

A GUIDE TO 10 + MINDFUL WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE

Some Ideas and Links to Resources to Get the Most from Your Time in the Great Outdoors



Quite often when we spend our time outside we are more focused on getting from one place to another and do not really take the time to observe and pay attention to what is going on around us. More and more research shows that the greater our connection to nature, the greater the benefits to our wellbeing. Mindfulness experiences in nature, where we can pause, observe and really soak in our natural surroundings, help us to make these connections.

The purpose of this guide is to provide some ideas, tools and links to other resources to help you get the most of your time outside, whether in a park, on a trail, climbing a mountain or just sitting in your own back yard.

1. FIND A SIT SPOT – A QUIET PLACE TO OBSERVE

A place where you can sit quietly and observe for a few minutes. If possible pick a place you can return to at different times of the day or year so that you can notice what might be different. Try to use all your senses to take in what is going on around you. **Watch-Listen-Touch-Smell.** From [John Muir Laws Nature Stewardship Through Science, Education, and Art](#) (Laws, 2017) here are [Three Prompts to Ask Yourself](#) (Laws, 2017):

- What did you notice?
- What did you wonder about?
- What did it remind you of?



2. TAKE A DIFFERENT VIEW

From your sit spot, or another place where you can sit quietly for a few minutes, take some time to look in different directions. Spend a few minutes looking in each direction:

LOOK UP ◊

LOOK STRAIGHT AHEAD AT EYE LEVEL ◊

LOOK DOWN



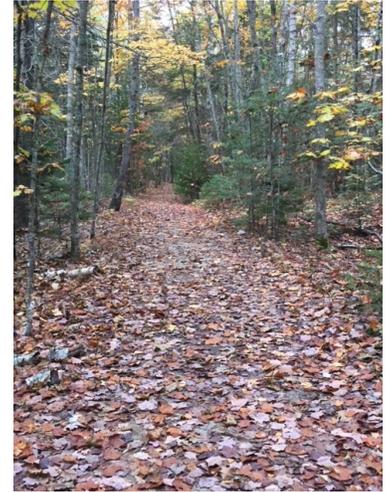
The world is a very different place for an ant on a log and moss growing under your feet from the world of a bird in the tree tops.

How far can you see, and what do you see looking straight ahead in the winter, when there are no leaves on the bushes, compared to summer when vegetation is very dense, and trees and bushes are full of leaves?



3. TRY OUT YOUR LISTENING SKILLS - SOUND MAPPING

The purpose of a Sound Map is to identify and record sounds as a way of understanding our natural environment. Sounds we hear quite often point us in the direction of where to look. We may hear the tapping of a woodpecker on a tree long before we are able to see it. The rustling of a small creature under the leaves may lead us to a chipmunk's home or stash of food. Here is a link to a [Sound Mapping](#) (MDIFW, InforME, n.d.) activity sheet developed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife that will help you to track what you hear.



4. MINDFUL WALKING

Walking in nature has so many benefits. Here are some ways to have a more mindful walk so that you can capture some of those benefits: [6 Ways to Enjoy Mindful Walking](#). (Willard, 2023)

5. TREE HUGGING

Whether in your own back yard, a city park or deep in the woods, through the release of hormones that make you feel better, hugging a tree can have some positive health benefits. A Zen Buddhist hugging meditation practice found that through mindfulness meditation hugging a tree can “bring about reconciliation, healing, understanding and happiness.” Here is a guide from the [Ecohappiness Project](#) (Ecohappiness Project, 2024) on [How to do a Tree Hugging Meditation](#). (Schwartz, 2021)



6. FOREST BATHING (or shinrin yoku)

Forest Bathing, also known as Forest Therapy, is a practice that originated in Japan and has benefits for both physical and mental health. Through a purposeful connection to, and immersion in nature, Forest Therapy has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, foster creativity and enhance overall wellbeing. Here is a self-guided resource with more information: [How to Take Yourself Forest Bathing](#). (Asher, 2024)



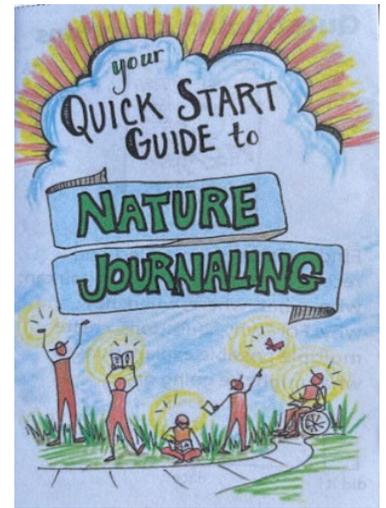
7. NATURE ART

Making art from things you find in nature is another way to slow down, appreciate and connect to the environment. Use whatever natural objects you have available to you for inspiration, whether it be leaves, twigs, stones or seaweed to create your masterpiece.



8. NATURE JOURNALING

A way to slow down, pay attention to what you are observing and find ways to record those observations – using words, pictures, questions, sounds, smells, etc. Here is a [Quick Start Guide to Nature Journaling](#) from the Wild Wonder Foundation. (Wild Wonder Foundation, 2023)



9. ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

We are fortunate in Maine to have a tremendous resource in the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. They offer a wide range of educational programs for all ages whether spending time in your back own backyard, or going on a hike or walk, there is a wide range of activities and resources available to fit almost every interest or need.

Check it out at: [Nature Based Educational Activities and Materials](#). (MDIFW, InforME, 2024)

10. MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES FOR GROUPS PLUS MORE RESOURCES

If you are interested in diving deeper into mindful ways to connect to nature, [Healing Forest](#) (Healing Forest, n.d.) is a tremendous website that collects ideas from around the world. Here is a link to some ideas they have posted under [Outdoor Mindfulness Activities for Groups](#). (Healing Forest, n.d.)

About this Guide - This guide was done by Sally Sutton, a student in the 2023 Spring [Mass Audubon Field Naturalist Certificate Program](#), (Mass Audubon, 2024) as a volunteer with the South Portland Land Trust to fulfill the volunteer component of the Field Naturalist Certificate Program. Any photos in this guide were taken by Sally Sutton.



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