

Forest Bathing

A selection of facts and resources supported by research

2024

Overview

Forest bathing is based on the Japanese concept of *shinrin-yoku*. It is generally practiced in an area with many trees but can also be done in a more urban setting such as a city park. It differs from hiking and exercising outside in **that the goal is to slow down and use your senses to notice smells and other sensations**. There are numerous health benefits associated with forest bathing, and it can be adapted to different cultural practices and circumstances.

Mindful Exercises

- Each forest bathing experience will be different, but some key components include **being aware of beauty, relationships between sun and leaves, and celebration of imperfection and impermanence**. There is significant overlap with the concept of “mindfulness” (*Why Forest Therapy Can Be Good for Your Body and Mind*, n.d.).
- Some practices include noticing your breath, feeling or smelling the texture of a tree or rocks, imagining the experiences of these objects and life-forms, and expressing gratitude (Hughes, n.d.).

Benefits

- **Forest Bathing is associated with reduced stress, reduced anxiety, and lower blood pressure** (Farrow and Washburn, 2019).
- It can be done for as little as **10 minutes**, but two or more hours are associated with larger benefits (Segarra 2023).
- Based on a comprehensive review of current research, **forest bathing is considered a cost-effective public health strategy to promote well-being**. It is seen as a supplement to other physical and mental health practices. Research is still emerging on its potential to treat diseases (Antonelli et al, 2022).

Cultural Considerations

- Multiple Indigenous scholars have pointed out that although there has been a lot of attention in the media promoting forest bathing as a new concept, **the core of the concept reflects many Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the world**, which have been advocated but dismissed for many years. This acknowledgement also suggests the importance of worldviews that center relationality among all living and non-living aspects of the world (Ghemmour, 2020).
- In one study of forest bathing across different countries, **natural sounds were consistently one of the elements most associated with benefits to wellbeing**. Additionally, women experienced higher benefits, as did people living in the Southern hemisphere or with hot, long-day seasons. No significant difference in effect was found between natural and urban parks, although areas designated as nature resorts did see higher benefits (Subirana-Malaret et al., 2023).

Case Studies

Experiencing Forest Bathing: Cheverly Town Park, Maryland

- An intern with Corazon Latino who wrote about their first forest bathing experience described how a guide helped their group see, smell, and touch the forest to be more aware of their surroundings. Saveri describes the personal and group observations as a calming and relaxing experience, especially in comparison to frequent screen time in day-to-day life (Nandigama, 2019).

Self-Love in Nature: South Holland, Illinois

- Light of Loving Kindness is one example of a group that leads forest bathing walks and other events that are free at a public location and include guidance in both English and Spanish (*Light of Loving Kindness*, n.d.). Eventbrite can be a helpful online platform to share events with your local community.

Buffalo Bayou Park Wellness Walk: Houston, TX

- This is another example of a free outdoor event, led in English and Spanish, through a partnership with a public organization. Covering 3 miles in 1.5 hours may be slightly faster paced than a typical forest bathing experience, but the event does focus on the benefits of spending time outside (*Buffalo Bayou Park Wellness Walk – Buffalo Bayou Partnership*, n.d.).

Resources

Websites

Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs: <https://www.anft.earth/guide-training/training>

References

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