



Children more than ever, need opportunities to be in their bodies in the world...It's this engagement between limbs of the body and bones of the earth where true balance and centeredness emerge.

-David Sobel

We can work to create the most creative loose parts environment possible and we would still have trouble topping the benefits provided by Mother Nature herself. Research tells us the wilder the space, the better -- in terms of children's intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual development. If you can leave part of your space a little more "wild", you'll be doing the children (and yourself) a great service. Perhaps you can work in a visit once a week to a more natural wild place -- it's worth the effort.

You have probably heard of Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* and the man who coined the term "Nature Deficit Disorder." Louv contends there is a significant difference between going outside to play on a playground and spending time in a more natural, wild setting. Here are the ten reasons Richard Louv says we need to provide children with regular doses of "Vitamin N":

Ten Reasons Why Children and Adults Need Vitamin N

FROM RICHARD LOUV ON JUNE 24, 2011

“Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.”

— Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

- 1. The more high-tech our lives become, the more nature we need.** We have a human right to a meaningful connection to nature, and we have the responsibilities that come with that right. Few today would question the notion that every person, especially every young person, has a right to access the Internet. We should also have access to the natural world, because that connection is part of our humanity. [We'd like to add that the recent trend toward more online learning due to the Covid-19 disruption amplifies the need for time in nature.]
- 2. Humans are hard-wired to love and need exposure to the natural world.** Researchers have found that regardless of culture people gravitate to images of nature. Our inborn affiliation for nature may explain why we prefer to live in houses with particular views of the natural world.
- 3. We suffer when we withdraw from nature.** Australian professor Glenn Albrecht, director of the Institute of Sustainability and Technology Policy at Murdoch University, has coined the term solastalgia. He combined the Latin word solacium (comfort - as in solace) and the Greek root algia (pain) to form solastalgia, which he defines as "the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault."
- 4. Nature brings our senses alive.** Scientists recently found that humans have the ability to track by scent alone. Some humans rival bats in echolocation or biosonar abilities. These are often individuals who spent a good percentage of their time in nature as children. [Our addition: with the increasing number of children who have some form of sensory processing challenge, the benefit of

time spent in nature is a therapeutic aid we would be foolish to overlook.]

- 5. Individuals and businesses can become nature smart.** Spending more time outdoors nurtures our "nature neurons" and our natural creativity. For example, at the University of Michigan, researchers demonstrated that, after just an hour interacting with nature, memory performance and attention spans improved by 20 percent. In workplaces designed with nature in mind, employees are more productive and take less sick time.
- 6. Nature heals.** Pennsylvania researchers found that patients in rooms with tree views had shorter hospitalizations, less need for pain medications, and fewer negative comments in the nurses' notes, compared to patients with views of brick.
- 7. Nature can reduce depression and improve psychological well-being.** Researchers in Sweden have found that joggers who exercise in a natural green setting feel more restored and less anxious, angry, or depressed than people who burn the same amount of calories jogging in a built urban setting.
- 8. Nature builds community bonds.** Levels of neurochemicals and hormones associated with social bonding are elevated during animal-human interactions. Researchers at the University of Rochester report that exposure to the natural environment leads people to nurture close relationships with fellow human beings, value community, and to be more generous with resources.
- 9. Nature bonds families and friends.** New ways are emerging to make that bond, such as family nature clubs, through which multiple families go hiking, gardening or engage in other outdoor activities together. In the U.K., families are forming "green gyms" to bring people of all ages together to get exercise in nature.
- 10. The future is at stake.** The natural world's benefits to our cognition and health will be irrelevant if we continue to destroy the nature around us [...] The future of humanity is at stake.

To truly know the world, look deeply within your own being; to truly know yourself, take real interest in the world. -Rudolf Steiner