Earth Day and the Healing Power of Nature

April 22, 2019 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Today is Earth Day. The first Earth Day was in 1970, signaling the birth of the modern environmental movement. When I think of the earth, my mind gravitates towards nature. Nature and our human selves are interdependent; nature depends on us, we depend on it. However, although we know this intuitively, sometimes we take this knowledge for granted.

Science is beginning to examine the healing power of nature. Contact with nature is an emerging field of research showing the potential to influence some important public-health problems. Nature, whether in the midst of it, or viewed from indoors, may have some powerful health benefits.

Gregory Bratman, Ph.D., assistant professor and the Doug Walker Endowed Professor at the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, University of Washington is researching this subject. He found that contact with nature may improve health and prevent problems. You can read about him here and view his talk here.

In the United States, some of us seem divorced from nature. Some cultures emphasize the healing powers of nature. People in Japan are encouraged to walk in the woods in forest therapy centers, participating in shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing. Japanese researchers studied the health benefits of spending time in nature, and found clear benefits to those who walked in the woods compared to urban walkers. Nature walkers had lower stress hormones, blood pressure and heart rates; they also had increased immune chemicals.

It is a beautiful spring day here in the Sierra foothills. I have planned a walk later today. I know that this will energize me. John Muir said it well when he wrote, “In every walk with nature, one receives far more than one seeks.”

Celebrate earth, celebrate you. Whether you buy a house plant, gaze out your window at a tree, or plant your feet in the soil, call on the healing power of nature.

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