

Nature and Wellbeing

Creative activities to help you connect to nature



PRIFYSGOL
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Student Services
and Administration



Nature and Wellbeing



Nature has a profound impact on mental well-being, with numerous studies highlighting its positive effects. Here are several ways in which nature benefits mental health:

1. Reduces Stress: Exposure to natural environments can lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and reduce feelings of anxiety. Natural settings promote relaxation and can help alleviate feelings of tension.

2. Improves Mood: Time spent outdoors has been linked to improved mood and increased feelings of happiness. Nature can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

3. Enhances Focus and Concentration: Immersing oneself in nature can improve attention spans and concentration, particularly through experiences referred to as "nature therapy" or "forest bathing." This can also foster creativity and problem-solving skills.

4. Promotes Physical Activity: Being in nature often encourages physical activity, whether through hiking, walking, or cycling. Exercise is well-known for its positive impacts on mental health, including the release of endorphins that boost mood.

5. Fosters Connection: Nature can serve as a backdrop for social interaction, promoting connections with friends and family. Shared outdoor experiences can strengthen relationships and provide opportunities for support.

6. Encourages Mindfulness: Natural settings can enhance mindfulness, allowing individuals to be present and aware of their surroundings. This type of mindful practice can reduce rumination and improve emotional regulation.

7. Boosts Resilience: Engaging with nature can build resilience and improve coping skills. People often find solace and perspective in natural settings, which can help them deal with life's challenges more effectively.

8. Restores Mental Energy: Nature provides a restorative effect on mental fatigue. Spending time outdoors can replenish cognitive resources and improve overall mental performance.

9. Strengthens Immune Function: Some research suggests that exposure to nature may strengthen the immune system, which can indirectly support mental health by contributing to overall physical well-being.

10. Increases Feelings of Awe and Connectedness: Experiencing the beauty of nature can induce feelings of awe and interconnectedness, which are associated with greater life satisfaction and well-being.



Creative Activities in Nature

Incorporating nature into daily life, whether through gardening, walking in parks, or simply enjoying natural scenery, can significantly contribute to better mental health. Creativity too has long been known for its therapeutic benefits, and by combining creativity and nature additional therapeutic benefits can be experienced, such as connection, reflection, expression, increased awareness and mindfulness. This booklet offers a selection of creative activities which can help you connect with nature for the benefit of your personal wellbeing.

A Kind Reminder

Please don't damage the environment. Use what's fallen or about to fall. Take only pictures. Let everything you create, return back to nature.

Creative Writing in Nature

The [Healing Forest](#) website notes that writing about nature leads to an increased awareness of our surroundings. Creative writing in nature can enhance our attention and help us to become aware of our own state of being. Nature is a place where we can observe both our outer and inner landscapes. Why not take a notebook with you on your next walk and respond to the following prompts, or write freely following your own ideas.



- ***Choose two living things you see whilst walking and write about their relationship with one another.***
- ***Pick a tree that stands out to you during your time outdoors and write its life story.***
- ***Find a feather and write about its original owner and how they lost their feather.***
- ***What magical creatures do you imagine hide from sight in the forest or garden you visit?***
- ***Whilst walking on a beach imagine something washing ashore, what is it? Where did it come from? What is its purpose? What message has it for you?***

A blank, spiral-bound notebook with a white cover and a silver spiral binding on the left side. The notebook is open, showing two blank, lined pages. The lines are horizontal and evenly spaced.A blank, spiral-bound notebook with a white cover and a silver spiral binding on the left side. The notebook is open, showing two blank, lined pages. The lines are horizontal and evenly spaced.

Draw Birdsong

Sit in a garden and listen mindfully to the birds singing around you. Use some simple drawing materials such as oil pastel or crayons to draw the sounds you hear. Certain sounds may connect you with particular colours and shapes. You may like to record some of the birdsong you hear and learn about the birds you heard using the free [Merlin Bird ID app](#).

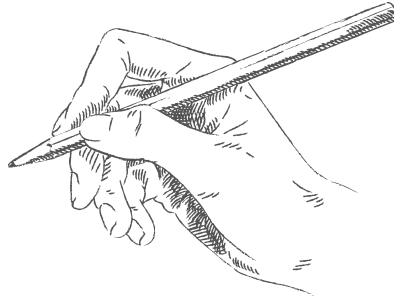
Bring Nature Indoors

Take a basket or box outdoors with you to gather fallen pinecones, leaves, seeds, shells and pebbles. Gather things that stand out to you and that you are attracted to. Look for interesting patterns and shapes and place natural treasured items in your basket or box to take home with you. Place your gathered items on a shelf or table-top to remind you of your time outside.



Flower and Leaf Shadow Art

Collect some flowers or leaves and hold above a plain sheet of paper with their shadow cast upon the paper. Use a pen to draw over the shadowy shapes to create a drawing or pattern to keep.



Nature's Paint Brushes

Use twigs, leaves, pines, seeds etc. to make a collection of paintbrushes. These make interesting marks when used with thinned down paint or inks. Enjoy experimenting with different materials and colours, use them for image-making outdoors or bring home and use to create artworks in your own space.



Dream Catcher

Native Americans created dream catchers originally, and placed them above their beds to catch bad dreams. They tended to use willow branches and items such as feathers and jewels; what natural materials will you find and use to make your own dream catcher?



Botanical Prints

Collect different leaves to use for creating a printed image at home. You may like to create some cards or wall hangings to display indoors.



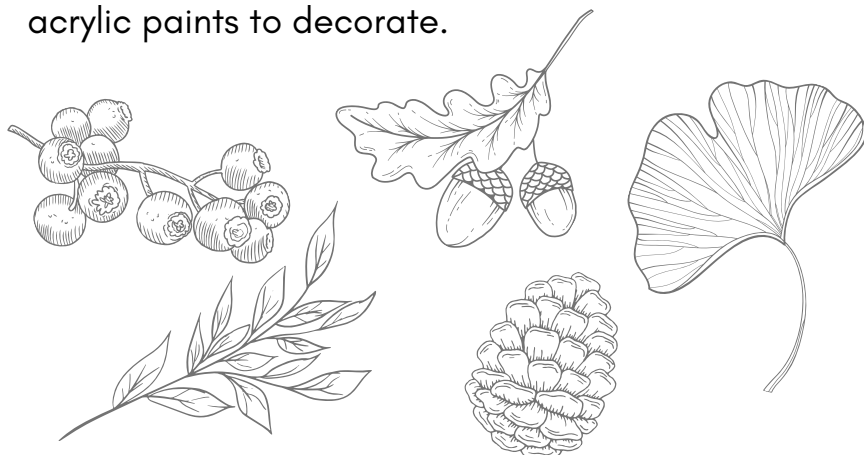
Floral Mandala

Use gathered leaves and flowers to create a mandala on the ground. In the ancient Sanskrit language of Hinduism and Buddhism, mandala means circle. Place your gathered materials in a circular pattern taking time to focus and enjoy the pattern making process. Take a photo to record your creation.



Nature Clay Plaques

Make decorative clay plaques by imprinting natural objects such as leaves, shells, and stones onto air-dry clay. Once dry paint with acrylic paints to decorate.

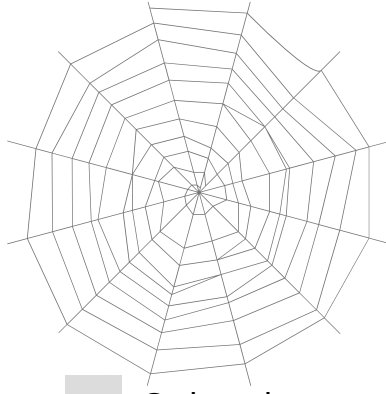


Scavenger Hunt

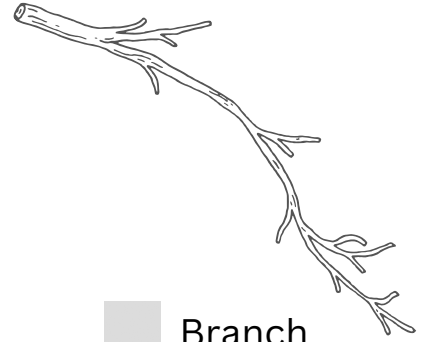
Search for the following items, you may like to tick them off or why not sketch a few of these items in you sketchbook or use them as inspiration for a short poem?



Tree stump



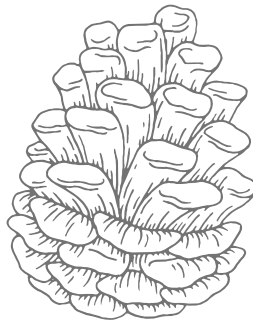
Cobweb



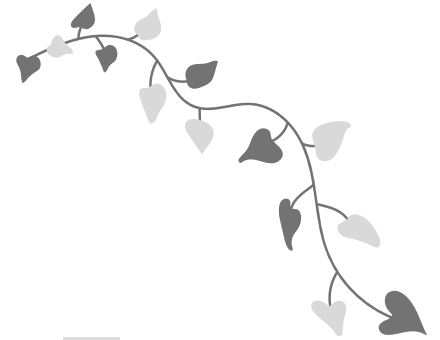
Branch



Footprint



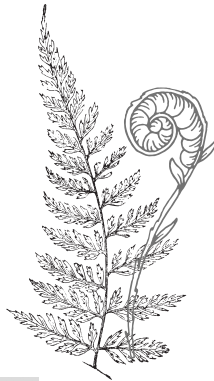
Pinecone



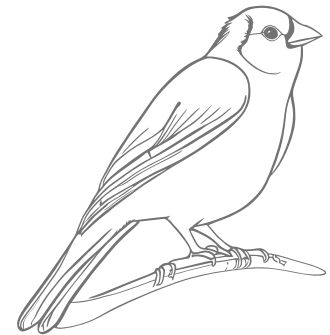
Vine



Leaf



Fearn



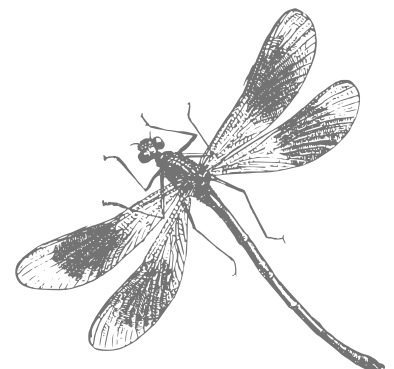
Bird



Feather



Fungi



Insect

Nature & the Five Ways to Wellbeing



The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a set of five, evidenced-based, actions that can help improve mental and social wellbeing. Here are a few suggestions of activities you can do in nature to help you achieve the five ways to wellbeing, you may also like to come up with your own ideas too...

Connect:

- Join a wildlife society or group
- Arrange a nature crafting date with friends and make together
- Go stargazing with family or friends

Keep Learning:

- Learn a new skill such as willow-weaving, printing or clay-work
- Explore works by artists and writers who use nature as their inspiration
- Visit a local nature reserve and learn about the wildlife there through nature study

Give:

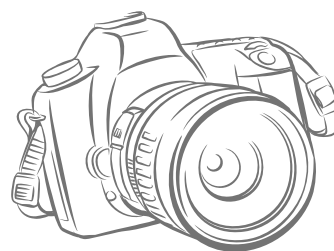
- Volunteer at the Bangor University Healing Garden or at Treborth Botanic Garden
- Make and distribute seed bombs so that flowers grow in verges or on waste ground
- Build a birdbox or bee water station with recycled materials

Be Active:

- Go on a photography walk
- Build a forest den
- Do some gardening or plant a window box

Take Notice:

- Do some bark or leaf rubbings
- Take close-up photos of plants and insects
- Notice the weather and changing seasons and draw or write about this in a notebook



Places to Visit

Enjoying nature does not necessarily need to involve long, complicated excursions. Make use of local parks or even stop and notice what is growing in urban areas, it's surprising where nature is able to inhabit.

Bangor University has several places you may wish to visit. College Park is located below the Main Arts Building, listen out for birdsong here and enjoy a carpet of bluebells during late March to May each year. Nearby is Neuadd Rathbone's Wellbeing Garden with various species of trees and flowers as well as some picnic benches, handy for sketching and writing. Bangor University's Healing Garden is another place you may like to visit, this is a student-led garden in the heart of Upper Bangor, next to the Church of Our Lady & St James on Ffriddoedd Road. Treborth Botanic Garden is a wonderful place to explore, this is a hidden gem located along the shores of the Menai Strait, with a stunning ancient woodland, garden borders, glasshouses as well as a Mindfulness Trail.

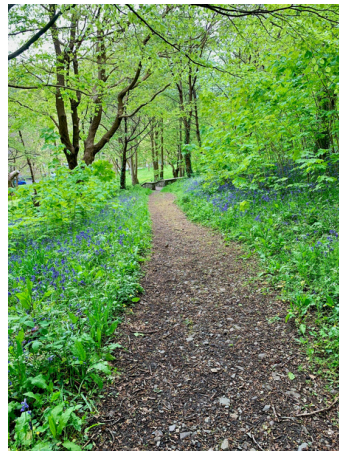
You may also like to explore Eithinog, Nantporth and Spinnies Aberogwen Nature Reserves which are all based in the Bangor area. Eithinog has a Health & Wellbeing Route you may like to follow. Visit www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org for more information on other nature reserves to visit.



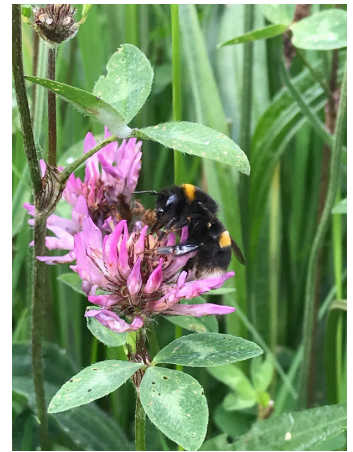
Treborth Botanic Garden



Wellbeing Garden



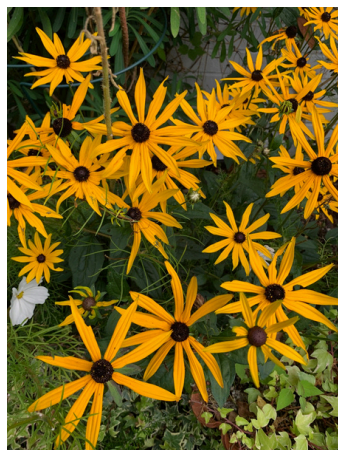
College Park



Healing Garden



Healing Garden



Treborth Botanic Garden



Healing Garden



Treborth Botanic Garden



Wellbeing Garden, Neuadd Rathbone

Hopefully you found this booklet useful. If you feel you could benefit from further wellbeing support from Bangor University's Wellbeing Service please contact us. The service offers Mental Health Advice, Counselling, Wellbeing Workshops and Art Therapy.

If you have found the creative activities in this booklet helpful you may be interested in working with an Art Therapist to support your mental wellbeing. Art therapy, a type of psychotherapy, offers emotional and psychological support during the most difficult periods of life. Working with a qualified art therapist helps people use art materials, discover the creative process and support them as they explore their thoughts and feelings through the images they create. Art therapy is available to students on a one-to-one basis or via group work, please visit the [Art Therapy webpage](#) for more details.

Contact details:

Wellbeing Service
Neuadd Rathbone
College Road
Bangor
LL57 2DF
01248 388520

wellbeingservices@bangor.ac.uk

<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/student-services/wellbeing/>

Or mental health support is available 24/7 in Wales by calling 111 and selecting option 2. More information is available at the following link:

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-advice/mental-health-hub/111-press-2/>