

More on Nature and Forest Therapy

Biophilia refers to the innate subconscious connection we have with nature and life in general. This affinity developed over millennia as humans evolved and flourished in the wild world. Nature and the more-than-human beings that inhabited this world comprised a home in which we had an intimate bidirectional relationship. Our sensory systems developed over the ages to engage nature in this way. As industrialization and urbanization developed throughout time, most of us lost our intimate connection with nature's patterns, sounds, and scents and the wild world became more of a tamed world; a world governed by cultural conditioning, societal norms, constant demands, and a fast pace of life. As a result, we became detached from the sensory input that was imprinted over thousands of years. We became separated from the reciprocal relationships with other beings in the more-than-human world. This taming process has led to pathologic alienation from the sensory world in which we evolved and, with this alienation, there have been physical and mental health ramifications.

Forest therapy, inspired by the Japanese practice of Shinrin-Yoku or forest bathing, offers an opportunity for repairing this damaged relationship by guiding participants on a journey to find their own process of reconnection with nature. Through this reunion, mental and physical wellness and healing can truly occur. Throughout the past two decades, there have been studies with data showing that slowing down in nature, freeing the mind, and engaging the senses in forest therapy can have a host of mental and physical benefits. These benefits include but are not limited to improvements in depression, sleep quality, chronic pain, asthma, immune system function, and cardiovascular health including lowering blood pressure. Although not a replacement for traditional western medicine, forest therapy opens up another parallel world of potential healing.