

Research Notes: Psychological Benefits of Turf and Other Vegetation

Definition: ecopsychology *n.*

1. The emerging synthesis of ecology and psychology
2. The skillful application of ecological insight to the practice of psychotherapy
3. The study of our emotional bond with the Earth
4. The search for an environmentally-based standard of mental health
5. Re-defining “sanity” as if the whole world mattered

Source: The Ecopsychology Institute (<http://ecopsychology.athabascau.ca/>)

“Eco-psychologists believe that we humans have an innate affinity with the natural world and experience positive mood states when we are in green places, by water or up mountains.” (Source: Realbuzz.com, www.realbuzz.com/fitness/)

Ecopsychologic facts associated with turf and trees:

1. Hospital patients whose beds merely looked out on to a view of trees and grass healed faster than those who looked out on to a brick wall. (source: Realbuzz.com)
2. Findings from several studies have converged in indicating that simply viewing certain types of nature and garden scenes significantly [reduces] stress in hospital patients within only five minutes or less, as well as aiding recovery evident by shorter hospital stays and reduced dependency on pain medications. (source: Hooked on Nature, www.hookedonnature.org/research)
3. Seeing nature or being outside lowers stress levels, lowers blood pressure and calms heart rates. (source: Hooked on Nature)
4. Older people living near green spaces tend to live longer than their concrete-jungle counterparts. (source: Hooked On Nature)
5. Psychological benefits of nature have shown that natural setting – trees, gardens and the like – have a profound, positive impact on both mental and physical health. (source: A walk in the Woods, by John Lofy; University of Michigan Michigan Today, www.umich.edu/news)
6. Psychological health of cancer patients “improved dramatically” after they spent 20 minutes a day, three days a week, doing restorative activities such as gardening or walking in the woods. A control group that did not do the activities showed notably less improvement. (John Lofy)
7. Residents of public housing projects who live near trees “showed all kinds of benefits – more civility, less aggression. And girls were more likely to study their schoolwork”. (source: Professor Stephen Kaplan, University of Michigan)
8. Yet another study promotes the natural world as a resource for personal growth. It stresses how nature may help individuals build responsible and fulfilling relationships and offers sensory activities which show how nature can lead people to emotional health by teaching them its “non-language communication”. (Hooked on Nature)
9. Schools that have embraced a nature-based curriculum are rewarded with higher test scores, fewer discipline problems and an altogether more engaged and enthusiastic student population.

Another study argues that children need contact with nature to grow well. Suggests that nature stimulates powers of observation, creativity and a sense of peace. (source: Hooked on Nature)

10. "... Single most powerful factor in avoiding stress-related burnout was "locomotion in nature", i.e., walking, running, biking, canoeing. (The quickest route to burnout was watching television.) (source: Lisa Canin)
11. The natural setting doesn't have to be big or pristine to have a positive effect. "Most of all, it has to be nearby". (source: Professor Rachel Kaplan, Univ. of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment)
12. In the inner city, residents of buildings with more vegetation know their neighbors better, socialize with them more often, have stronger feelings of community and feel safer and better adjusted than do residents of building with little or no vegetation. (source: Univ. of Illinois, researchers Kuo, Sullivan, Coley and Brunson, 2002)
13. One study showed improved science scores and other benefits among at-risk sixth grade students in Los Angeles, San Diego and Fresno who participated in week-long residential environmental education programs known as 'outdoor science schools'. (source: American Institutes for Research)
14. Simply having a view of farmland from a prison cell reduced inmates' need for health care. (source: Ernest Moore, Milan, Michigan State Prison)

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