

Nature Connection Practices



NATURE CONNECTION PRACTICES

Nature connectedness is about our subjective sense of relationship with nature—how we think about, feel towards, and experience the more-than-human world. Psychological connection with nature is different from physical contact with nature—it is about being with nature, rather than simply spending time in nature. There is a solid body of research evidence to show that higher levels of nature connectedness are associated with increased happiness and vitality, greater satisfaction with life and increased pro-nature intentions and behaviour.

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Developing our sense of nature connectedness involves growing a new relationship with nature. Creating a lasting sense of nature connectedness doesn't require spending a lot of time in nature or going on epic hikes out in the wilderness. The key is to change how we experience nature in our ordinary everyday lives. All we need to do is notice and appreciate the nature around us.

While brief moments of engagement with nature can boost our wellbeing, for enduring change and lasting wellbeing benefits, we need to develop nature connection practices. These are repeated ways of engaging with nature that become part of our everyday lives and routines.

Research has identified five pathways to nature connectedness ways of engaging with nature that help improve our relationship with the natural world. Activities that involve sensory engagement with nature, appreciation of nature's beauty, recognition of how nature makes us feel, celebrating what nature means to us, and caring for nature all help us to feel closer to the rest of the natural world.

Based on the latest research on human-nature relationships, the Nature Connectedness Research Group at University of Derby have put together a set of five nature connection practices to help activate the pathways to nature connectedness. Each one takes just a few minutes a day and can be done alongside your ordinary daily activities. You may choose to practice each one for a week, or do a different one each day, or simply pick one that most appeals to you.

It is a good idea to create a journal or scrapbook or online space to record and reflect on your practice and experiences of it. The benefits will be amplified if you share your experiences, thoughts, and creations with others.

Notice three good things in nature

Every day for five days, aim to notice three good things in nature.

Practice tuning into nature, whether in a nature-rich green space, a view outside a window, or in an urban setting. You might notice small details of nature or appreciate a grand view. Pay attention to what you see, smell, feel or hear in nature, and the thoughts and feelings nature inspires. Notice nature's beauty, and identify aspects of nature that bring feelings of joy, calm, wonder, awe or carry special meanings for you.

This might be the beauty of a robin's song; the calming effect of hearing wind in the trees; the smell of your favourite plant; or a sense of wonder at the diversity of the natural world.

Each day, record your three good things in nature. You can write them down, share them with someone, take photos of them, or just keep a mental note.

EVIDENCE

Research has shown that noticing three good things in nature every day for five days brings sustained increases in wellbeing and nature connectedness, and clinically significant improvements in mental health ([Keenan et al., 2021](#); [McEwan et al., 2019](#); [Richardson & Sheffield, 2017](#)).



Enjoy a sit-spot

Find a place in nature where you can sit or rest every day, whether in a garden, park, wild place, or somewhere with a view to the outside. Choose somewhere you can be comfortable and undisturbed.

Sit in this space for ten minutes every day for five days and really get to know the nature around you. Explore the space with all senses – what can you see, hear, feel and smell close to you and far away? Notice and examine any leaves, bark, plants, soil, or moss near you, or watch the sky and any clouds, birds, and insects that cross it.

Note how the space changes each day, and how you feel during and after the practice. You could draw or write about your spot and experience each day, or take a daily photo.

EVIDENCE

Sit spots encourage sensory engagement with nature, which increases nature connectedness and supports wellbeing ([Cervinka et al., 2020](#); [Lim et al., 2020](#); [Lumber et al., 2017](#); [McEwan et al., 2021](#); [Richardson et al., 2021](#)). The practice helps develop skills in actively noticing nature, paying attention to its detail, beauty, meaning and how it makes us feel – skills that are more important for increasing nature connectedness than simply spending time in nature ([Richardson et al., 2021](#)).



Explore nature in arts and culture

Spend ten minutes each day for five days exploring nature through arts and culture.

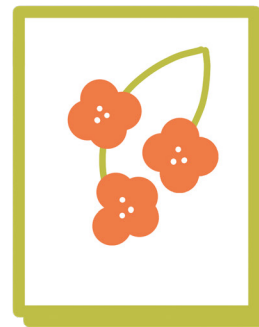
For this activity you can make your own creations, or you can explore other's creations. You might take photos, paint pictures, write a song, prose or poetry, create a collage, or nature-inspired embroidery. Or you could curate your own nature gallery, playlist or collection of poems and quotes - seek and collect examples of artwork, music, or writing that capture nature's beauty, wonder, and how it makes you feel.

Alternatively, you may wish to research or reflect on cultural beliefs and practices around nature – how does your culture relate to, celebrate, or make sense of the natural world? You could explore folktales, traditional nature practices, or nature symbolism.

Share your creations and discoveries with others.

EVIDENCE

This activity helps activate the meaning, emotion, and beauty pathways to nature connectedness ([Lumber et al., 2017](#)). Research has found that engaging with the meaning of nature through art and creative activities helps people feel closer to nature (e.g., [Arbuthnott & Sutter, 2019](#); [Oak Project, 2021](#); [Walshe et al., 2022](#)).



Take awe walks

This activity involves tuning into nature while walking, by gently directing your attention to it as if you are seeing it for the first time. You could do this with a dedicated ten-minute walk outside, or you could make use of your regular walking during your commute, school run, shop visit, or dog walk.

Tap into your sense of wonder and try to notice something new on each walk. Awe can be found almost anywhere in nature. Notice plants, whether you are surrounded by them in a park, countryside, or suburban gardens, or you need to hunt for them in pavement cracks. Tune into birdsong, watch the movements of bees and butterflies, and explore the colours of nature. Look for beauty and let yourself be amazed and absorbed by what you see and hear. You could try barefoot walking and focus on the feel of the ground beneath you. Notice the difference in how you feel when you focus on nature.

EVIDENCE

'Awe walks' have been found to increase prosocial positive emotions and decreased sadness ([Sturm et al., 2021](#)). Paying attention to nature while walking leads to increased nature connection, particularly when people notice nature's beauty ([Barrable & Booth, 2020](#)), reflect on how nature makes them feel ([Lumber et al., 2017](#)), and focus on specific elements of nature - such as the colour of leaves ([Nisbet et al., 2019](#)).



Connect with imagined or virtual nature

Take ten minutes every day for five days to engage mentally with nature, through imagination or virtual walks.

Use one of these meditations to imagine the sensory and emotional experience of being in nature, and feel calm and connected to nature:

- [Audio-meditation](#) to activate pathways to nature connection
- [Pathways to nature connection audio-visual meditation](#) with film of installation by artist Charlotte Smithson
- Nature-based meditations on the app [Awe](#)

Or you could experience a virtual nature walk to explore sights and sounds of nature, through one of many high-quality free virtual walks available (just search online for “virtual nature walks” to find some). Aim to take in as much of the scene as you can and imagine what the full sensory experience would be like. You may choose to repeat the same practice or do a different one each day.

EVIDENCE

Studies have shown that audio meditations activating pathways to nature connection help people feel closer to nature and improve mental wellbeing ([Muneghina et al., 2021](#)). Nature-based guided imagery has similarly been found to increase nature connectedness ([Coughlan et al., 2022](#)). Several studies have shown that watching videos of nature can increase nature connection (e.g. [Sneed et al., 2021](#)), and reduce feelings of stress (e.g. [Chan et al., 2022](#)).

