

# *Te ara o tukutuku pūngawerewere*

[Mātai Rongo](#)  
Newsletter

## Forest Therapy and Shinrin-Yoku

The practice of Shinrin-Yoku or Forest Bathing started in Japan in 1982 and its first standardised format was created in 1993. The Forestry Agency in Japan provided a number of forests specifically for the purpose of allowing over-stressed city workers a place to rest and recuperate in a beautiful natural environment. Since then, the practice has gained widespread appeal throughout the world.

### What is Shinrin Yoku?

The word Shinrin Yoku is a literal combination of the Japanese words for 'forest' and 'bath'. To bathe in a forest is to walk without purpose or agenda and to breathe deeply. Anyone can do this without any special guidance, although there are a number of people trained in guiding stressed out city dwellers in how to wind down, switch off and tune in.



### Wabi-sabi

Another beautiful concept in Japanese language and thinking is wabi-sabi; 'the beauty of imperfection'.

There are several principles within this one idea:

- 1) Beauty is imperfect
- 2) Beauty is incomplete
- 3) Beauty is ephemeral

Each of these aspects of wabi-sabi can be considered more deeply and reflected upon when out in nature. The idea of imperfection is seen everywhere on a forest walk or stroll in a city park. The irregular shapes, fallen leaves, broken branches and peeling bark, all hold a special beauty.

The second principle, that beauty is incomplete is also found on our nature walk. All of creation is in constant change, growth and death, reaching and twisting and finding the light. It is easy for us to live under the illusion that we might get to the end of our 'to do' list and then we can relax.

However, the reality is that it is never done, it is never finished. So we can let ourselves have times and moments of rest along the way.

Finally the idea that beauty is ephemeral. This means that it doesn't last forever. One of the artists that I find inspirational is Andy Goldsworthy.



Many years ago when I was at art college I enjoyed creating similar works, enjoying the idea that the work would not last, but would be re-absorbed into its natural environment over time.



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### What are the benefits of forest bathing?

According to Hector García and Francesc Miralles (García, & Miralles, 2020, p.19), forest bathing has a number of healing benefits:

- "Helps produce more happiness hormones
- Mitigates aggression and sudden mood swings
- Helps repair damaged tissue
- Reduces the risk of dementia
- Relaxes and restores eyesight, which is impaired by the constant use of screens on all our devices
- Lowers blood pressure
- Slows heart rate
- Taking a walk after a meal improves digestion
- Naturally boosts our immune system, protecting us from disease
- Increases life expectancy"

## FINDING A SIT SPOT

When starting out in a regular forest bathing practice, the experts often recommend finding a 'sit spot'. The photograph on the right is one of mine. It is a beautiful area of native bush in the Bay of Plenty in NZ where I live. There is a small stream with a naturally flat area before it trickles down a waterfall into a pool below.

Whilst the benefits of walking through a wooded area have been noted, there is also a different kind of connection to be made with the natural environment when we sit.

Sitting allows us to be quiet and still, which means that wildlife and birds may feel safe to come closer. It gives us a chance to listen without the sounds of our own footsteps. We can tune in to bird-song, water sounds, movement in the trees and the sounds of the wind and the insects.

In a sit spot you may also find that taking a photograph or journalling some words or images will help you to pay attention in a more conscious and deliberate way. All the time you will be breathing in the sweet scents and chemicals of the trees around you.

## AMAZING TREES

Certain trees including pine, cyprus, eucalyptus and lemon secrete bactericidal molecules which have been found to improve mood.

Cyprus and cedar release substances that lower blood pressure.

Trees can detect variations in temperature humidity and light. They respond by adjusting their growth.

Trees can regulate their temperature by transpiration, called evapotranspiration.

Trees have proprioception. They have cells in their roots and stems that detect tension and compressions in their tissues, which enables them to perceive their position and orientation in space.

Trees can anticipate seasonal and climatic changes.



Questions	Answer of operator	Software's elaboration
(Do you know what is organite?)	Yes	Truthful
(Are you affected positively from organic radiation?)	Yes	Truthful
(Do you feel yourself bad?)	No	Truthful
(Are you affected negatively from organic radiation?)	No	Truthful
(Are you feel alive?)	Yes	Truthful
(Would you like that I will remove organite?)	No	Truthful



Trees emit chemical signals via pheromones to warn other trees of predators.

Some trees such as Acacias produce toxic tannins to make them indigestible.

## CLEVE BAXTER

Cleve Baxter left the army in 1948 and began working for the CIA specialising in working with polygraph machines (lie detectors). He became an expert in the use of these machines, and founded the Backster School of Lie Detection, which is still in operation today.

However, of interest to us, is that in the 1960s he began a series of fascinating experiments involving plants. Of note was a series of experiments where three potted house plants in his laboratory were connected to the polygraph machine which measured the galvanic skin response (GSR) of their leaves.

Nearby a small container of brine shrimp were randomly tipped into hot water. The timing was not known to the experimenters at the time. Charts of the plants' reactions showed a significant correlation with the exact moment that the shrimps were immersed.

The conclusion was:

**“evidence of the existence of a yet undefined primary perception in plant life” (Backster, 1968, p.34).**

In other words, the plants were aware of the shrimps' suffering. Baxter's research has been controversial with mixed results for those trying to replicate the studies. However one recent study in 2022, also using a polygraph machine, showed that

**“plants possess an advanced capacity for processing external stimuli and also of the human voice” (Turini, et al., 2022, p.281).**

In this study, vegetables were asked questions, and were shown to be able to learn. In particular, the vegetables learned to recognise organite (p.286).



## FOREST THERAPY MICRO-DOSING

In his book *Shinrin Yoku*, Hiroshi Nakamura introduced the idea of micro-dosing in nature during lunch breaks and weekends. This is a great option for people who don't have time for longer forest bathing opportunities.

**"Micro-dosing nature is about weaving small restorative practices into your everyday life. Think of it as stepping outside the noise, even if just for five or 10 minutes. The key is not the length of time, but the quality of attention you bring to the moment"** (p.38).

## WAYS TO MICRO-DOSE NATURE

**Lunch break:** Find a small courtyard, a patch of grass, or any outdoor space with a tree or a few shrubs. Instead of eating lunch at your desk, or scrolling through your phone, take your meal outside.

**Weekends:** Set aside 30 minutes for a mindful walk. Head to a local park or garden. Leave your headphones, and your phone. Walk slowly and let your senses lead the way. Touch the bark of a tree or a leaf and watch the clouds move. Pause by a flower or an area of water. Remember, this is about reconnecting. Even short visits accumulate and nourish.



**At home:** Even at home, you can step out onto your balcony or deck, or into your back garden with a morning coffee or tea. If you have grass, spend a few minutes barefoot. Even gazing out of the window and observing the sky or any greenery outside will be beneficial.

**Indoor plants:** Indoor plants can also help you connect. Some plants have been shown to reduce EMF radiation. Plants also respond to their owners. Indoor plants can be a way of connecting with nature if you are not able to go outside.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FOREST BATHING AND FOREST THERAPY

Forest therapy tends to be led by someone trained in supporting you to make the most of your time in the forest. Forest therapy guides vary in terms of the additional skills they bring. For example someone may have a lot of knowledge of plant identification, or they may add in a tea or cacao ceremony or mindfulness.

If you are thinking of doing a retreat with a forest therapist, you could check if they are registered with the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy, or with the Forest Therapy Hub.

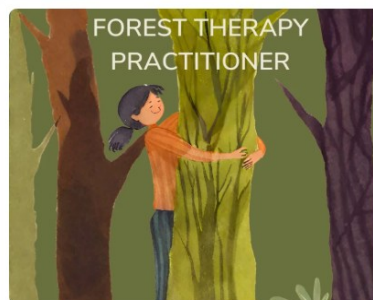
[Association Of Nature  
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[Forest Bathing & Forest  
Therapy Training |  
FTHub](#)

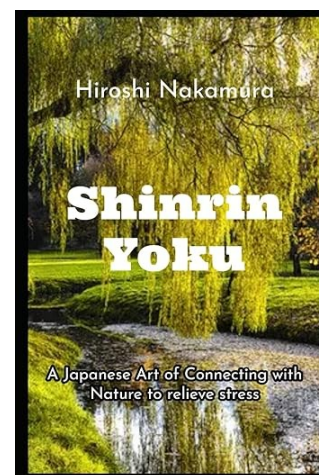
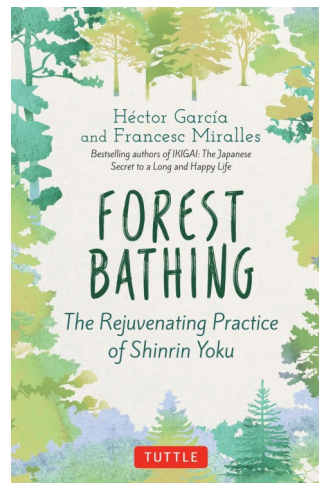
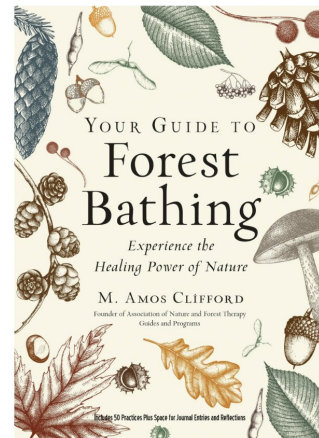
A new area that is just emerging is for professionals with existing qualifications in Counselling or Psychology that traditionally work with clients indoors, is to take that work outdoors into nature. This will mean that you are able to do the same, similar or more interventions with your trained therapist in an outdoor setting. Check that they are registered or certified with an appropriate professional body.

If you would like to take an introductory course in Forest Therapy, I recommend this course with Alma Oasis



[Forest Therapy \(Sylvotherapy\) -  
almaoasis](#)

These are a few of the books I have been reading and found helpful if you want to explore this topic further.



Read more... Read more...



## EARTHING

Although it is not officially a part of forest bathing, an understanding of ‘earthing’ is a valuable and complementary knowledge.

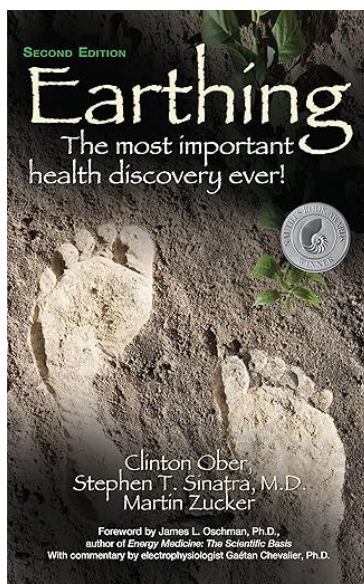
**The EARTHING Movie: The remarkable science of grounding (full documentary)**

<https://youtu.be/44ddtR0XDVU?si=y7tsEgSCQ4zPq3V5>



Follow this link to watch the full movie about the incredible benefits of human skin contact with the earth.

There is too much to say about the benefits of earthing in this short article, so you can also read the book ‘Earthing’ when you have time. Earthing is proposed to be the most important health discovery ever.



## THE BENEFITS OF EARTHING

- Earthing has a major impact on reducing inflammation, and inflammation is known to be a disease marker for multiple ailments including asthma, allergies, Alzheimer’s, anemia, arthritis, cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, eczema, fibromyalgia, kidney disorders, lupus, multiple sclerosis, pain, pancreatitis and psoriasis

- Earthing works because the earth has a huge amount of electrons. The earth is negatively charged, so when you make contact with the earth with your bare feet, electrons flow from the place where they are in abundance to where there are fewer of them (inside us).

- Inside the body are thousands of immune-response free-radicals which soak up the electrons. When this happens, it reduces the oxidative and inflammatory mode of the free radicals. They are in effect neutralized. Free radicals no longer need to oxidize healthy tissues.

**“The Earth itself is the original anti-inflammatory. And the planet itself is the biggest electron donor on the planet.**

**What does this mean to you?**

Just imagine a mighty unseen cavalry of free electrons galloping up through your body from the earth and mopping up outnumbered forces of inflammatory free radicals. Electron deficiency created by a lack of grounding is eliminated and a healing process unfolds.

The inflammation, sickness and pain in your body are but a manifestation— In large part or small— Of an electron deficiency. The remedy is as close as the Earth you live on.”

(Ober et al., 2010)

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By Nikki Kiyimba.

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<https://www.maatairongo.com/newsletter-1>





### What about hugging a tree? Does this mean I'm earthed?

The answer to this is that trees are made of wood, which is an insulating substance. If you touch the dry bark of a tree, you are probably not going to be earthed. Earthing might happen if the tree is wet. However, the soil under the tree is usually more moist than exposed soil. So if you are standing barefoot next to a tree, you are likely to be earthed. Another way of earthing with a tree is to hold a leaf between your fingers. This is more likely to produce earthing because the sap is close to the surface. It won't have the same effect if you touch a dry leaf. Also, if you touch a green stem of the plant, you will be earthed.



#### The Umbrella effect of Earthing.

One research study showed that earthing can protect against environmental electrical fields. This is called the umbrella effect. Because the surface of the earth has an abundance of electrons, this gives it a negative electrical charge. If you stand outside on a clear day with shoes on, or stand on an insulating surface such as wood or vinyl, there is an electrical charge of approximately 350 volts between the earth and the top of your head. However, if you are standing outside in your bare feet, you are earthed.

This means that your whole body is in electrical contact with the Earth's surface. Your body is a pretty good conductor of electricity. Your skin and the earth's surface make a continuous charged surface with the same electrical potential.

This means that the charged area is pushed up and away from your head. If you are near any object that is in direct contact with the earth, including a tree or a person or a dog, this also creates this shielding effect. The object then resides within the protective umbrella of the Earth's natural electric field.

