

# Nature Notes

August 29, 2019

A weekly round-up of useful information as you and your students explore the natural wonders around Nolan Catholic High School.

## Question of the Week:

What is that large tree in the center of the Activity Courtyard?



## Answer:

That's a pecan tree, and you can see the pecans starting to form (the small bright green pods). Technically, a pecan is a drupe, not a true nut. Drupes have a fleshy outer-covering around a hardened shell that encapsulates the seed. Examples of drupes include almonds, walnuts, peaches, plums and olives. True nuts, like hazelnuts, chestnuts, and acorns, form by the hardening of the flower's ovary wall.

The word "pecan" comes from a Native American word meaning "any nut requiring a stone to crack." Pecans are the only native nut-producing plant in the United States, and the US is responsible for 80% of the world's pecans. Pecan trees can live and bear fruit for over 300 years.

<http://justfunfacts.com/interesting-facts-about-pecans/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2016/nov/10/hips-haws-and-drupes-when-is-a-nut-not-a-nut>

## Activity Suggestion

Mr. O'Connor had a wonderful suggestion for utilizing the courtyards on block days. After formal instruction, he takes his students into the courtyard for a 10-15 minute break. During that time, they can reflect, wander, or discuss the lesson among themselves. Then they return to the classroom for a transition to Socratic-style discussion of the material



they covered earlier. Today, he and his students found a cicada emerging from its shell.

## Campus Spotlight- Oak-Leaf Hydrangea

In-service seems like such a long time ago, doesn't it? If you attended my presentation on Outdoor Learning, you may remember a tree out by the greenhouse, which was in fact two trees growing together and making it hard to identify accurately.

We have a similarly unusual plant in Mary's courtyard, on the short side closest to the front office. Look closely, and you'll find a small shrub with leaves that look like they should be on a towering oak tree. That plant is called, appropriately, an Oak-leaf hydrangea, and we should keep a close eye on it over the next couple of months. Oak-leaf hydrangea leaves turn gorgeous shades of red and purple in the fall. And next May, we can look forward to clusters of lovely white flowers.



***The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God."***

## *Pope Francis, Laudato Si'*

### **Courtyard Adventures**

We had at least eleven teachers out in the courtyards this week, probably more. So exciting!! Thank you so much for your patience as we work through scheduling. If you have thoughts on how we can improve the courtyards, or comments about how the class use is affecting your time in the classrooms along the courtyards, please let me know.

Also, remind your students that they can use the courtyards during passing periods.

Remember, I'm available to help with activities and lesson plans if you want to get your students outside but don't know where to start. Email or come by my office anytime.

### **Where to find Emily next week**

On campus:  
Monday-holiday!  
Tuesday 8-2  
Wednesday 8-3:30  
Thursday 8-4

[ebreclaw@nchstx.org](mailto:ebreclaw@nchstx.org)

### **Outdoor Learning Headquarters**

In the office immediately to the left of the teacher boxes in room D22.

Please come by anytime! Let's chat about how we can work outdoor learning into your lesson plans!

Personal cell: 682-438-2393