



“Nature Connection” is the psychological measure of the quality of our relationship and emotional attachment with nature.

Nature connection has been shown to:

- Improve mood
- Enhance cognitive function
- Restore attention
- Spark creativity
- Boost the immune system
- Reduce stress and tension
- Regulate the nervous system
- Help us recover from burnout
- And much more...

When we connect with nature in a mindful, embodied way we feel the benefits; more than those experienced during physical activity or spending time in green spaces alone!

Global research indicates the non-human world benefits too, as connection with nature also leads to increased stewardship behaviours and improved environmental outcomes. In this way, nature connection supports a mutually beneficial relationship of reciprocity.

Cultivate a deeper relationship with nature this October - we’ve made it easy by compiling a list of daily challenges. There’s a new invitation to try each day! You don’t need to do them in order. It’s also more than fine (even beneficial) to repeat the invitations.

Don’t feel you need to go bush, you can start in your own backyard. Little doses often are equally important to longer stretches. Do what you can, when you can. Enjoy!

1. **Observe nature with mindful intention:** paying close attention. Seek not to identify WHAT things are but rather observe HOW they are. Notice attributes and characteristics without judgement. Try to remain curious. Ask yourself, *what else can I notice?*
2. **Try a sit spot practice** – as the name suggests, find a quiet place in nature where you can sit undisturbed and quietly observe your surroundings. Establish a daily or weekly routine to spend time in the same natural place. This builds place-attachment, feeling more like a home-coming each time you return.
3. **Do you know which catchment area you live in?**
Jump on the interactive map on the Landcare ACT website to find out (this map also provides links to the volunteer groups that meet in each region)
<https://landcareact.org.au/get-involved/>
Once you’ve found your catchment check out their site for what’s happening in your area.
Ginninderra Catchment Group - <https://ginninderralandcare.org.au/>
Molonglo Conservation Group - <https://www.molonglo.org.au/>
Southern ACT Catchment Group - <https://sactcg.org.au/>

4. **Take the same nature walk during different times of the day**, observing how it changes.
5. Visit the Australian National Botanic Garden. Whilst you're there check out the bookshop and **pick up a field guide**. *Ngunnawal Plant Use* provides information on 69 native plant species of the ACT region, and their many Ngunnawal uses.
<https://botanicalbookshop.com.au/products/ngunnawal-plant-use>
6. **Sit quietly by a natural water source** (pond, creek, river or lake) and watch the surface for ripples and patterns.
7. **Try being an early riser** (if only for a day). Get up before the sun and listen to the dawn chorus.
8. **Tune in to the more-than-human** residents in your local suburb. Take a walk around the block and make a list of who you encounter. The birds you meet are not random, you're likely to come across them again, it's their hood!
9. **Learn about "bird language."**
There are 5 basic voices or distinct call types:
Song (magpie warble)
Juvenile begging (less enjoyable persistent baby magpie)
Aggression (noisy kookaburras defending their territory)
Alarm (sounds like a warning think native minors as you pass)
Companion calling (rosella pairs tolling to and fro)
Can you identify what "voice" birds are using?
10. **Pay attention to all the different shades of GREEN** you can see, notice how there can be subtle changes in hues even on the same plant.
11. **Find a leaf or flower and examine it closely**. Use a magnifier if you have one handy.
Make a sketch capturing as much detail as you can.
12. **Take a mindful breath** outside and note the scents around you. Crush a eucalyptus leaf and take a deep inhalation. Try sniffing like a dog – it can improve the experience!
13. **Spend time in nature** with someone under 5 or over 80 and see things from their point of view.
Share favourite nature memories (recalling experiences enables us to relive them again!)
14. **Visit Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park** (STEP for short) - a regional botanic garden at the National Arboretum. It's a great space to learn about our local climate and discover plants that are well-suited. Meander along the Wattle Walk and see if you can identify the different species (hint: it's in the leaves!) <https://step.asn.au/>
15. **Find a space for a native plant in your garden, verge, or balcony**.
Make a trip to a local native nursery <https://www.coolcountrynatives.com.au/>
16. **Plant with pollinators in mind** – check out the species list compiled by ACT for Bees.
<https://actforbees.org/grow/>
17. When was the last time you walked barefoot? Find a safe spot to **shed your shoes** and feel the sensations underfoot.
18. **Identify** a tree or shrub in your area – is it a weed or a native? Sometimes names can be misleading!

19. **Visit one of Canberra's beautiful nature reserves** – there are 39 to choose from!
<https://www.parks.act.gov.au/find-a-nature-park/canberra-nature-park>
20. **Hug a tree.** Whilst you're there, you could also try to figure out its age (your arm span is roughly your height - you might need more than one person if it's an elder tree!) Once you have a rough idea of the circumference of the tree at chest height, divide this number by 2.5* to get an approximation of how old the tree is in years. *Growth rates of trees vary by species but 2.5cm/yr is an average measure.
21. **Take note of the weather** and how it affects the local flora and fauna. Lie on your back and observe the passing clouds, birds, or insects buzzing by.
22. **Look for signs of animals such as tracks, scats or nests.** We can learn a lot from traces left behind.
23. **Observe all the different textures and patterns of nature.** Can you find a fractal (a repeating pattern)? Looking at fractals has been shown to change our brainwaves for the better!
<https://bhma.org/fractals-the-hidden-beauty-and-potential-therapeutic-effect-of-the-natural-world/>
24. **Try 360 degree listening in all directions.** Listen to the sounds in nature with your eyes closed and try to identify them. Can you build a sound map around you? What's the loudest/quietest/closest/furthest away sound you can hear? Try drawing the sound vibrations moving through the air.
25. **Turn on your listening ears and see if you can identify the native frog species of the ACT.**
<https://ginninderralandcare.org.au/frogwatch-frog-identification/> better yet, become a citizen scientist and join Frogwatch.
26. **Go hunting for AWE** (even on a micro level – the smallest details can be captivating)...
<https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/blog/what-is-the-awe-of-nature>
27. **If you come across an 8 legged friend, try to identify it** using the Spidentify app: <https://identify-spiders.com/>
28. **Go outside and scout for the highest hill. If you're game, climb it and appreciate the view.**
Try doing so without headphones in (you could miss that echidna rustling nearby!)
29. **Make a plan to venture a little further into the wild** where you can switch off for a couple of days. We need lots of small doses of nature often, but once in a while we benefit from a deeper dive.
https://peopleandparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/THE-NATURE-DOSE_FINAL-digital.pdf
30. **Actively care for nature in the spirit of reciprocity.**
Join one of the 100+ local Landcare groups meeting across the ACT – find one near you!
<https://landcareact.org.au/get-involved/>
Join the ParkCare Ranger Assist program
<https://www.parks.act.gov.au/get-involved/parkcare-volunteering>
Learn more about how you can take part in citizen science programs
<https://www.act.gov.au/environment/research-and-data/citizen-science>