



Spring

**The season of renewal,
flowering bulbs and the
re-emergence of green.**

As the days grow longer,
the temperature rises and
buds start emerging, this
is a good time of year to
get outside more.

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

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...

Taste wild garlic. Often found in ancient and mature woodland, wild garlic can be hard to miss. You might notice the smell first and then, perhaps among the bluebells, you might see a carpet of broad-leaved plants on the forest floor. The leaves are best picked when young and fresh (before it flowers), and are perfect for adding to pasta or other simple dishes. Seek advice if you are not sure.



Hear the song of birds returned from their warm winter getaways. Can you notice different birdcalls coming from the trees and gardens around you?



Feel the soft, green new leaves on trees around you, changing the atmosphere of our streets and cities, and transforming previously stark woods and forests.



Smell the bright new flowers blooming around you. Parks and gardens are decorated with daffodils, and woodland floors are covered in bluebells and dotted with many other flowers over the course of the season.

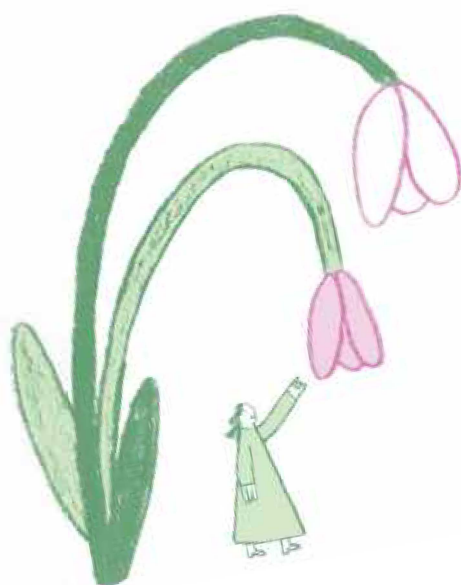


See the first butterflies of the year, and the acrobatic manoeuvres of swallows and swifts in the air and tiny tadpoles swimming in ponds.

**“I love the spring because
everything is so fresh and
coming back to life after
the winter, the days gradually
get longer, and everything
just looks brighter.”**

Supporter on Twitter





Get outside and...

Draw

You can draw however you like, but here is a suggestion... Find a spot to sit or stand that captures your curiosity. Pick a starting point – a leaf, rock, tree, distant field... whatever catches your eye. Draw every detail you see but without looking at the page and without taking your pen or pencil off the page. Instead keep your eyes



fixed on the object, exploring its contours. Once you have finished, take a look at your work – you will find your picture is unlikely to even closely resemble what you were looking at but that doesn't matter at all. The idea is to focus your attention and notice more of what you are looking at.

Wellbeing benefits:

Connecting with others; mindfulness and relaxation; time in green spaces; creativity.

Get to know a tree

There is a good way to do this with a partner (and even better with a large group) and in a location with lots of different trees.

One of you is blindfolded, while the other guides. Setting off from a shared starting point, the guide takes their blindfolded partner on a winding walk before choosing a tree. The blindfolded person then sets about getting to know that tree in all ways but sight. When ready, the guide leads their partner back to the starting point (again, a winding route is good to add to the challenge). Then the blindfold is removed and that person has to find their tree. You may be surprised at how successful everyone is... Then swap roles and do it again – be mindful of the obstacles that might hinder the blindfolded person in particular.



Personal story

Green oases in London

London is not necessarily a place associated with nature, but it is full of spectacular parks and smaller squares and gardens.

When I am feeling low, it is a real treat to walk around one of London's spectacular parks, such as Greenwich Park, Regent's Park, Hampstead Heath. One of my favourites is Golders Hill Park, which is a hidden gem.

It is so important for people who live in the city to visit green spaces if they can. The fresh air, the greenery, the variety of plants and changing colours – and being able to watch and listen to birds, animals and insects. If the sun is out as well, it can really lift your mood.



I am lucky enough to have a small back garden. This year I finally started to pay it some attention, doing some weeding, planting things and trying to keep it tidy. It has really been worth the effort and I love coming home from work, sitting in it and admiring the colours and peacefulness.



I have been befriended by a friendly robin who comes to visit and sits on the fence as I struggle with the weeds. Luckily, my cat leaves the robin alone.

Nature can take you out of yourself, give you a chance to admire natural beauty and give you some exercise. All in all, very good for your mental health!

By Fran Edwards



This is your space.





