about the
attitude of a person that's
conveyed through the words that
that I didn't notice before.

And so the same is true for
our kids when they're
reading or when they're doing their math,
whatever,
whatever area of math you're studying.

Um, there's so much that the, I, the, uh,
ability to notice the
details will really serve
them in the academic setting as well.

Um,

I would say it's going to serve our
kids in the spiritual
setting to notice what God is, uh,
who he is, his nature, um,

Of course,

the Bible says that the world
that God created declares his glory.

So that's another thing you

can add into your
observation and discussion.

Well,

how does what you're seeing show
something about God?

So these are all ways to just form that.

not just skills,

but attitudes and just

character even in your

children from a very early age.

And you've mentioned it's for all ages.

So we can start as toddlers

and up through high school

and then lifelong learning.

We can continue that ourselves.

And moms, I think when

when we start to do this

type of activity with our kids,

we're going to really feel

the benefits ourselves.

You know, we get stressed.

I get stressed anyways.

Really?

Every now and then.

But what is it when you can

just go out and, you know,

inhale the air and pause?

That's going to do...

good for your own spirit, your own soul.

And your mental framework is

going to change because

you've been out there.

I just, I just am so jazzed about what,

what all we can do outside.

And I hope that our

listeners are getting the

sense of that as well.

So we've talked about some

different places that we can go.

You know, we have,

Many of us might have even a backyard,

but some don't.

Some live in an apartment or

something like that without that.

But you work in a public garden,

so there are public resources for us.

And Todd,

I think we can talk a little bit

about where can we go in this world?

It may seem like an obvious question,

but there's probably a lot

of hidden gems out

like the Arboretum at NC

State or in other people's communities.

So let's talk about how

these public spaces are a

great resource for us as homeschoolers.

Yeah, I have to be honest.

I did not visit our own

Arboretum where I work now

in Raleigh until my middle child, my son,

was getting ready to graduate.

And somebody said, oh,

let's take graduation

pictures down at the Arboretum.

I'm like, the what?

And I feel kind of dumb now

because this was a hidden gem,

like you said, a resource,

and I never even knew it existed.

So you might have to do some digging.

We are connected to NC State University.

We are a public garden,

but we are also a living

laboratory for the species.

students at nc state and um

so there's lots of

different audiences that

we're we're reaching as a

as a public garden

associated with the

university so if you have a

large university I would

encourage you near you

I would encourage you to

look to see if they have

something similar.

Many of the state

universities are doing and

it's primarily because of the research,

the plant research that's

going on and connected with

that with a lot of state
universities would be the
extension service.

And those are the folks that
operate things like the four H programs.
and other community-based educational,
the extension service is
supposed to be the bridge
between a state university
and what it's being funded
to investigate and learn
about and a bridge to the community.

So there are a lot of
opportunities through your
state extension service if
you have a state university.

And I think most states do, I don't know.

Sorry, I'm not up on all of that.

I believe they do.

I've lived in a number of
different states and you
look up the Agricultural
Extension Office on the Internet,

you're going to find something.

A wealth of information.

Again, their whole role is to educate,

to take what's happening in

this scientific community

and bridge it and provide

that information to the

community at large.

So those are good places to start.

I think I mentioned earlier,

you've got lots of parks

that you can explore that

are on the city level, the county level,

the state level, and the national levels.

It's always great to go to a national park,

but you don't have to to

find some really good programming

at the local level.

And the cool thing about

that is you are really

going to dive deeper into

what is important and

what's happening around in

your environment right where you live,
which I think is really important.

But then, like I said,
like when you go on
vacation and you go to a
totally different type of area,
seeking out those areas
in learning more about their
environment and their issues,
they may be very different
from the ones that you are
dealing with around where
you where you live.

So you've got all of those.

And there's you know,

I I just can't imagine that
there isn't a city park
close to somebody somewhere
that that you can get
outside and enjoy some
fresh air and and sunshine museums.

Water parks,
any of those kinds of places

are going to have lots of
programming available to you.

Again,

that's their job that they want to
invite you to come in and
learn more about what they
know with exhibits and not
just stagnant exhibits,
but also hands-on kinds of
activities and programming too.

I think there's a real
movement towards that.

Again,

you can find a lot of this virtually.

You can find a lot of virtual field trips,
but I would always choose a
regular field trip,
a real physical field trip
over a virtual one.

But if you're in a position
where you want to gather
information and you want to
learn about a specific

topic and there is
something virtual available,
I guess it's better than nothing,
but I would always opt for
the in-person experience
before a virtual one.

Oh, that's a,
that's a great point because
the internet is a wonderful tool,
but it's not concrete until
we go out and put our hands on something.

And there's,
there's really something to be
said for that when we're
learning the hands-on approach.

I would just add,
you mentioned four H and as
a beneficiary of four H myself, you know,
I spent years doing
for each activities.

We won't take my lack of
ability to grow things
It wasn't their fault.

But those things are great.

And I would say this as well.

There are some organizations
that you might have to pay
a membership fee for.

And look at those that have
the ones that the fees or
the membership where you
can go to different places.
that have a number of
institutions as part of that one fee.

So you get the most economy
for your dollars that you do spend.

And I would also say in your communities,
consider that our libraries
are great sources of learning.

And you can talk to your
librarian about what
what you would like to see, uh, being, uh,
in the, put in their programming.

So you can talk about, uh, you know,
wanting to do more nature
study type things through

their programming.

Um,

also the parks around you may not offer
any kind of program to help you, um,
engage with that type of education.

But if you ask, they're usually willing to,
um, accommodate their, their,
happy.

Like you said,
they're so happy because
you're helping fulfill their desires.

They're a willing audience
that wants to learn.

So I would suggest that you
think about what you might
like to learn more about
and engage with those
resources in your community.

But if there aren't any
resources like that,
go out and just do this yourself.

Don't let that stop you.

You don't have to be part of

a formal program to really
take advantage of the few
things that we've talked about today.

Yes,

I was going to mention the American

Public Gardens Association

is a professional

organization of botanical

gardens across the United States,

and they do have a

reciprocal membership agreement.

For instance, our garden is not ticketed.

You can come in free.

But we do need the support

of our community.

And so one of the benefits

when you join our

membership is that

reciprocal membership in

other public gardens.

Many public gardens do need to ticket.

In other words,

they charge you to come in

through their gates.

um because of their their

need for funding um

everybody's you know

different botanical gardens

will work different ways

but that reciprocal

membership is worth its

weight in gold um because

you can visit so many more

locations because you're a

member of a single of your

garden in your own location

um and there yeah there's

more information available

about that probably through

all of the gardens and

their membership um support

things well um with

aquariums and zoos I think

oh yeah up similar to those

um kind of reciprocal

memberships well our uh

we're kind of winding down
on on the time that we have
to talk today is there
anything else you want to
just add in closing for um
for us to, you know, get out there.

This may be a total
different rabbit trail and
I don't want to open a can of worms,
but I do want to share a
personal observation
experience from my
homeschooling that is kind
of like the elephant in the room,
maybe a little bit.

And that is sometimes I was
very afraid to take my kids
to specifically science-based schools.
places because I was afraid
of what they would teach about origins.
I'm a creationist,
but I work at a public
university that fully

embraces the theory of evolution.

I wish now that I had not

been so fearful about,

I consider that I was

fearful about taking my

kids to some places because

I was afraid of what would

be presented and taught.

in reality they're going to

be exposed to all of those

things as adults anyway and

so I do think it's an

important opportunity for

you to to use it as a

jumping off point to talk

about the what you do

believe and the bottom line

is when I'm teaching at the

garden there are so many different um

things that we can agree

about that's observable

science that is not related

to origins and I felt like

I shortchanged my kids a
little bit by just
automatically assuming that
they weren't going to teach
from a perspective that I
would approve of and instead
make sure that I would go
and take advantage of what
was there and was
observable science and then
address those issues
individually as they may or
may not have come up does
that make sense yeah yeah
we know there are some
obviously that we can agree
on and that that are um
You know, we all have different, again,
we all make different
observations about and make
connections about why
things may or may not be
the way they are or where they came from.

But that's all part of the discussion, too,
and really solidifying what
you believe and helping
your kids to navigate all
of those questions.

So I guess that's just from
personal experience.

I wish I hadn't have been so
hesitant about some of the
visiting some of the places
that I think they would
have benefited from.

Yeah.

So maybe to hold on to that
a little bit more loosely.

I don't know.

But again,
just using it as an opportunity
to discuss about discuss with your family,
then your perspectives and
what why you may or may not
think differently than the
prevalent professional

position or position.

Right.

We obviously need to use a
lot of discernment about
where we go and carefully consider,
but I appreciate you
sharing your hindsight,
the wisdom you have in hindsight,
because as you mentioned,
our children will see and
hear all kinds of different worldviews,
and we're trying to equip
them to understand what's
what is out there and also
to cling to the truth that, you know,
and the values and things that we have,
you know, we know to be true.

And so, you know, I just, I would,
you know,
think about what Joy is sharing
here and pray about where
you should go with your children and
who you should expose them

to and at what ages and things like that.

There's a lot of discernment

we need as parents.

So thank you for sharing not

only that insight,

but all the expertise that

you have come to have

through homeschooling and

through your education

experience here at the Arboretum.

And I think that our

homeschool audience is

going to be inspired to go

outdoors and explore

the wonder that we find in God's creation.

I also want to thank you, our audience,

so much for tuning in to

today's episode of

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Thank you again, Joy,

and we'll see you all next

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