

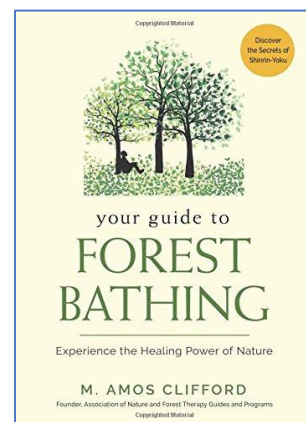


## Forest Therapy: Eight Steps to Begin

Also known as **Forest Bathing** (from the Japanese “**Shinrin-Yoku**”), Forest Therapy helps us remember our place in a kin-centric network of relationships with all beings. When done repeatedly as a regular practice it brings many health benefits. Because it creates strong bonds between people and natural environments, forest bathing is an important foundation for ecological awareness and activism.

This Starter Kit contains instructions for a very simple, basic, yet lovely forest bathing walk that you can do on your own. To develop your practice, we highly recommend that you learn with a Certified Forest Therapy Guide, if there is one in your area. If not, perhaps you will feel called to become one.

The information in this kit is adapted from [Your Guide to Forest Bathing: Experience the Healing Power of Nature](#), by M. Amos Clifford, founder of the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs. The book is available from all major book retailers, and is available in several non-English editions, and as an Audio book.



**Step 1: Check to see if there is a guide in your area**

<http://www.forestbathing.info/find-a-guide.html>



A trained guide will help you learn the fundamentals, so you can build a strong practice on your own. You may be surprised at how helpful it is to with a guide, and in an organized group. Although forest bathing is simple, it can be quite difficult to learn how to slow down and tune in to your senses.

Guides also organize group walks. They've scouted the best trails and know them intimately. One of the core experiences of a guided walk is the way the guides will encourage you to reflect on and share your experiences with others. Guides may also make tea from wild plants and serve it during discussion time at the end of the forest bath. This is often a time for questions and answers, and to learn more about the practice: it's history and origins, how it is spreading across the globe, the science behind forest bathing, and the methods used by practitioners.

If there is no guide in your area, or if you prefer to try forest bathing on your own, the next seven steps will help get you started.

## Step 2: Learn these General Guidelines



- Work with the forest as a *partner*, rather than as a setting for an activity. When you skillfully open yourself to the forest, it will work with you in a positive way.
- Keep your focus on embodiment and sensory experience; don't over-think it.
- Minimize efforts to *achieve* anything.
- Ideally, your walks will last between two and four hours. This allows enough time for your mind and body to slow down and become relaxed.
- You won't go very far, often only a half mile or less. It's about *being here*, not *getting there*.
- Your primary goal is not to get a workout. It's more like playtime with a meditative feeling. If you find yourself working out, just pause for a moment of stillness, then proceed again slowly.
- While you can forest bathe in any natural environment, ideally your walks should take place in a wooded environment, with streams and meadows and minimal intrusion from human-made sounds such as traffic or construction.
- The trail should be accessible and easy to walk on.
- Go unplugged, without technological barriers between your senses and the forest.
- Don't let concepts such as "mindfulness" or "walking meditation" trick you into making efforts to experience anything other than what the forest offers.
- Don't let the experiences of others or outcomes such as the feelings of awe described in research studies trick you into trying to have those same experiences. Let each walk be its own experience; avoid trying to recreate prior positive experiences.

### Step 3: Find a Suitable Place for Forest Bathing



**Close to Home:** To develop a consistent forest bathing practice, begin by exploring trails closer to home so its easy to return many times and in all seasons.

**An Ease-Full Trail:** Find a trail that is easy and pleasant to walk on, without much physical exertion.

**Sit Spots:** There should be pleasant places along the trail to sit and rest with a reasonable degree of solitude.

**Access to Natural Waterways:** Ideally, there is at least one place where you can safely enjoy wild water flowing in a natural stream.

**Mixed Experience:** Trails that include forest canopy and open meadow are best. Give special attention to the boundaries where the woods meet the meadow; these are often where you will find the greatest diversity. You can also forest bathe along the sea shore, in deserts, and in almost any other natural setting.

**Natural Sounds:** The ideal soundscape consists of entirely natural sounds such as babbling brooks, wind in the trees, birdcalls, and so forth.

## Step 4: Arrive

Arriving means much more than simply showing up at the trail head. It means noticing three things:

1. **The place you are in.** Standing in one place, look around and comment out loud on whatever you are noticing about the place. Do this until you feel you have a deeper awareness of where you are now.
2. **Your body.** Notice your body. Feel how you are standing. Pick up a stone (about the size of an apple) and slowly move it around; as you do, trace the feelings of movement throughout your muscles, tendons, and bones.
3. **Tune in to your senses.** Your senses are the links that connect you with the forest. Take 15 minutes to stand in one place and tune in to them. It may help to close your eyes. First notice the sensations on your skin. Allow enough time for awareness to develop so you notice sensations that were not at first apparent. Then turn your attention to hearing. Try to hear the quietest sound nearby, and the farthest away bird sound. Next, open your mouth and breath just loudly enough to blend the sound of your breathing with the sound of the forest. Let this combined sound be a way of reducing any sense of separation you may feel between you and the forest. As you continue to breath through your mouth, notice the tastes and textures of the air. Next breathe through your nose and discover as many scents as you can distinguish. Finally, slowly open your eyes, letting the forest show you something you have not seen before.



## Step 5: Walk Slowly.

For 15 minutes, walk slowly while silently noticing what is in motion in the forest.

There is always movement, even when things seem perfectly still. Strands of a web drift in the air, trees move in the breezes, birds fly by, and squirrels scramble in the branches, grasses bend, insects crawl. Creeks are perpetually changing their shape and tune. Inside you there is also motion.

Your inner motion cannot avoid mirroring the motion of the world around you, and vice versa. The soothing sound of a breeze will be mirrored within you as calm; in turn, your calm will encourage the squirrels and birds not to flee at your approach.

If you start feeling rushed or distracted, come to a complete halt and focus your attention on something nearby, noticing how it is moving.



## Step 6: Make Friends with the Forest.



Notice what tree, stone, flower, or other being of the forest you feel most drawn to. Approach it in a friendly way. Speaking out loud, introduce yourself. Offer it your friendship.

As a friend, take time to listen to it. Notice what arises in your imagination, where the natural world often makes impressions; perhaps a flow of images, memories, body sensations, and ideas will come you, as a kind of conversation from your new friend. Tell it what you are receiving.

Speaking and listening, let your friendship ripen in the rich field of imagination, until you feel your conversation is complete.

Thank your new friend and continue your walk.

## Step 7: Sit Spot.



Sit spot is a very simple and very powerful practice. It is one of the best methods of nature connection, supporting healing, cultivating awareness of self and others, and deepening relationships with the more-than-human world. When done in the context of forest bathing, sit spot is a practice-within-the-practice.

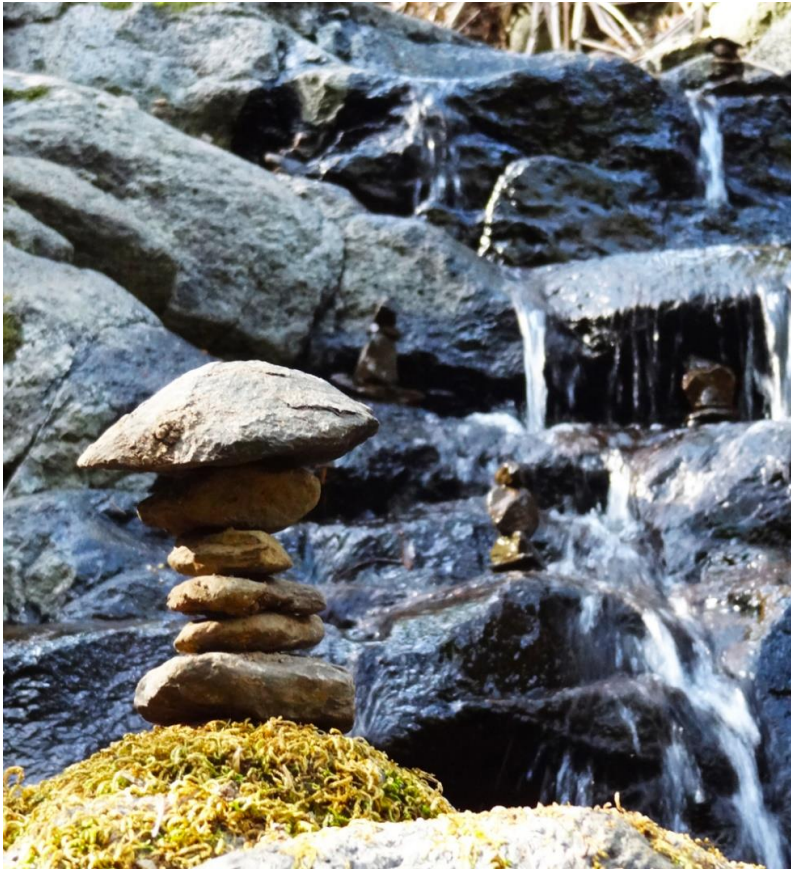
A very common sit spot experience is “the slow reveal.” The longer you sit, the more you notice. You may sit for fifteen minutes before you realize tiny flowers are growing right in front of you. It may be twenty minutes before the shy fox pokes its nose out of a bush to get a better sniff of the human with the unusually still behavior. In the relative stillness, an inner stillness also emerges; when it does, the other beings in the area may respond by making themselves more readily known. Let things reveal themselves when they choose.

Twenty minutes is a good minimum time for sit spot.



## Step 8: Give Back

Reciprocity increases awareness of the many ways in which we are connected with the more-than-human world. It supports the development of relationships. Aim to creatively practice the reciprocity of both giving and receiving in all your forest bathing outings. You can do this anywhere, at any time, following this simple method:



1. Notice what things exist around you. Either silently or quietly speaking (preferred), acknowledge the thing and describe what you have received from it (and its type): for example, “Here is a tree, which has shared shade and places to rest.”

2. Find something to offer it. This could be a gesture or a song; perhaps you would like to write a note and conceal it where only the earth can read it. Allow time for an inspiration to appear.

Learn to incorporate this idea into all your forest bathing activities. It will help to hone your understanding of your relationship to all things.

Thank you for forest bathing. For more information please visit [www.forestbathing.info](http://www.forestbathing.info)

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