

Reconnect With Nature

By Ted Carter and Calen Rayne

Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our Blue Ridge Mountains offer many opportunities to spend time in nature, and we attract artists and lovers of the outdoors who enjoy spending time in Asheville, and in doing so, bring tourist dollars to our region. Some journey to Asheville to reconnect with nature and slow the pace of their lives. For those who wish to establish or strengthen an earth-based connection, there are as many ways to reconnect with earth as there are people on the planet. Each of us has a unique link, like an energetic fingerprint.

When you turn your senses over to nature, it heightens your awareness of everything. Following are a few tools one can use to enhance your experience either at home or during your travels to Asheville and other locales.

1. A perfect way to start: David Suzuki's thirty-by-

thirty challenge. Spend thirty minutes outside for thirty straight days. Walk, run, explore, or just sit out in nature, and let it have its way with you. Reconnecting to the earth is just plain good for you. As his website shows, scientific research proves that after just two minutes, being in nature begins to relieve stress; within two hours, your memory and attention span improve; and after two days in nature, cancer-fighting white blood cell levels increase by as much as fifty percent. Maybe those doctors of long ago who sent their patients to Asheville as a "treatment" knew what they were doing.

2. On your nature walks, see if you can identify three trees. Stumped? No worries, there's an app for that: Leafsnap (<http://leafsnap.com>) is an "electronic field guide" that allows you to take a picture with your smart phone and dig into a database that will eventually include all varieties of trees in the continental United States.


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3. Branch out and be with nature at night. It's a whole other world. Note how your nonvisual senses perk up.
4. Develop a walking meditation practice. How often have you solved a problem or received an inspiration just by walking quietly by yourself? Why? Because outside, you are closer to your own life source, a wisdom as old as time itself.
5. Visit the North Carolina Arboretum (www.ncarboretum.org), featuring 65 acres of various cultivated gardens and exhibits, as well as more than 10 miles of hiking trails.
6. Sit in a garden or a wooded area, near a seashore, or just sit on a porch, park bench, or any other place where you can be outside in relative quiet. With eyes closed, let the sounds seep into you. Note how your breathing slows and your stress level declines.
7. Go hunting with a camera or a tape recorder. Take pictures that record your experience. Set your tape recorder near a lake or stream and record the sounds. Share on your website or social networking sites.
8. Visit Asheville's River Arts District and downtown art galleries. They are full of work of artists who have tried to capture the ephemeral, changing nature of art on canvas, in photographs, and in a variety of other modalities. Nature is elusive; it never stands still. There is great tradition of using art in your landscape, of honoring nature's capacity to stir wonder and act as a canvas and backdrop for companion works of art that are manmade.
9. Bring a piece of Asheville art back to your home. Whether you fill your garden and home with paintings, solar lamps, gazing balls, angels, ornamental iron, sculpture, chimes, shepherd's hooks, works of art are a beautiful way to enhance your home décor or landscape. It can add perspective, balance, harmony, charm, and memories from your travels.

We are the first generation to be disconnected from the stars and skies that humankind has always turned to in awe. Because of pollution and bright city lights, we are often cut off from the sight of the cosmos to which we belong. Whenever you can, do any of these practices under a full night sky and feel the moon and the stars above you and the earth beneath you. It completes a magical and mystical circle that each of us relates to without knowing why.

For more from Ted and Calen visit:
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A photograph of a family of three (a woman, a man, and a child) standing together at night, looking out over a landscape. They are positioned in front of a campfire that is burning brightly, casting a warm glow. The sky is filled with stars, and the Milky Way is visible. In the background, there are mountains and a town with lights. Two tents are visible on either side of the family. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

*My father considered a walk
among mountains as the
equivalent of churchgoing.*

Aldous Huxley