



**Get Outdoors Florida!** is a coalition promoting outdoor experiences to help Floridians have healthier lifestyles and develop an appreciation for our abundant natural resources.

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## Family Nature Date: Pictures of Pitcher Plants

By Sandra Friend

My 7-year-old niece Amber and I went on a walk exploring the forests around her home. She poked and prodded at fallen trees, gleeful when insects emerged from the crumbling wood, and peered down into tubular armadillo dens.

“This used to be a farm,” I said, having dug up bottles on the property when I was a teenager. “The laurel oaks only live about 70 years, so since they’re falling down this was likely the farmer’s field before that. But look at this grass.” She looked down and saw the spiky tufts of wiregrass topping a small mound. “Where you see wiregrass, longleaf pines used to grow.” She grinned. “So this used to be a pine forest!” We found two ancient pines remaining to support our theory.

When you take your family out on a hike, you’re getting in touch with your state—the real Florida, the Florida that stood here long before the first settlers arrived, a living laboratory. Florida hosts more than 80 different plant communities, and Tallahassee has a bounty of this biological diversity in our backyard, from steep bluff forests to longleaf pine savannas, titi swamps, vast wet savannas, and coastal estuaries.

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While the statewide Florida Trail runs more than 1,400 miles between Pensacola and the edge of the Everglades, more than 100 miles of our National Scenic Trail surrounds Tallahassee, offering a variety of interesting and unusual habitats to explore.

This time of year, carnivorous pitcher plants are especially colorful throughout the Apalachicola National Forest, with gorgeous rubbery yellow and red blooms. The best places to find them along the Florida Trail are in the western part of the forest, walking west along the orange blazes towards Memery Island from Camel Lake Recreation Area and along the ditches where the trail crosses SR 65, 13.7 miles south of Hosford at Vilas.

Yes, you’ll get your feet wet – pitcher plants grow in bogs – but why not encourage your kids to stomp through mud puddles as a family? You’ll have more fun that way.

Take a digital camera along, take turns taking pictures of the plants, and go home and spend time with your children looking them up in field guides like the *Audubon Guide to Florida and Florida Wildflowers in Their Natural Communities*. Learning together, you can create a family scrapbook of botanical photos and fun observations about the natural communities you visit.



Sandra Friend is the author of *Along the Florida Trail*, *The Florida Trail: The Official Guide*, and six other books on hiking in Florida. For more information about the Florida Trail, visit [www.floridatrail.org](http://www.floridatrail.org).