Nature Experiences: Readings and References on Human Benefits

The evidence grows! Plants do much more than beautify our built environments. They contribute to our health, well-being and quality of life! While we may have intuitively known this for some time, recent scientific evidence has confirmed these ideas and expanded our understanding of nature’s benefits. People and plants are entwined by threads that reach back to our earliest experiences, as individuals and as a species. Is the need for nature in cities an environmental issue or a public health agenda? These readings help us to recognize the extensive psycho-social benefits that we gain from the human experience of nature.

Readings Overview

Scientists from various fields have helped us to better understand the “human urge to green.” Environmental psychology, landscape architecture, horticulture, geography, urban forestry, urban planning - social scientists from each of these disciplines are expanding our understanding of people/plant relationships. Here is a collection of books that present our current knowledge about the human dimensions of urban nature.

Research - Human Benefits

Our understanding of human response to nature can be thought of in two ways. First, there are many human health and well-being benefits associated with nature contact. These benefits are the result of both active and passive experiences of nature. Gardening and horticulture activities provide exercise and satisfaction. In addition, observing scenes of nature, while outdoors or in buildings, provides a surprising array of benefits. These research reports provide scientific understandings of a wide range of benefits associated with people/plant contact.


Research - Cognitive Understanding

In addition to understanding the therapeutic aspects of people/plant dynamics we also have learned about patterns of human response to outdoor environments. People are not passive in outdoor settings; their activities and behavior are based on their understanding and processing of environment-based information. Various methods have been used to evaluate how people perceive and understand a space or place. Cognitive mapping, wayfinding, and environmental behavior are some of the terms used to describe how people encounter, interpret and make sense of landscapes. These readings illustrate how people perceive, respond and act within outdoor settings.


