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The Nurture of Nature

1. Reap While You Sow

Norwegian researchers discovered that people with moderate to severe depression who participated in a horticultural programme experienced reduced symptoms after 12 weeks. “Humans are innately engaged in nature,” says study author Marianne Thorsen Gonzalez, PhD, making gardening an ideal distraction.

2. Exercise in the Open Air

A 2011 study in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* found that people who walked on an outdoor track moved at a faster pace and experienced more positive emotions than those who walked on an indoor treadmill. In another study done in Scotland, subjects who walked through a rural area viewed their to-do list as more manageable than those who walked on city streets.

3. Notice the Scenery

Just looking at a natural scene activates parts of the brain associated with balance and happiness. In a study at South Korea’s Chonnam National University, fMRI scans showed that when subjects saw images of landscapes, they experienced heightened activity in the anterior cingulate gyrus (which is linked to emotional stability) and the basal ganglia (an area tied to the recollection of happy memories).

4. Just Breathe

They sound like science fiction, but negative ions – particles that are plentiful near waterfalls, breaking waves and river rapids – can act as natural antidepressants, according to Columbia University researchers. And an Indoor Air study found that

after breathing negative ions for an hour, subjects' blood lactate levels dropped 33 percent, improving their energy levels.

5. Walk in the Woods

The Japanese knew that shinrin-yoku, or “forest bathing,” does wonderful things for the body. But now researchers at Tokyo’s Nippon Medical School have quantifiable evidence: In one study, women who spent two to four hours in the woods on two consecutive days experienced a nearly 50 percent increase in the activity of cancer-fighting white blood cells.