

Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Forest Bathing

Text by Marisol Clark, HTR & Jeanne Schultz, HTR

Photo by J. Schultz, HTR



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Clients will be introduced to a variety of outdoor meditation and contemplation activities based on natural cycles.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Follow instructions, strengthen communication skills

Physical: Expand strength & endurance for physical skills of walking, sitting, & stretching in outdoor settings

Psychological/Emotional: Encourage surprise, wonder, stillness

Sensory: Experience nature while using all 5 senses

Social: Experience the outdoors as a group & individually

Materials

Familiar walking or hiking trail
Journals
Writing utensils
Walking sticks
Yoga mats, towels or blankets
Timer
Sunglasses, sunscreen
Bug spray
Comfortable shoes, clothing
suitable for weather

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator determines the structure of the session based on the location, needs and interest of groups. Leaders decide if the group will walk together, split into small groups, or walk independently. Various introductory prompts have been included in this directive; however these are only meant to be a starting point for forest bathing. Facilitators may give advance notice to groups about the activity to encourage members to dress appropriately.
2. Facilitator begins session by distributing materials to group.
3. Explain to the group they will be spending time quietly exploring the outdoors. Introduce concept & practice of forest bathing.
4. Discuss the path with clients before beginning.
5. Determine how much time clients will observe the forest by themselves & how debriefing/discussion will occur.
6. Allow clients to find a comfortable spot to sit or stand & observe the outdoors or complete an activity or journal prompt.
7. Allow clients time to express the sensations they felt & experienced during the time outdoors.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: All ages can benefit from slowing down and building appreciation for the outdoors. Encouraging clients to look for and express moments of awe and wonder experienced during a session can also yield positivity and willingness to return to [forest bathing activities](#) throughout the year. **Discussion questions may include:** What part of the experience was challenging/rewarding/beneficial? What did you notice/observe about your mood/breathing/thoughts during the activity? What is a major take away?

Verbal prompts and related activities for sensory exploration could include:

Sight: Look for patterns in nature, repetitive designs. Notice the colors, shapes, and textures of leaves and roots and branches. Activity: [Create a Colorful Mandala](#).

Sound: Listen to the symphony of nature. Stand or sit still basking in your own silence. What does the forest sound like? Hear rustling of leaves, birdsongs, listen for the subtle sounds of the forest. Activity: Create a Sound Map.

Smell: Smell the fresh air and the evergreens. As you walk, smell a few different trees. Rub the evergreen and pine needles then take a deep breath. Activity: Harvest for Fragrant Arrangements.

Touch: Stand or sit still in one place. Take a moment to feel the ground beneath your feet. Touch a tree close to you. Notice the texture and strength of the tree trunk. Feel the pattern of the bark across your fingers. Activity: Tree Bark Rubbings Mosaic.

Taste: Open your mouth to taste the air as it passes or as a drop of rain falls onto your tongue.

Collect pine needles or ginkgo leaves to create stimulating tea. Activity: Create a Foraged Tea.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.

As well as hazardous areas and specific safety concerns of individuals and groups. Facilitator needs to inspect and verify safety of nature's items and each individual's lack of allergies, swallowing issues if tasting will occur.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Additional Activities:

Tree Breathing

Find a comfortable position and start to breathe. With each inhalation visualize or imagine the oxygen coming from the tree in through your nose or mouth and traveling down into your lungs. Pause to image in the trade off – oxygen goes into your bloodstream and carbon dioxide comes out; as your exhale, visualize the carbon dioxide leaving your body and the tree opposite you taking it in through its leaves. Visualize breathing in and out in rhythm with the tree.

Stand Tall

This exercise will help you to adopt the fortitude, perseverance, and appreciation for the resilience of trees. Look around for a tall tree that embodies a growth pattern you admire or find inspiring. Stand near or in view of this tree. Take a deep breath in and draw the security and strength of the Earth up through the soles of your feet into your torso and continuing up through your head. As you exhale, concentrate that sense of connection and feeling grounded. Continue breathing in and out, while visualizing roots extending down from the soles of your feet and out from the tips of your toes, spreading to secure you to this spot where you stand.

Sit Spot

A sit spot is a place of quiet awareness. It is the spot where you instinctively want to sit down and contemplate the universe. A sit spot needs to be revisited as it works slowly over time. Find a sit spot (*you can also stand or lean if sitting is uncomfortable*) you are drawn to and that you can easily revisit. Get comfortable and stay quietly in place for 1-2 minutes. Focus on observing the natural world around you. You might notice patterns or rhythms, and eventually perceive a deepening of your relationship to nature and your connection to the Earth. Over time, many people find that their sit spot becomes a place where they can go to cultivate presence, and a place that connects them through the present to their past and their future.

Letting Go

Trees shed leaves to help conserve water and energy during the winter. Fall is a natural time for trees and ourselves to let go of anything we do not want to hold onto anymore. Think about one specific thing that you want let go of or let be. With your eyes open or closed, picture whatever you want to let go of and place it into a leaf or visualize it going into many leaves on the same branch. In your mind's eye, see those leaves losing their connection to the branch and falling to the ground. Imagine them decomposing over the winter. Repeat this visualization as many times as you want to practice the mindfulness of letting go. Feel the space you have opened up in yourself, that can now be filled with new memories, habits or thoughts. Send compassion and gratitude to yourself and the trees for their gentle reminder of the cycles of life.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Antonelli, M., Barbieri, G., & Donelli, D. (2019). Effects of forest bathing (shinrin-yoku) on levels of cortisol as a stress biomarker: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Biometeorology*, 63(8).

Cleveland Clinic. (2023). [Forest bathing: What it is and its potential benefits](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/forest-bathing-what-it-is-and-its-potential-benefits/). *Health.clevelandclinic.org*.

Gilbert, C. (2019). *Forest bathing*, St. Martin's Press.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2025.