



Ages: 2-5 yrs.

Time Required: 10-20 min

## Discovery Time: Tracks!

*Discover who your neighbors are and learn about animal tracks! (Ages: 2+)*

### Materials

- Rake
- Sand
- Shovel
- Bait (bird seed, fruits, vegetables, etc.)

### Try this!

**Step 1:** Rake away leaves and sticks from a small area.

**Step 2:** Bring in some soft sand or soil and spread it out making it smooth and level.

**Step 3:** Add bait, like bird seeds.

**Step 4:** Watch and see what comes to leave tracks! Be patient, it may take a day or two.

**Step 5:** Try checking after a rainstorm when the ground is soft and wet.



### What's going on?

Animals are constantly on the move and when we go out to explore, we aren't always lucky enough to see them but we can look for what animals leave behind, like tracks. Animal tracks are generally easiest to find in mud, soft garden soil, sand and snow. When you find a track, you can measure the width and length of the prints. You can also measure the stride width (length between prints) and the straddle (width between prints), this can give you an idea of how quickly the animal was moving. Count how many toes you see; this can help you group the types of tracks you are seeing into different kinds of animals. You can also measure the depth to compare tracks left in the same substrate at the same time, since the heavier the animal, the deeper the print it will leave.

Tracks can tell us where an animal is going and what type of animal left the print, but footprint tracks aren't all animals leave behind. Animals with tails often leave tracks of their tails dragging on the floor, and birds can also leave tracks of their wings as they try to take off in flight or land on the ground. Animals can also leave behind fur, feathers and even scat (animal poop). Scat can tell us what animals are eating. Sometimes animal scat can even fossilize into coprolites

and tell us what animals ate millions of years ago. Feathers, fur, scats and tracks can tell us who lives in the neighborhood.

### Extension Activity

Try moving the location of the bait around your yard or changing the bait to see if you are more successful in one place vs another, or by using bait A vs bait B, and count how many tracks you have and how many different types over the same number of days to compare.

### Additional Resources

You can visit <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/educators/resource/discovery-time-tracks/> to learn more about tracks and see a step-by-step guide on how to make this activity! You can also check out other cool activities and tips on how to explore the outdoors with toddlers.

#### **Supporting Stories:**

*Wild Tracks! A Guide to Nature's Footprints* by Jim Arnosky

*Whose Poop Is THAT?* by Darrin Lunde