

# Ecotherapy Workbook

**A Tool to Help You  
Improve Your  
Mental Wellbeing  
By Connecting  
With Nature**

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*“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space.*

*He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something **separated** from the rest, a kind of optical **delusion** of his consciousness.*

*This delusion is a kind of **prison** for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.*

*Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our **circle of compassion** to embrace all living creatures and **the whole of nature in its beauty.**”*

*- Albert Einstein*

## Introduction

The UK's 2021 theme for Mental Health Awareness Week is nature.

Research in the relatively new field of ecotherapy suggests there's a strong link between time spent in nature and mental wellbeing.

The reasons behind this are complex and still being understood, but here are some ideas why nature is so good for us:

- **It encourages mindfulness.** Focusing on the soothing sights and sounds of nature promotes [mindfulness](#) – the ability to be fully aware in the present moment.
- **It reduces excessive self-focus and rumination.** Rumination is the tendency to fixate on distressing mental activity – the upsetting thoughts, memories and images our mind often conjures up. Nature steers us away from this unhelpful habit by directing our attention externally, making us less self-focused. This is important because excessive self-focus is widely considered to be a root cause of poor mental wellbeing. In one study, researchers compared the brain activity of people who walked in nature as opposed to an urban setting. They found that those who walked in nature had less activity in their prefrontal cortex, a brain region associated with rumination.
- **It boosts positive emotions.** Nature helps us relieve negative moods and boost positive emotions such as awe, joy and peacefulness. In a 2020 study, a group of participants went on 15-minute Awe Walks every week for eight weeks. Compared to those who took normal walks, the awe walkers experienced more positive emotions and less distress in daily life.

Another idea is the biophilia hypothesis, which claims we have an innate drive to connect with nature – it's a preference coded into our DNA because it helped our ancient ancestors survive.

**Research suggests spending two hours a week in nature is enough to significantly improve your mental wellbeing. This workbook is therefore designed to help you create this habit.**

Read our inspiration list and use the Weekly Nature Journal to plan your weekly dose, perhaps reviewing it every Sunday. While reading, be sure to tick the ideas you're interested in, and add any ideas of your own.

### 1. Go for an Awe Walk

Visit a local or [national park](#) and focus your attention on what you can see, hear and smell.

Practice what's called 'beginner's mind' in Buddhism: seeing things as though you're looking at them for the first time. It's easy to spend most of our lives walking around on autopilot. Making an effort to truly notice the details of what's around you can help spark those feelings of awe.

### Useful Links

- Check out this collection of the [100 best walking routes in Britain](#) created from a survey of thousands of regular walkers.
- Search for a [local forest](#) to walk in.
- Join [Ramblers](#), the UK's largest walking group.
- Discover a [local nature reserve](#) to visit.
- Find a [botanic garden](#) to browse.
- Book a [walking holiday](#).



## 2. Take an Animal for a Nature Walk

Research shows that spending time with dogs can reduce stress and anxiety, ease loneliness, and encourage playfulness.

Offer to walk the dog of someone you know or join the [Borrow My Doggy](#) website.

## 3. Go Camping

Use [this website](#) to find a campsite.

New to camping? Check out this [Camping 101 YouTube video](#) full of helpful tips.

## 4. Enjoy a Countryside Break

Browse [Airbnb](#) for a countryside getaway.

Find inspiration for places to go on the [Visit England](#) website.

## 5. Hunt for Free Food

Like the sound of free food?

Then you might enjoy foraging!

Foraging refers to searching for food in the natural environment. Also known as “hunting and gathering”, it’s what our ancestors did for millions of years.

Common foraged foods nowadays include wild garlic (for [homemade pesto](#)), blackberry (for [delicious desserts](#)) and elderflower (for homemade [cordial](#)).

The Woodland Trust have a [fantastic online guide](#).

We also recommend the book [Food for Free](#).

Want more free tips? Head to the [foraging subreddit](#) online community.

## 6. Try Out Nature Photography

Interested in a new hobby? Why not give landscape and/or wildlife photography a go?

### Udemy Online Courses

- [Landscape photography](#)
- [Wildlife photography](#)

### YouTube Videos

- [Landscape photography](#)
- [Wildlife photography](#)



## 7. Spy on Birds

Another hobby you might be interested in is bird watching, or birding.

[Collins Bird Guide](#) is the “ultimate reference book for bird enthusiasts”.

Prefer an app? Here’s the digital tool for [Apple](#) and [Android](#).

[Here’s an online community](#) where you can find other birding enthusiasts.

## 8. Start a Nature Scrapbook

Collect plants and flowers to keep pressed inside your scrapbook.

Make notes about your awe walks, treating it as a type of journal.

Invest in a [polaroid camera](#) and feature your nature photography inside.

Browse Pinterest for more [scrapbooking ideas](#).



## 9. Get Creative with Arts and Crafts

Interested in developing your artistic skills?

There’s plenty of free, high-quality videos on YouTube teaching you how to draw nature.

For example, check out the tutorials on [how to draw a tree](#).

Why not take a sketchpad with you to the park?

[Pinterest](#) is also jam-packed with inspiration for nature-themed craft activities for kids:

- [DIY Bird Feeder](#)
- [Stick Crafts](#)
- [Butterfly Nature Craft](#)

## 10. Go Geocaching

Got kids? Here’s another idea for you.

Geocaching is an outdoor treasure-hunting game - your phone’s GPS helps you find the treasure. Find out more in [this video](#).

A similar game is Pokémon Go - watch the trailer video [here](#).

## 11. Join an Ecotherapy Programme

In 2008, the mental health charity Mind received funding from The Big Lottery to set up 130 ecotherapy projects.



They now facilitate lots of different nature-based activities, for example:

- **Adventure therapy** involves doing adventurous physical activities in a group, such as rafting, rock climbing or caving.
- **Animal assisted interventions** involve being in spaces such as farms where you come into contact with animals and spend time feeding or petting them.
- **Green exercise therapy** involves doing exercise in green spaces, for example walking, running or cycling.
- **Nature arts and crafts** includes creating art in green space, using the environment as inspiration or using natural materials such as wood, grass or clay.

For more information, visit [their website](#).

## 12. Become a Volunteer

In a study of volunteers at The Wildlife Trust, 95% of people who were experiencing poor mental wellbeing at the start of their volunteering project said they felt better in 6 weeks.

Search The Wildlife Trust's volunteering opportunities [here](#).

### Find More Volunteering Opportunities

- [Volunteer Centre Finder](#)
- [Do It](#)
- [CharityJobs](#)
- [Volunteering Matters](#)
- [Reach Volunteering](#)

## 13. Exercise Outdoors

Fancy trying a new outdoor sport?

The BBC have a highly comprehensive and inclusive guide of 76 sports and activities, many of which are outdoors-based. Give it a read [here](#).

## 14. Attend an Outdoor Meditation or Yoga Retreat

For example, [The Sharpham Trust](#) in Devon runs 3 and 5-night mindfulness retreats in a woodland setting. They offer reduced-price retreats for people experiencing financial difficulties (on a limited basis). You can also try Googling for retreats near you.

If you're interested in [mindfulness](#), check out [The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook](#).

It's a 12-week programme covering:

- **Mindful Awareness**
- **Radical Acceptance**
- **Wise Mind and Wise Body**
- **Letting Go**
- **Living in the Now**
- **Centering**
- **Connecting**
- **Nature as Metaphor**
- **Nature as Teacher**
- **And more!**

You can email the author for resources and clarification at [chuck@mindfulecotherapy.org](mailto:chuck@mindfulecotherapy.org).



## 15. Enjoy a Scenic Drive

Studies suggest that a mere glimpse of nature from a window or even photographs can enhance mental wellbeing.

For example, one study found that heart surgery patients in intensive care units felt significantly less anxiety after viewing pictures of trees and water.

Another study found that people who had a view of nature from their office space reported higher job and life satisfaction than those who didn't have such a view.

So, why not enjoy a scenic drive sometime soon? Here's a list of [50 best British drives](#).

## 16. Watch a Nature Documentary

On a similar note, get your nature fix by watching a documentary - [here's](#) a list of recommendations from BBC Wildlife Magazine.

## 17. Go Stargazing

Take some blankets to keep warm and marvel at this vast universe we're in!

There are lots of [free apps](#) to help you navigate the sky and learn about astronomy.

Go Stargazing is a brilliant website featuring a [stargazing locations map](#), [list of observatories](#), and [events](#).



## 18. Visit the Park

Head to the park with a book, bike, or bread for the ducks!

## 19. Arrange a Picnic or BBQ

Who doesn't love a good picnic or BBQ?

(Remember to check the latest [COVID guidelines](#) to ensure you're adhering to the rules.)

## 20. Do Some Gardening

If you're new to gardening, watch beginner tutorials on [YouTube](#).

Easy-to-grow food includes: strawberries, radishes, chillies, beetroot, and apples.

Growing herbs like mint, basil and lavender is also simple!

The Royal Horticultural Society have a comprehensive [online guide](#) for newbies.

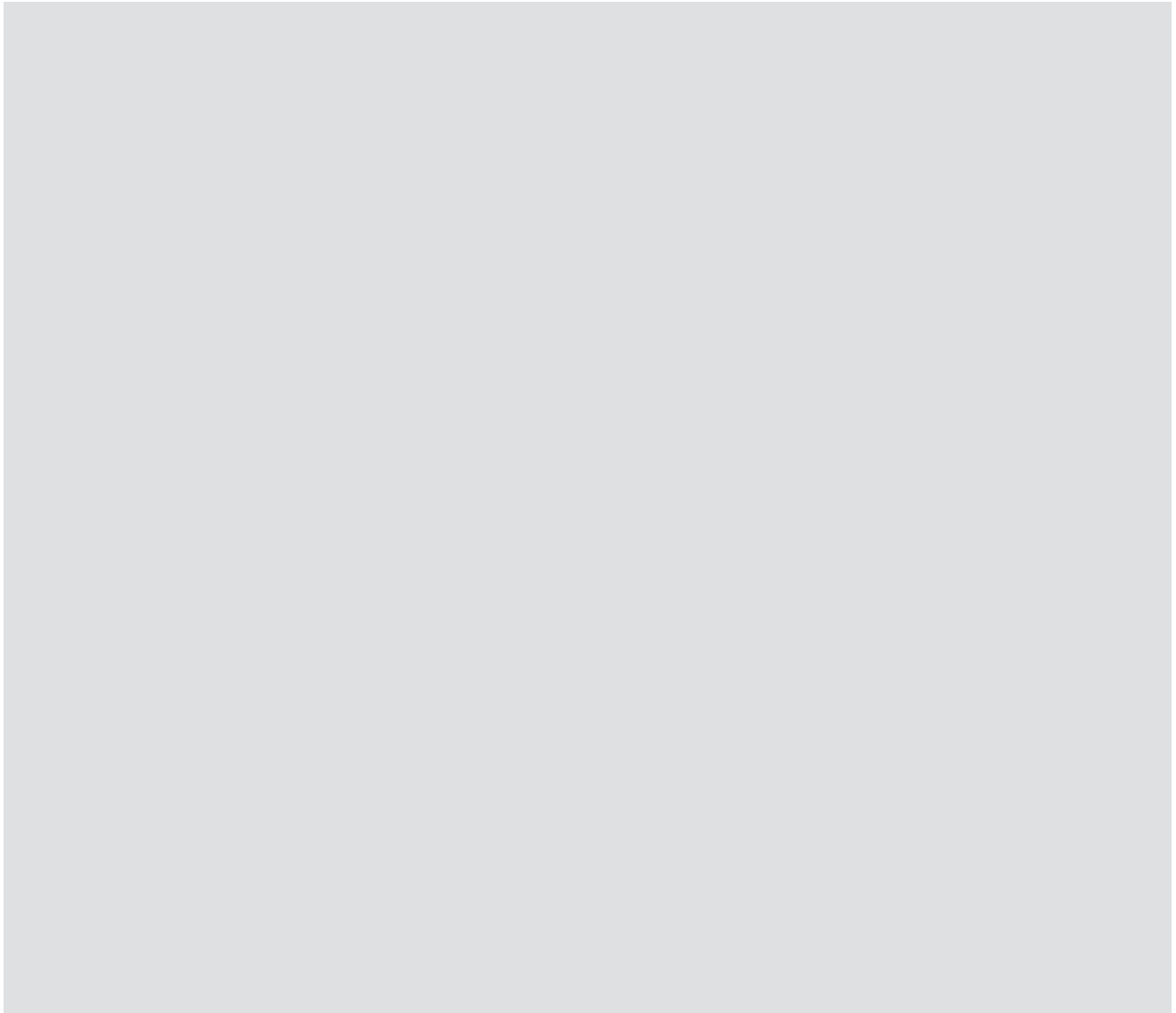
And if you don't have a garden, why not look into [getting an allotment?](#)



# Weekly Nature Journal

**Date:**

Describe how you'll spend two hours connecting to nature this week.

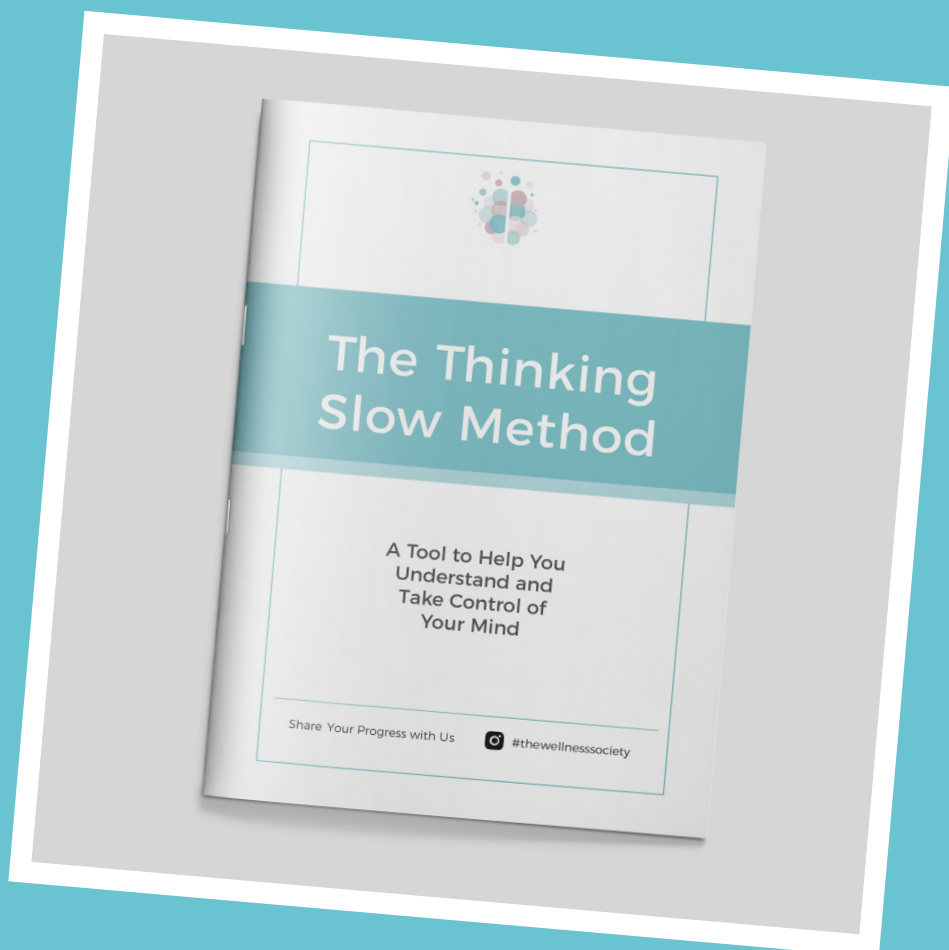






# Want more practical self-help tools?

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Head to [thewellnesssociety.org](https://thewellnesssociety.org) to browse our collection.



# We love hearing from you.

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Collaboration is incredibly important to us, and we really appreciate your help in making our tools the best they can be.

Do you have any feedback on the workbook? Or suggestions for future updates/tools?

Please email us at [hello@thewellnesssociety.org](mailto:hello@thewellnesssociety.org).

We love to hear from you!

Want more practical self-help tools? Visit [thewellnesssociety.org](http://thewellnesssociety.org).

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*A full list of references is available on request by emailing [hello@thewellnesssociety.org](mailto:hello@thewellnesssociety.org)*