

## How To Preserve Nature While Hiking

Hiking is a relaxing and fun way to stay healthy and to enjoy the great outdoors. However, when you head out on the trail, you have the responsibility to do what you can to preserve nature while hiking. Here are a few of the best ways to preserve nature while hiking:

- Do not stray from the trail. While stepping slightly off the trail may seem harmless, it is not. When you step off the path, you are crushing flora and damaging plants. Other hikers will follow suit, and before you know it, the trail is widened and there will be washouts [and erosion](#).
- Do not litter. If you have trash, be sure to carry it with you to dispose of at the end of the hike. If you come across trash that others left behind, do the right thing, and take it with you to dispose of properly.
- Carry a reusable water bottle. It is important to take along water to stay hydrated. Millions of plastic water bottles make their way to landfills and to the ocean every year. A high-quality reusable water bottle can serve you well for years to come.
- Mix up your own snacks. Buy local ingredients to make trail mix or granola. This will save money, reduce waste, and reduce packaging while providing a healthier energy boost. Carry your snacks in reusable plastic containers.
- Choose your hiking gear and clothing wisely. When you are shopping for hiking gear and clothing, do your research. Buy [environmentally-friendly brands](#) that are high-quality and that are made without harming the environment.
- When planning a hike, carpool if it is a considerable distance. If it is nearby, you are cutting down on travel time, reducing fuel use, and reducing your carbon footprint.
- Do not pick flowers, dig up plants, take rocks or shells, take limbs or feathers, or remove anything. Leave everything as you found it and take only memories and photographs.
- Do not approach wildlife. Regardless of whether it is a small creature such as a squirrel or a larger animal like a deer, you are [visiting their home](#). Keep your distance.
- Wash yourself, your clothing, and your gear after every hike. You can easily transfer seeds, insects, disease, and fungi from one location to another and cause serious damage. Many plant diseases and threats to animals such as the white-nose syndrome that endangers bats, are easily spread on shoes or clothing.
- If you must take a bathroom break, be sure to dig a cat hole several hundred feet away from any natural water sources and then cover it when you are finished.
- After your hike, refuel yourself locally by choosing a locally owned restaurant that serves locally grown food and that believes in sustainable practices.

If you enjoy hiking, do your part to protect the habitat of animals and to leave the great outdoors in its natural beauty and enjoyable for future visitors. With the right care and attention, we can work together to preserve nature while we enjoy the trails.

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