Dear Readers,

The practice of naturopathic medicine is based on the foundation that the body has a natural and innate way to heal. It’s our nature to heal.

It is also our nature to spend time in nature to heal. How much time? Two hours per week is all it takes. When people spend at least two hours a week in nature – parks, green spaces, forests and other natural environments – they are physically and mentally healthier than those who stay indoors, according to a study from 2019.

It doesn’t matter where you live, your income, or your occupation. Spending more time outdoors is good for general health. But, if you interact with nature in a very intentional way, it can do more than just improve overall health. The Japanese call the practice Shinrin Yoku, or forest bathing. When you bathe in nature, learn to bring in all your senses and take in your surroundings, your body responds at the cellular, gut and brain level.

Our experts, Cyndi Gilbert, ND, author of *Forest Bathing, Discovering Health and Happiness Through the Japanese Practice of Shinrin Yoku* (St. Martin’s Press) and Kurt Beil, ND, LAc, MPH, a practitioner and researcher in this field, shows you how to get the most out of your time in nature. We also include how to use poetry as a form of mindfulness while in nature, from Norman E. Rosenthal, MD author of *Poetry Rx: How 50 Inspiring Poems Can Heal and Bring Joy to Your Life* (G&D Media).

Since this is our Food as Medicine series, we also have healthy outdoor recipes and camping cooking tips from Linda Ly, and her book, *The New Camp Cookbook, Gourmet Grub for Campers, Road Trippers, and Adventurers* (Voyageur Press).

As naturopathic physicians, we believe in the importance of nature for healing. In the pages ahead, you will learn the health benefits of being in nature, how to use nature as a part of a meditative practice and healing foods to enjoy while spending time in nature.

In Good Health,

Michelle Simon, ND, PhD
President and CEO
Institute for Natural Medicine
naturemed.org
WHAT’S INSIDE
Health Advice on Nature and Mindfulness, Recipes for Outdoor Fun

The Art of Forest Bathing  3
Nature, Poetry, Health and Mindfulness  5
Outdoor Cooking Tips from Camp Cookbook  6
Savory Oatmeal with Shiitake and Spinach  7
Pizza Primavera  8
Energy Pin Balls  9
Grilled Watermelon with Gorgonzola and Pistachio  10
From the time a parent told us to get away from our screens and go outside, we’ve known there is something about the outdoors that changes us for the better. During the pandemic one of the only saving graces was access to the outdoors. Millions flocked to city, state and national parks not only for freedom and space from being cooped up, but also to feel alive and healthy during a time when staying healthy was precious.

Whether it’s a walk in a park, a hike in a forest or just sitting under a tree to rest, nature restores our soul. In truth, it does much more than that. When urban neighborhoods have more green space, the body produces less harmful levels of cortisol, our stress hormone, which can normalize blood pressure and blood sugar. Being in nature of any sort helps one age healthier, supports a healthy mood, enhances cognitive functionality, lowers blood sugar and blood pressure and reduces damaging inflammation.

Kurt Beil, ND, LAc, MPH, a practitioner and researcher in the field of nature and psychoneuroimmunology, as well as being a hiker and kayaker, says that nature is so good for us because it reminds our brains and bodies of ancient connections to the restorative and relaxing potential of the land and sky around us. Nature supports our parasympathetic nervous system, which is largely responsible for our body’s rest and digestive response. When the parasympathetic nervous system kicks in, it releases acetylcholine, a hormone that slows the heart rate, dilates blood vessels and plays an important role in memory and cognition.

In contrast, the body’s sympathetic system is our body’s quick and involuntary responses to both dangerous and stressful situations. “This can be from a true threat like a wild animal, but also from more modern perceived threats like loud traffic, a scary movie, or an argument with a co-worker. No matter which happens, the body’s response is the same,” says Dr. Beil. It’s the flight response, whereby the body is flooded with a barrage of hormones that increase alertness and heart rate, which sends extra blood to the muscles and extremities to take action or flee.

Our parasympathetic nervous system unravels what the sympathetic system does during times of stress to calm the body. Nature helps us balance our parasympathetic balance by lowering cortisol and adrenaline, and increasing endorphins that make us feel better. “Going for a retreat for a meditation class is great, but there is something special about being surrounded by the trees, the water, the air and the sounds of the birds that changes us physiologically,” says Dr. Beil.

WRITE YOURSELF A GREEN PRESCRIPTION

It’s pretty clear that being in nature is good for us. Can we make it even better? This is where the art and practice of forest bathing comes in. Dr. Cyndi Gilbert, a practicing naturopathic doctor and author of Forest Bathing: Discovering Health and Happiness Through the Japanese Practice of Shinrin Yoku (St. Martin’s Press, 2019) asks her patients about how frequently they are exposed to nature, a park or other natural

THE ART AND BENEFITS OF
SHINRIN YOKU, FOREST BATHING
environment. She says that despite their best efforts to eat healthy and work out, they struggle with life’s common health complaints of anxiety and depression, high blood pressure, insomnia, asthma, weight gain and indigestion.

What is missing? Time in nature and a relationship with nature. Dr. Gilbert often helps renew her patient’s relationship with nature by taking walks or sitting under a tree during their appointment. From there, she gives her patients *green prescriptions* to restore their connection to nature. A prescription might say, “sit beside a tree,” or “visit a park.”

Her green prescriptions also might suggest listening to a guided meditation under a tree to improve concentration or walking in the dew first thing in the morning to heighten energy. This is where forest bathing comes in. The practice is about setting aside time for nature and using your senses to nurture a relationship with nature. In a sense, it is really about returning home. “Intrinsically, most people know they feel better in a natural setting, whether that’s in the woods, on the beach or on a mountaintop,” Dr. Gilbert says. The problem is, we don’t take the time to get outdoors—neither adults nor children.

**LEARN TO FOREST BATHE**

Drs. Beil and Gilbert both agree, there is no wrong way to be one with nature and forest bathe. The only mistake you can make is not doing it. Go for a walk, sit under a tree, hike on a path, kayak in the water. It’s all forest bathing. However, Dr. Gilbert encourages you to engage your senses to ground yourself in the natural environment, connect to the forest and participate in an active form of meditation.

1. **LOOK CLOSELY.** Find a pleasant spot and take time to sit down and look at the colors, shapes, patterns and textures of the trees, plants, leaves, flowers and moss. Look for birds and animals.

2. **LISTEN INTENTLY.** Be silent and listen to the sounds around you. Trickling water, rushing creek, wind rustling the leaves, birds chirping, buzzing insects. Notice the sounds of the forest floor as you walk.

3. **SMELL DEEPLY.** Think about what you are smelling, such as the volatile oils from the trees, plants and flowers. What does the soil smell like when you run your shoe across the dirt?

4. **TASTE NATURE.** Open your mouth and taste the air, the rain and the snow. If you know a plant is safe, try it out (do not eat plants you suspect may be poisonous).

5. **TREE BREATHE.** Stand or sit facing a tree and breathe in and out with regular breaths (eyes open or closed). With each inhalation, visualize the oxygen from the tree entering your body, the carbon dioxide leaving your body and the tree taking it in.

6. **GRATITUDE MEDITATE.** Give intentional thanks for what you see in the forest. Thank the forest and thank yourself.

7. **FIND A SIT SPOT.** Whether a park or a forest, find a spot that speaks to your heart. Visit during different times of the day and seasons to observe the changes. Write or draw your impressions in a notebook. Use your sit spot as a regular anchor place when you need to connect with nature. *See Dr. Gilbert’s book for more ideas like these.*

If you want to take this practice to the next level, contact a naturopathic doctor to learn more about the benefits of botanical medicine and plant remedies. “There is a tree for everyone and every problem,” says Gilbert. However, consult with a medical expert before self-prescribing herbal medicines or related products.

**RESOURCES**

Kurt Beil, ND, LAc, MPH
drkurtbeil.com

Cyndi Gilbert, ND
cyndigilbert.ca

Norman Rosenthal MD, Poetry Rx
normanrosenthal.com/poetry-rx/

Linda Ly, *The New Camp Cookbook*
gardenbetty.com/the-new-camp-cookbook/

Association of Nature and Forest Therapy
natureandforesttherapy.org

Forest Bathing Central
forestbathingcentral.com

Big City Mountaineers
bigcitymountaineers.org

Urban Adventure Squad
urbanadventuresquad.org

More Youth Outdoor Programs (*Sunset Magazine*)
sunset.com/travel/outdoor-adventure/
outdoor-programs-for-youth

Find a naturopathic doctor with our directory
naturemed.org/find-an-nd/
For many who love the outdoors, nature is poetry. Some of the world’s most famous poems use nature as the backdrop for inspiration. Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*, *Water Bird* by Ralph Waldo Emerson and *Caged Bird* by Maya Angelo are just a few. We’ve talked about the healing power of nature, now imagine adding poetry in nature as a form of healing.

Norman E. Rosenthal, MD, is a psychiatrist known for his research on seasonal affective disorder (SAD). He pioneered light therapy to treat it. He understands better than most the importance of outdoor light and health. Now he has a just released book that adds a new way to heal with words. *Poetry Rx: How 50 Inspiring Poems Can Heal and Bring Joy to Your Life* (G&D Media, May 4, 2021). In each chapter, he shows how poetry can be used to heal the soul. He reveals the inner meaning of poems sentence-by-sentence.

As you read each poem, you begin to see how poetry is a form of meditation. The rhythmic patterns of each verse make room for new ways of thinking and healing from illness, anger, grief and loss. “By its sounds and rhythms, poetry can soothe and delight. This has been shown scientifically by researchers who have recorded gobbleups, chills, and changes in the brain’s reward circuitry in response to listening to poetry. By their conciseness and enchanting presentation, poems can offer important ideas cogently and powerfully in ways that prose cannot do,” says Dr. Rosenthal.

In the chapter, *Transcendence in Nature*, Dr. Rosenthal uses the poem, *Daffodils*, by William Wordsworth as a guide to experience both the poem and feelings while in nature. As mentioned earlier by Dr. Gilbert, by using your senses in nature, you can open up the mind and body to calm the mind, improve your health and take in the beauty around you. Before you read on, take a look at the sidebar and read the poem, *I Wandered as Lonely as a Child*, by William Wordsworth. Read it silently and then out loud. Now pay close attention to the following stanzas:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills.
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils.

Can’t you just feel the clouds floating over you, with the warm sun flickering in and out of the clouds? Then as if the bright, yellow-frilled flowers had legs, they dance into view. Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

As Dr. Rosenthal explains, “The poet takes his time to drink in and store this natural wonder and the emotions it evokes.” Wordsworth’s words, which were inspired by a walk with his wife in the Lake District in England, evokes the serenity and vibrancy of nature in just a few lines.

Dr. Rosenthal calls out the 19th century British philosopher, John Stuart Mill’s autobiography, where he calls Wordsworth poems, “a medicine for the mind,” which he claims cured his depression. Mill says his sensitive responses and descriptions to nature helped heal his mind. With that in mind, read these lines again:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;

How many times in the past year have you sat on the couch feeling vacant and pensive, thinking about being able to get away and get outside to enjoy the beauty of nature?

The next time you venture into nature, bring a poem with you. It may change the way you see your surroundings, your life and your future. “As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has closed down in many ways, depriving us of joy, companionship, love and adventure. Against this backdrop of loss and hardship, we are seeking novel remedies, and poetry is a surprisingly powerful remedy, not just for the moment but for our entire life. Poetry can serve both as a balm and a vaccine for the soul,” says Dr. Rosenthal.

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The rhythm of poetry is very similar to the practice of meditation and mindfulness. To get the most out of poetry, here are some simple suggestions from Dr. Rosenthal:

1. Read the poem more than once. New meanings will emerge on repeated readings.
2. Read the poem aloud. That will engage different neural pathways from those involved in reading it silently.
3. Listen to other people who read poetry beautifully, which may act as an inspiration when you read it in different ways.

*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*

By William Wordsworth (1807)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:

Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;

The next time you venture into nature, bring a poem with you. It may change the way you see your surroundings, your life and your future. “As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has closed down in many ways, depriving us of joy, companionship, love and adventure. Against this backdrop of loss and hardship, we are seeking novel remedies, and poetry is a surprisingly powerful remedy, not just for the moment but for our entire life. Poetry can serve both as a balm and a vaccine for the soul,” says Dr. Rosenthal.

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COOK OUTDOORS LIKE AN EXPERIENCED OUTFITTER

It's no secret that cooking outside makes food taste better. Maybe it's that cooking takes more time, being outdoors makes us hungrier, nature slows us down when eating, and of course, there are the views. Cooking outdoors doesn't have to be tofu hot dogs on a stick or dehydrated meals in a prepackaged bag. Yes, they should be simpler than how you eat at home, but don't be afraid to tap into your inner camp chef.

Linda Ly describes all the culinary gear you will need to set up a proper kitchen outdoors in her book, The New Camp Cookbook. In the book Ly describes cooking essentials, fire building methods and ethics, grilling toolbox and tips and how to cook over an open fire with foil, cookstove and a Dutch oven (an essential in our opinion). She also reviews food and forest safety, which we can all use from time to time as a refresher course.

WHAT TO PACK

We've collected a few tips from our experts for how to pack a camp kitchen and find the right gear:

1. Invest in good camping cookware and accessories: 12-inch skillet, 2-quart saucepan, 4-quart stock pan, 6-quart Dutch oven, coffee kit, metal skewers, heavy duty aluminum foil, mixing bowls, 2 cutting boards, knives, basic kitchen utensils, head lamp. Plus: cooler, plastic storage bin, camp stove and fuel, fire starting supplies, dishwashing station.

2. To keep expenses in check, look for used camping equipment at local or online consignment stores, such as Isella Outdoor and Gear Trade.

3. See page four resources for a list of nonprofits that support outdoor programs for adults and kids who may have never ventured outdoors.

4. Don't forget the three S's: sanitation, storage and safety. Pack disposable gloves, antibacterial wipes, food storage containers and a first aid kit.

5. Bring the basics: cooking fats and oils, spices, sweeteners, aromatic spices, condiments, canned-food staples, quick cooking sides (rice, quinoa, orzo, noodles), a few bailout foods if all else fails (soup, ramen and pouches of tuna).

6. Ly says pack aromatic flavor bombs like citrus zest, compound butters (blends of butter and chopped herbs), strong hard cheeses that survive without refrigeration and lastly nuts and seeds for quick energy and texture (pumpkins seeds, pine nuts, cashews, almonds, walnuts, pecans and macadamia nuts).

7. Prewash and prep as much fresh foods as possible before leaving the house. This cuts down on preparation time and reduces campsite waste. Pre-cut fresh vegetables, onions and garlic and even pre-crack eggs. Store in silicon bags or sealed jars.

8. Chill the cooler with ice a few hours before you pack up so your food stays fresher longer. Discard the old ice and refill with fresh just before packing. Don't skimp on the amount of ice, it's essential for food safety.

9. Keep drinks, perishables and meats separate. Chill and pre-freeze as much food as possible.

10. Pack food in groups. Remember your menu and pack in chronological order so you aren't rummaging around too much and warming up the food.

11. Place ice in the bottom and alternative layers of ice and food. If there is any air left, place a towel in the gap to push warm air out.

12. Store coolers in the shade away from the sun at the campsite.
Savory Oatmeal with Shiitake and Spinach

We like how cookbook author, Linda Ly, bumped up the flavor of oatmeal in this savory dish. It’s an any-kind-of-day recipe, good for breakfast, lunch or dinner. She suggests adding a protein, such as cooked chicken or grilled tofu to round out the nutrients.

Makes 4 servings.

INGREDIENTS
2 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 medium shallot, finely chopped
3 cups chicken or vegetable broth
2 cups toasted instant oatmeal (see below)
8 medium (3 oz) shiitake mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
3 cups (100 g) packed baby spinach
Leftover cooked chicken or grilled tofu (optional)
2 Tablespoons ponzu sauce, plus more for serving

METHOD
1. Drizzle tablespoon of oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Add shallots and cook until they turn translucent, about 2 minutes. Add the broth and oatmeal and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally until the oats are your preferred consistency. Keep warm.

2. Meanwhile, set a large skillet over medium-high heat and swirl remaining Tablespoon of olive oil. Add mushrooms, salt and pepper. Cook until mushrooms are soft, 3-5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the spinach and ponzu, stir to combine, and cook until the spinach is wilted, about 2 minutes.

3. Divide the oatmeal, mushrooms, and spinach among 4 bowls. Add protein if desired. Drizzle with a little more ponzu before serving.

Recipe adapted from the Rise and Shine chapter of The Camp Cookbook.

TOASTED INSTANT OATMEAL

Make your own instant oatmeal before packing up your food and gear.

INGREDIENTS
4 cups rolled oats
1 teaspoon kosher salt

METHOD
Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Spread oats on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for 10-15 minutes, stirring halfway until lightly toasted but not browned. Cool. Place half oats in a food processor and pulse until finely crumbled. Transfer to a sealable bag or lidded container.

Optional for sweet oats, stir in 1/4 cup brown sugar and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon before packing.
**Pizza Primavera**

Like the pasta that inspired it, this pizza primavera is loaded with fresh spring vegetables. When the veggies are picked at their peak and eaten in season, little more is needed to enhance their sweetness than the kiss of a grill. This is the kind of pizza you make for that first warm-weather get-together when everything starts to turn green and your favorite campground opens again. Don’t forget to pack a portable grill with a lid, as you’ll need one to properly melt the cheeses while the bottom crisps up.

Makes 4 servings.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 pound (450 g) homemade or store-bought pizza dough
- 6 medium asparagus spears, trimmed (about 1/4 pound/113 g)
- 1/2 small head broccoli florets (about 1/4 pound/113 g)
- 4 scallions
- Olive oil spray
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) prepared pizza sauce
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup (36 g) shelled English peas or thawed frozen peas
- 1/4 cup (25 g) grated Parmesan cheese

**METHOD**

1. Bring the chilled pizza dough to room temperature for about 30 minutes.

2. Prepare a grill for high heat.

3. Lightly spray the asparagus, broccoli, and scallions with oil.

4. Grill the vegetables until tender and lightly caramelized, 3 to 5 minutes, turning frequently.

5. Transfer the vegetables to a cutting board as they are cooked and chop into bite-size pieces. Keep the chopped vegetables near the grill for easy topping later.

6. Divide the dough in half and shape into 2 smooth balls. Working with the first ball of dough, flatten and stretch it into an 8-inch (20-cm) round. Lightly mist it with oil and place the dough, oiled side down, over direct heat. Cover and grill until the bottom is lightly browned with good grill marks and the crust is barely cooked on top, about 2 minutes.

7. Mist the crust with oil and turn it over. Working quickly, spread half the sauce over it, followed by half each of the mozzarella, grilled vegetables, and peas. Top with half the Parmesan, then cover and continue grilling until the crust is crisp and browned and the cheeses are melted, 3 to 5 minutes more.

8. Periodically check the pizza to ensure the crust isn’t scorching, and reduce the heat if necessary. Repeat the process for making the second pizza.

**NOTE:** You will need a pair of metal tongs for lifting and checking the crust for doneness, turning it over, and dragging the pizza off the grill.

Recipe adapted from the Rise and Shine chapter of *The Camp Cookbook.*
Energy Pin Balls
Amy Rothenberg, ND developed this recipe when her kids were little—she had three under the age of four. She remembers thinking they seemed like a bunch of pin balls because they would get stirred up from whatever they were playing, zip and bounce around the house and then disappear, which could mean trouble. These healthy-fat, high in protein snacks, are named for that time in her life because they whip up fast and disappear quickly.

They are loaded with nutritious nut butters and seeds, for healthy fats, protein, zinc, selenium and prebiotics. Try to use organic ingredients and be creative by using different nut butters, seeds, nuts, sweeteners and spices. They do not need to be refrigerated for outdoor play, bike rides, hikes, picnics or camping.

INGREDIENTS
1/2 cup plus 2 Tablespoons organic peanut butter or almond butter, or half and half
1/8 to 1/4 cup honey or other liquid sweetener of your choice
1 teaspoon vanilla extract or a little more if you like
1/3 cup flavorless protein powder of choice (we used pea-based protein powder)
1/3 cup ground flaxseed
1/2 cup whole rolled oats
1/2 scant teaspoon cinnamon
1 Tablespoon chia, sesame or sunflower seeds or any nut combination thereof
1 Tablespoon mini chocolate chips (we suggest LILY’S brand which contains no-refined sugar)
1/4 cup of shredded coconut
1 Tablespoon coconut oil

METHOD
1. Throw everything but the chocolate chips into a food processor. Pulse until mixed finely chopped, but not pureed. Or, for a coarser blend, mix it with your hands for an arm workout or a fun kid’s cooking project. The mixture will be moist but crumbly when done.

2. Add in those delicious chocolate chips and start rolling. Make golf ball size or smaller (1 1/2 inches is ideal). You can then roll in additional shredded coconut if you like.

3. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator. They freeze well or are great gifts. Place in small jars and tie with a ribbon for a healthy gift.
INGREDIENTS

1 (5-pound/2.2-kg) seedless baby watermelon, cut into 1-inch-thick wedges
Crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
Chopped pistachios
Chopped fresh thyme
1 lemon (optional)

METHOD

1. Prepare a grill over medium-high heat.

2. Place the watermelon on the grill and cook for 2 to 3 minutes on each side, until the surface is seared and glossy but the interior retains its crunch.

3. Sprinkle with a few handfuls of Gorgonzola, pistachios, and thyme to taste. Add a squeeze of lemon juice if desired.

This recipe is courtesy of The New Camp Cookbook, by Linda Ly.