



THIS ARTICLE IS PART OF OUR SERIES ABOUT HIGH KNOB, ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE BIOSPHERES IN THE COUNTRY.

Health and Nature: Exploring the Best of Both Worlds

Written by Tauna Gulley

People who connect with nature are healthier and happier. They feel better about themselves, their families and their jobs. Nature is an area with living plants and animals. Contact with nature can occur in urban areas along tree-lined parks or in rural, mountainous regions. There is an abundance of research describing the human health benefits of contact with nature including self-reports of increased happiness and subjective well-being, stress reduction and social cohesion after connecting with nature. In addition, we gain numerous physical health benefits when we experience the beauty of our natural environment, especially here in the Appalachian Mountains. Health benefits include enhanced ability to fight disease, improved blood pressure, improved pain control, weight reduction, and better sleep.



Photo by Tauna Gulley

When we enjoy a walk in the woods or a stroll in a park, we become more relaxed; stress is decreased. Physical activity helps reduce stress which improves sleep and blood pressure. Health benefits of contact with nature has reduced symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) among some children. ¹

On a personal note, my daughter recently hiked 30 miles on the Appalachian trail. She gave the following account of the health benefits she experienced:

Mother Nature humbles you, she makes you grateful for your health and abilities. Being able to climb the hills, hike the valleys, crawl over the rocks and wade the streams was awe-inspiring. Hiking with 25 pounds on my back was challenging but also invigorating. Completing the hike gave me a boost of confidence, a sense of accomplishment and motivated me to maintain an optimal level of physical activity. This hike benefitted my physical and emotional health. The focus was contact with nature and self. Cell phones were only used in the evenings. Without the distraction of a cellphone during the day, we enjoyed our biological senses. We saw incredible views of the mountains, beautiful waterfalls, and streams. We heard the birds sing, the water flow and the wind blow. The experience was magnificent.



Photo by Tauna Gulley

One doesn't have to hike 30 miles to experience the health benefits of nature. Research has suggested that being mindful of your surroundings during a 20-minute walk will promote a positive attitude and connecting with nature through simple activities like smelling flowers, relaxing in a park or sitting at a popular overlook are important factors in promoting wellbeing.

In order to be physically healthy, we must have clean air, clean water and food that is not contaminated; therefore, protecting our environment is crucial. The time is now.



Activities

What's New on High Knob?

July 26th-27th: Environmental Camp! The Clinch Coalition will be teaching local children about the life cycle of plants as part of the City of Norton's Environmental Camp! If you would like to sign up your child, reach out to Rebecca Iozzi at rmiozzi@nortonva.org. And we'll see you there!

August 1st: Pre-registration for the High Knob Naturalist Rally begins!

Plant of the Month

Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*

Often referred to as the most nutritious plant in North America and even the world, the stinging nettle, scientifically known as *Urtica dioica*, is a marvel. Studies suggest that it is a superfood that may reduce inflammation, hay fever symptoms, blood pressure and blood sugar levels — among other benefits. The nettles can be cooked down like spinach, or boiled and brewed into a nice tea to obtain the aforementioned health benefits. Nettles are best when very tender, so pick in the spring when the nettles are just coming up or later in the season. Make sure to pick the young leaves from the tips by either using rubber gloves or pinching the leaves hard to avoid being stung.

A stinging nettle may seem like a formidable plant to harvest, but they really are only capable of stinging you while they are firmly rooted. Once they are wilted, they cannot sting you or release their formic acid! So, let's prioritize our health and get harvesting!



Make Sure to Pre-register for the High Knob Naturalist Rally!

Opening August 1st, 2022

The Clinch Coalition is excited to announce that this year's High Knob Naturalist Rally will be in person on **September 24th, 2022** from 10am-6pm. Pre-registration for the event will be opening on our website on August 1st for you to make your choice of hikes and view the schedule of events. Make sure to pre-register, and we will see you on **September 24th, 2022!**

Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress, and increases pleasant feelings.

If you would like to become a member or make a donation, please visit www.clinchcoalition.org.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ARE RUNNING WILD WITH THE CLINCH COALITION!

Volunteer with Us Today!

The Clinch Coalition has made great efforts for 2022 to expand our interactions not only with our partner organizations, but also with the United States Forest Service (USFS). Since January, The Clinch Coalition has participated in volunteer days with USFS, tabled at local events, worked with local students at UVA Wise, and more. If you would like to get involved, we are always looking for people who want to engage with the community! Contact us at info@clinchcoalition.org.

Volunteer Days with USFS



TCC at Local Events



If you would like to become a member or make a donation, please visit www.clinchcoalition.org.