

GREEN THERAPY: MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF NATURE

Did you know that for many people it's common to be looking at screens for more than 10 hours a day? Given the strong correlation between nature and mental health, it's important to prioritize time outside.

1 - SUNLIGHT

- We spend an average of only 2.5 hours in daylight outdoors; but each additional hour spent outdoors significantly lowers depressive symptoms.
- 10-15 minutes of sun exposure within an hour of waking up helps you to stay alert and regulate your sleep-wake cycle.

2 - SOIL

- Research conducted on mice has revealed that beneficial bacteria residing in the soil can boost serotonin levels and alleviate anxiety!
- Putting your hands in the soil releases 'feel good' chemicals in the brain and grounds the nervous system.

3 - GREEN SPACES

- 10-30 minutes of sitting outdoors is associated with improved mood, reduced perceived stress, and reduced cortisol levels
- 31-50 minutes of walking in nature can improve attention and build focus

4 - PREFER BEING INDOORS?

- Lightboxes can be used to supplement daylight exposure in the winter months (consider putting in the bathroom when you're taking a shower in the morning)
- Watching high quality nature programs on TV can boost mood, decrease negative emotions, and reduce boredom of being cooped up

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5 - INCORPORATING NATURE INTO YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

- Start Small: Incorporating nature into your daily lives doesn't require grand expeditions or elaborate plans. Even small doses of outdoor time can yield significant benefits.
- Unwind and unplug: Leave your devices behind and fully immerse yourself in nature's beauty. Take this time to disconnect from the digital world and reconnect with the natural world around you.
- Practice Mindfulness: As you immerse yourself in nature's beauty, you invite your senses to be fully engaged, tuning in to the sights, sounds, and sensations around you.

6 - NATURE ACTIVITIES

- Grow herbs in planter boxes
- Plant a garden or flowers in your backyard
- Volunteer at a community garden (e.g. Giving Garden)
- Take a walk outdoors
- Exercise outside or at a park (e.g. bike at Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail)
- Birdwatch
- Plan a picnic in a park
- Paddle or float down a river or springs (e.g. Ichetucknee Springs State Park)
- Enjoy Gainesville and nearby green spaces such as:
 - Grow Hub Plant Nursery
 - San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park
 - Payne's Praire Preserve State Park
 - Sweetwater Wetlands Park
 - Kanapaha Botanical Gardens

