

## 2018-11-30 - "FOREST BATHING: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness"

Community Comment Recorded on 11/29/18 - Darus Trutna - 550 words

Hi, this is Darus Trutna and for this community comment I wanted to express my appreciation for our local forests and to share with you the Japanese concept of "Forest Bathing."

What is Forest Bathing, you ask? Well, we all know how good being in nature can make us feel. We have known it for centuries. The sounds of the forest, the scent of the trees, the sunlight playing through the leaves, the fresh, clean air — these things give us a sense of comfort. They ease our stress and worry, help us to relax and to think more clearly. Being in nature can restore our mood, give us back our energy and vitality, refresh and rejuvenate us.

Now the term "forest bathing" is a translation of the Japanese term Shinrin-yoku. Shinrin in Japanese means "forest," and yoku means "bath." The concept of "Forest Bathing" as an actual health care tool was developed in Japan during the 1980s and has become a cornerstone of preventive health care and healing in Japanese medicine. Researchers primarily in Japan and South Korea have established a robust body of scientific literature on the health benefits of spending time under the canopy of a living forest.

The idea is simple: *if a person simply visits a natural area and walks in a relaxed way, there are calming, rejuvenating and restorative benefits to be achieved.* This is not exercise, or hiking, or jogging. It is simply being in nature, connecting with it through our senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.

Many know this intuitively, but in the past several decades there have been many scientific studies that are demonstrating the mechanisms behind the healing effects of simply being in wild and natural areas. For example, many trees give off organic compounds that support our "NK" (natural killer) cells that are part of our immune system's way of fighting cancer.

The scientifically-proven benefits of Forest Bathing include:

- Boosted immune system functioning, with an increase in the count of the body's Natural Killer (NK) cells.
- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced stress
- Improved mood
- Increased ability to focus, even in children with ADHD
- Accelerated recovery from surgery or illness
- Increased energy level
- Improved sleep

Forest therapy approaches such as Shinrin-yoku have roots in many cultures throughout history. John Muir wrote, *"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home. Wilderness is a necessity."*

So how does one go about forest bathing? First, simply find a spot you wish to explore. The McKay track near Redwood Acres has some wonderful forest trails to explore. Make sure you have left your phone and camera behind or at least turn them off. You are going to be walking aimlessly and slowly. You don't need any devices. Let your body be your guide. Listen to where it wants to take you. Follow your nose. And take your time. A one-hour forest bath will help you to unplug from technology and slow down. It will bring you into the present moment and de-stress and relax you.

We are fortunate here in Humboldt County to have so many beautiful and convenient locations for our own "Forest Bathing" sessions. This has been Darus Trutna with Community Comment and I wish you health, strength, and happiness.