EcoPsychology

The Healing Power of Nature



Holistic Psychiatrist

& artist, writer, healer, yogi, astrologer

About the Author

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Nature as Healer

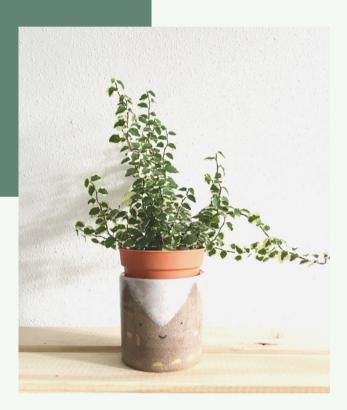


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Why this topic?

Nature, the original healer, is our our mother & our home. Because it IS our foundational energy on this planet, nature is inherently balancing. It's free, readily available (even as a houseplant), and eager to harmonize our energy back to a more peaceful state.





Beauty is soothing.

Purpose of this book:

Inspire you to connect more to nature and experience more happiness, joy, and peace as a result.



Thoughts to ponder...

LOOK DEEP INTO NATURE, AND THEN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING BETTER.

ALBERT EINSTEIN



Thoughts to ponder...



IF ONE WAY BE BETTER THAN ANOTHER, THAT YOU CAN BE SURE IS NATURE'S WAY.

ARISTOTLE



Thoughts to ponder...



THE EARTH LAUGHS IN FLOWERS.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



We are nature

EcoPsychology can be defined as the study of the intersection between humans and the natural world.

It is an extension of Environmental Psychology, which is the study of how environments impact human thought and behavior.

We are nature

EcoPsychology can be thought of as a fusion of ecology (the study of living organisms and the environments they inhabit) and psychology (the study of the human mind & its functions).

Let's start with something easy...



Psychologist Craig Knight at U of Exeter in England

Proved that houseplants in the office

Improve productivity (15-38%), reduce sick days, enhance purpose & reduce stress.

Knight, C & Haslam, S. The relative merits of lean, enriched, and empowered offices: An experimental examination of the impact of workspace management strategies on well-being and productivity. <u>Journal of Experimental</u> <u>Psychology: Applied</u>, 2010, 16(2), 158–172.

Personalizing one's workspace with art and PLANTS

-Increases creativity 45% and wellbeing by 47% -Reduces anxiety -Enhances commitment to the company/employer -Increases focus, concentration, and enjoyment



This data came from experiments conducted at the famous Chelsea flower show.

Plants



Connect us to nature in a real but portable way.



Inspire us with their beauty and vitality.



Remind us of who we are at a deeper level. We are of the earth & also beyond it.

Do you live near a Green Space?



GREEN SPACES

HAVE SIGNIFICANT MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Reduce incidence and severity depression, anxiety, stress, & psychosis.

REDUCE VIOLENCE IN NEIGHBORHOODS

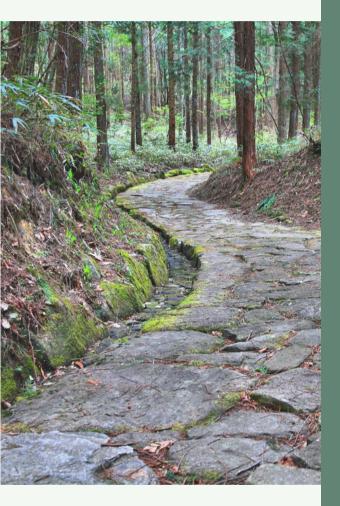
Promote a sense of community and reduces isolation.

ENHANCE HEALTH & OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE

Reduce cardiovascular mortality and obesity. Increase physical activity.

M Gascon, et al. Mental health benefits of long-term exposure to residential green and blue spaces: a systematic review <u>Int J Environ Res Public Health</u>. 2015 Apr 22;12(4):4354-79.

Visiting a forest is even better!!



Shinrin Yoku

"FOREST BATHING"

Extensively studied and very popular in Japan.

IMMUNE & HEALTH BENEFITS

Increases NK cells, reduces allergies/asthma, increases anti-cancer proteins, reduces incidence of cold/flu. Lowers BP and heart rate. Improves pain. Reduces blood glucose in diabetics.

ENHANCES MOOD & REDUCES STRESS

Reduces cortisol. Increases serotonin. Improves sense of wellbeing & subjective sense of one's beauty/appearance.

M Hansen, et al. Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing) and Nature Therapy: A Stateof-the-Art Review. <u>Int J Environ Res</u> <u>Public Health</u>.2017 Jul 28;14(8):851.

EcoTherapy

APPLIED ECOPSYCHOLOGY -CAN BE MANY THINGS

Walks in parks, plants in an office, living near a green space, vacations in remote spots, forest bathing, camping, shamanic ceremonies & healing rituals, psychotherapy outdoors, & living more aligned with nature in any way.

The point is to connect more with nature.

EcoTherapy

APPLIED ECOPSYCHOLOGY -CAN BE MANY THINGS

Ayurveda and really all ancient healing modalities were ecotherapy. They were/are natural and connected with plants, cycles of the earth, food, animals, patterns in nature, etc. Aligning ourselves with nature, we align with balance.

Physiologic Benefits

INCREASED IMMUNITY

Increase in IgA and NK Cells

Significant drops in cortisol from looking at nature, hearing it, and/or being in it.

REDUCED

CORTISOL

INCREASED SEROTONIN

Increased serotonin from spending time in nature, including parks & especially at beaches.



Emotional Benefits.

People who spend even 20 minutes with nature or in a green space are less reactive & less anxious. They report feeling more satisfied with life and (interestingly) more likable.

Social Benefits

People who have spent time in nature are more generous. They are more likely to smile at and stop to help a stranger. This has been studied and is true even after people look at photos of nature.

J Zhang et al. An Occasion for Unselfing: Beautiful Nature Leads to Prosociality. Journal of Environmental Psychology. 2014. (37): 61-72.



M. STIER-JARMER, ET AL. (A recent review)

The Psychological and Physical Effects of Forests on Human Health: A Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews and Meta-<u>Analyses. Int J Environ</u> <u>Res Public Health.</u> . 2021 Feb 11;18(4):1770.



11 REVIEWS, 131 DIFFERENT INTERVENTIONS: BENEFITS: -Cardiovascular system (lower BP/heartrate,

increased heart rate variability) -Immune system (increased NK cells) -Mental health (improved mood, stress, anxiety)



ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:

-Some benefits for atopic dermatitis/allergies & asthma -Induction of intracellular anticancer proteins

Just looking at photos of nature is healing

-Reduced activity in right orbito-frontal cortex (hyperactive in anxiety and depression) -Increased feelings of "comfort" & "relaxation"

R Yamashita, et al. The Mood-Improving Effect of Viewing Images of Nature and Its Neural Substrate. <u>Int J Environ Res</u> <u>Public Health.</u> 2021 May 20;18(10):5500.





Sounds of nature are restorative. Mood is improved & focus/cognition enhanced.

E Ratcliffe. Sound and Soundscape in Restorative Natural Environments: A Narrative Literature Review. <u>Front Psycho</u>. 2021 Apr 26;12:570563.

Smelling the smells - aim for a full sensory experience in nature. Interact with nature. Appreciate it. Create a gratitude loop, and look for signs that nature receives your love. Things may look brighter, sounds could become clearer. You could find a feather on your path. Butterflies may land on your hand. If you feel blissful by the end of your time in nature, ECOTHERAPY was achieved!



Interesting Stories

EARLY ECO-THERAPY IN THE DESERT WITH A BORDERLINE PD PATIENT AND TWO BIPOLAR PATIENTS.

As I was getting interested in the power and potential of ecotherapy I did a few experiments. I took three different patients in my holistic psychiatry practice in Tucson out to this spot (separately) for special nature-based sessions. We walked along a nature trail. meditated.andhad a modified psychotherapy session on a large,flat boulder. I suggested the patients connect with several different animals, reptiles, cacti, and trees to feel the distinctly different energies of each. I encouraged them to reflect on how different plants, animals, etc. bring out subtly different energies in us, depending on the fundamental characteristics of the plant or animal. This is part of Native American spirituality and shamanism.

Gates Pass, Tucson

We also explored how much calmer and more receptive the patients felt out in nature vs. in my office. Each of these patients suffered from significant anxiety, and each of them was notably calmer during their nature session compared to the norm. The nurturing impact of nature made it significantly easier for me to do my job. I "prescribed" returning to this same spot at least once a week for all three of them. I believe the sessions made a lasting impact that inspired confidence in the healing power of just being in and connecting to nature.



THINGS YOU CAN DO for RX "NATURE TIME"



BEACH DAYS

If you live on the coast, there are evidence-based improvements in mood and anxiety by spending even 20 minutes by the ocean. Streams, rivers, and lakes are good alternatives in you live inland.



BOTANICAL GARDENS

Flowers have been proven to improve mood and makepeople feel happier and more hopeful. Midweek trips to a nearby botanical garden is a wonderful way to experiment with the healing power of flowers.



HIKES

Time in the mountains is invigorating, elevating, and inspiring. If you live in an area with access to mountains, climbing one is definitely therapeutic. Walks in the woods along nature trails (at neutral elevations) are also beneficial, though less stimulating.



GUIDED IMAGERY EXERCISE

Let's journey to the jungle...

Please join me in this guided imagery journey into the rainforest in Costa Rica. Read through the script first, then do the meditation from memory. If you want to find jungle or rainforest sounds on Spotify or another streaming service, that may accentuate the experience.

Sit upright in a quiet place, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. Beginto imaginethatyouarewalking along a jungle path through a beautiful, tropical forest. Everything is green in all directions. You can hear the sounds of birds and insects all around you. There are birdsongs you've never heard before. It is inspiring and uplifting to your spirit! The ground is moist under your feet, and every step opens up a fresh aroma of earthy smells. Occasionally youseepatchesofcolorful flowers in places where the sunlight dapplesthrough the trees.

You come to a place where there are mossy rocks by a small stream. Sit bythisstream. Listentothesound of the water cascading overtherocks.Feelyourselfgettingcalmer and filled with gratitude at the simple pleasure of hearing the sound of water. Rest here in quiet meditation for several minutes. If there are any worries on your mind, bring them into your awareness and bring your hands to your heart. Offer your concerns to the Spirit of the water and to your own higher self. Release them with an outbreath and with intention to surrender to the wisdom of the Universe.



Nature teaches both harmony and surrender. Thepracticeofsurrender will heal even the most severe anxiety. Learning to trust the Universe to support what is meant to happen and block what is not brings profound peace and cultivates true happiness.

Further Directions to Explore:









Shamanism

A naturealigned system of medicine

Ayurveda

Plants are medicine

Herbalism

Eat as close to the earth as possible

Nutrition

Connect to the rhythms of the earth

If interested in developing a personal healing relationship with nature, consider diving deeper with these topics.

Final Thoughts to Ponder

Human beings are a part of nature; thus, connecting to nature will always be a homecoming. Spending time in nature is a way to reset and restore your nervous system, immune system, cardiovascular system, and mood. Really, all systems of the body are benefited by time in nature or natural approaches, including whole foods and herbs.

Astrology, which is one of my greatest passions, is a sort of applied ecotherapy. It explores the influence of star and planetary patterns on our minds, bodies, and lives. Stars and planets are nature! Understanding how we fit into the world of biology and ecology is taken just a few steps further in understanding how humans interact and fit into the cosmos.

I hope you allow this little ebook to reinforce your own connection and commitment to the healing power of nature. All of life's energies are illustrated in nature. The principles that operate in the natural world also operate in our own bodies and lives. If studied, they can make our lives better. At the minimum, looking at beauty is soothing, hearing birds is calming, smelling flowers is inspiring, touching trees is grounding, and tasting farm fresh food is invigorating.

Orienting towards nature will nearly always bring peace.

Thanks for Reading!!

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