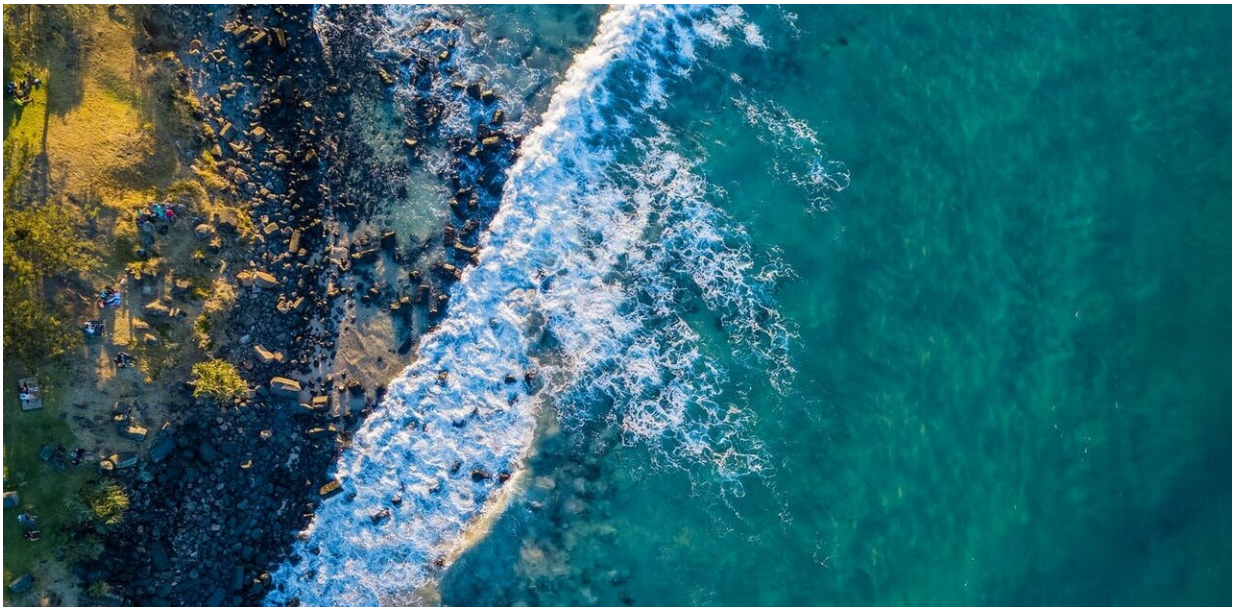


Can't go outside? Even seeing nature on a screen can improve your mood

April 29 2020, by Cris Brack



Credit: Damon Hall/Unsplash, CC BY

Are you feeling anxious or irritated during the coronavirus lockdown? Do you constantly want to get up and move? Maybe you need a moment to engage with nature.

Getting into the great outdoors is difficult at right now. But our research soon to be published in *Australian Forestry* shows you can improve your mood by experiencing nature indoors. This could mean placing few [pot](#)

[plants](#) in the corner of your home office, or even just looking at photos of [plants](#).

Our work adds to a compelling body of research that shows being around nature directly benefits our mental health.

Biophilia

Public gardens and parks, street verges with trees and bushes, and even rooftop gardens bring us a [broad range of benefits](#) – boosting [physical health](#), reducing [air pollution](#), and even [lowering crime rates](#).

But inside, in your hastily constructed home office or home school room, you may be unable to take full advantage of urban nature.

Embracing the notion of "biophilia"—the innate human affinity with nature—while locked down inside may improve your productivity and even your health.

The biophilia hypothesis argues modern day humans evolved from hundreds of generations of ancestors whose survival required them to study, understand and rely on nature. So a disconnection from nature today can cause [significant issues for humans](#), such as a decline in psychological health.

In practice at home, connecting with nature might mean having large windows overlooking the garden. You can also [improve working conditions](#) by having [natural materials](#) in your office or school room, such as wooden furniture, natural stones and pot plants.



Virtual images of nature have similar effects to being in the physical presence of nature. Credit: Kishoor Nishanth/Unsplash, [CC BY](#)

Indoor plants

Our research has demonstrated that even a small number of plants hanging in pockets on along a busy corridor provide enough nature to influence our physiological and psychological perceptions.

These plants even caused behavioral differences, where people would [change their route](#) through a building to come into contact with the indoor plants.

We surveyed 104 people, and 40% of the respondents reported their mood and emotions improved in the presence of indoor plants.

They felt "relaxed and grounded" and "more interested." The presence of indoor greenery provides a place to "relax from routine" and it made the space "significantly more pleasant to work in."

As one person reported: "When I first saw the plants up on the wall brought a smile to my face."

Whenever I walk down the stairs or walk past I mostly always feel compelled to look at the plants on the wall. Not with any anxiety or negative thoughts, rather, at how pleasant and what a great idea it is.



Natural products such as wooden furniture can also improve working conditions.
Credit: Noemi Macavei Katocz/Unsplash, [CC BY](#)

Looking at wildlife photography

Our research also explored whether viewing images, posters or paintings of nature would make a difference.

We photographed the plants from viewpoints similar to those the corridor users experienced. Survey responses from those who only viewed these digital images were almost the same as those who experienced them in real life.

While we can't say for sure, we can hypothesize that given the importance of vision in modern humans, an image that "looks" like nature might be enough to trigger a biophilic response.

However, physically being in the presence of plants did have some stronger behavioral effects. For example corridor users wanted to linger longer looking at the plants than those who viewed the photographs, and were more likely to want to visit the plants again. Maybe the other senses—touch, smell, even sound—created a stronger biophilic response than just sight alone.

So the good news is if you can't get to a nursery—or if you have a serious inability to keep plants alive—you can still benefit from looking at photographs of them.

If you haven't been taking your own photos, search the plethora of images from wildlife photographers such as [Doug Gimesy](#), [Frans Lanting](#) and [Tanya Stollznow](#).



Our study showed the benefits of indoor greenery. Author provided

Or check out live camera feeds of a wide range of environments, and travel to far-flung places without leaving the safety of home.

While we haven't tested the mood-boosting effects of live videos, we hypothesize their physiological and psychological effects will be no different than digital photographs.



Looking at photos of nature can improve your mood. Credit: Bee Balogun/Unsplash, [CC BY](#)

Here are seven places to help you get started.

- The [Bush Blitz](#) citizen science app launched a new online tool today. The species recovery program encourages children to explore their backyard to identify different species.
- "From the [bottom of the sea](#) direct to your screen": watch this [underwater live stream](#) of Victoria's rocky reef off Port Phillip Bay
- The Coastal Watch website offers [live camera feeds on beaches](#) around Australia.
- Watch the running water, trees and occasional fauna in California's [Redwood Forest River](#).
- In pastoral Australia, go on a [four-hour drive through the country side](#) along tree-lined roads.
- [Zoos Victoria](#) has set up live cameras that show its animals in natural (and nature-like) environments from Melbourne Zoo and Werribee Open Range Zoo.
- Yellowstone National Park may be closed right now, but [webcams are stationed](#) in various locations throughout the park.

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