

# Summer

**The season of sunshine,  
long evenings and holidays.**

The warmer weather does lend itself to more time spent outdoors and there is much to explore. Long walks in the countryside can allow you to see a wide range of environments and get a good 'dose' of nature.



# Thriving With Nature

A GUIDE FOR EVERYONE



MAKING THE MOST OF THE UK'S NATURAL SPACES  
FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING



FOR  
YOUR  
WORLD



Mental Health  
Foundation

## Nature for everyone

Nature is for everyone. It is essential that everyone can access nature, whatever their circumstances. For someone living with loss of vision, hearing or mobility, their need to enjoy nature remains, as does the positive impact of nature on their wellbeing. However, having a disability does change how and where you can access nature, and with whom. If this is your experience, please let us know how you find using this guide. Many parks, nature reserves and forest areas have made changes to make their entrances and paths more accessible and some organisations provide activities specifically designed to be more accessible – for example, see our suggestions at the end of the guide on places to go for more information.

Struggling with your mental health can also make it much harder to leave the house, never mind finding your nearest green space. If this is you, then we hope to encourage you to think of the benefits of nature, when you feel ready to go outside.



Financial pressures are another influence that makes it harder to get time in nature, because you have so little time, energy and money for transport and other costs when you're out. We have included activities in this guide that we think could relate to nature in homes, gardens or small patches of green space in a city. Accessing bigger green spaces may require some travel costs but most of the activities themselves are completely free!

## How to use this guide

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This guide contains imaginative and simple suggestions for seasonal activities to help you engage with nature in your area throughout the year. Each activity will have different components that research suggests can be helpful for supporting your wellbeing (such as staying active, connecting with others, or spending time in green spaces). If any of these activities feel like a stretch for you right now, even just noticing more of the nature around you is a good start and there are suggestions for what you might notice in each season as well.



This guide is available and open to anyone, but we think it may be most helpful for those of us living in urban areas, with busy lifestyles and who may be experiencing stress or other strains on wellbeing. But there are plenty of activities in this guide that you can tailor to your own lifestyle and needs whoever you are and wherever you live.

The guide moves through the seasons from spring to winter to encourage you to get into the habit of getting outdoors regularly and follow the cycles of nature, but you can start it anywhere, anytime. There's no need to follow any particular order – we encourage you to get creative!



The most important parts of this guide are the blank pages, which are spread throughout. This is space for you to write or to draw or do whatever you want as part of your reflection on where you are, what you notice around you and in the way you feel there. We hope this will help you find a connection with nature and make the most of the benefits for your wellbeing.



At the end of this guide, there are some suggested further sources of ideas and inspiration in books and online. There is also a list of organisations who provide advice and even planned activities you can join that are out in nature and designed to boost wellbeing.

We want to acknowledge that on some days you may struggle with your mental health and on those days, you may find engaging with this guide a little harder and the tasks that seem simple to others may become overwhelming to you. On those days be gentle and kind to yourself and pick the guide up again in your own time whenever you feel ready.

**Now, let's get started.**





## Use your senses to...

**See** whales and dolphins. We might normally associate the large mammals of the sea with oceans far from home, but actually during the summer is a good time to see those that live or migrate through our waters. The lucky among us could glimpse minke and humpback whales, bottlenose and common dolphins, basking sharks and more. This one will require some planning and travel but could be well worth it!



**Feel** cool, natural water by going 'wild-swimming'.

The coast and beaches are among the UK public's favourite natural spaces. As an island, we are all in reachable distance from the sea and salty air.

Why not take a dip in the chilly and refreshing water? If the sea is tricky to reach, perhaps there is a river or lake nearer by.

**Hear** grasshoppers and crickets in the grasses as they make their 'song' by rubbing legs and/or wings together. There are 30 species in the UK, and you are more likely to hear crickets at dawn and dusk, while grasshoppers favour sunshine during the day.

**Smell** the scent of freshly cut grass, barbeques in the garden or at the park.

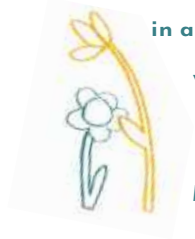


**Taste** brambles. Late in the summer, blackberry (or bramble) picking is a great way to satisfy your sweet tooth while enjoying the fruits of nature. It is unlikely that you live far from blackberries even if you had never noticed them before. Look around you in a nearby park, canal path or other green space.



**“I love the summer evenings  
especially at twilight when  
everything is calm, the colours  
of the flowers. I have a birdbath  
and watch the birds splash  
through it and I used to have  
a hedgehog visit every night...**

**Something very soothing  
in a breeze or a  
warm wind.”**



*Supporter on  
Instagram*



## Get outside and...

### Exercise

With bright mornings and evenings and warmer weather, it is easier to find time around work or childcare or whatever fills your time to get some exercise outdoors. We all know physical exercise is good for our physical health. So instead of hitting the couch or the treadmill, why not go for 'green exercise' instead? Try a brisk walk or jog in a nearby park, or one of the growing number of outdoor exercise classes. You could also take your bike out or hire one to try a safe route in a woodland or other green space nearby.



If you have a river, lake or beach near you, that is great too – green exercise near water has an added boost. If you are feeling particularly adventurous, you could hire a kayak or canoe and paddle your way downriver or learn to sail. Even small periods of time – say 5-10 minutes – can have a positive effect.<sup>13</sup> So you could start by taking a 10-minute walk in a nearby park each day for a week and see how that makes you feel. You might find you are more tempted to keep up the exercise if it is out in nature rather than indoors...



### Wellbeing benefits:

Finding nature in the city, staying active, time in green spaces.



## Grow or pick your own food

It can be very satisfying to grow your own food and enjoy the fruits of your work directly!

It's also a great way to experience and learn more about nature.

Small gardens and even balconies can be enough space to grow food, such as tomatoes or strawberries. If you don't have access to a garden, you could plant salad leaves or herbs in a window box or plant pot. If you have enough space, on the other hand, why not go big on a vegetable plot and save on your shopping bill at the same time?


You may also find that in your local area there are opportunities to apply to share an allotment, or even community gardens

or food growing projects. That will allow you to share the labour and the fruits, as well as learn from others in a social environment.

### Wellbeing benefits:

Connecting with others; gardening, conservation and farming; being part of something bigger.

And there are also immediate opportunities to pick your own food, by going fruit picking or foraging for wild food. Look for local farms, including city farms, or orchards that let you pick fruit to buy. And there are more opportunities for finding wild food than you might realise – from brambles (see page 40) and wild garlic (see page 26) in cities, to mussels on the coast.



**Top tip:** If you're going fruit picking or foraging, be aware that not all wild plants are safe to eat. Before eating something you've picked yourself, make sure you know exactly what it is by going with someone who knows what they are doing, reading up in advance from a reliable source or bringing a guide book with you. And picking from higher up the plant will give you fruit that will have been out of reach of dogs leaving their trail...



# Personal story

## Escaping through colour

I can feel the fanfare boom when summer arrives. I hear the eccentric brass band come to life. I watch the sun dance to their jaunty melody. I see the season fill with light. I wake to its bright, energetic mornings. I toss and turn to its warm, balmy nights. I travel through the warm breeze. Ebbing and flowing like the bobbing kite.

When summer drifts to a close. The vibrant beat takes a slower form. Reflecting the shorter days and evenings. And a time spent wrapped up indoors. As we approach autumn, the melancholic melody can be heard. Accompanying our falling leaves – and the migrating flocks of birds.



There is something that feels cosy. And there is something that feels safe. About being surrounded by vibrant colours and the branches' naked shape. I like to know that I can rest, like the hedgehog in its home. Nestled happily in crunchy leaves. Waiting to head out when dusk forms.

I watch the squirrels bury their nuts. And the barn owl hover way above. The blooming crocuses demand attention. The fragrant begonia brushes my glove. All the while I feel more peaceful. Surrounded by warming fires. Settling into the quiet atmosphere after summer says goodbye.

***By Bethan Harvey***





This is your space.











