

Nature in the Neighborhood – August 2023

Autumn Anxiety

Fall is officially here! Never mind that the Autumnal Equinox is weeks away, Starbucks has started serving pumpkin spice lattes and Marshalls is stocking Halloween decorations. Is that not a true sign of the change of seasons?

If you are like me and suffer from Autumn Anxiety (yes, it's a real thing – it must be, I read about it on the Internet), I approach the end of Summer and beginning of Fall with apprehension. It saddens me that the longer and warmer days are coming to an end, and the darker and colder winter months are close at hand.

Is there a cure for Autumn Anxiety? As I mentioned in previous *Nature in the Neighborhood* articles, getting outdoors and spending time in green spaces has been shown to have many health benefits. It can relieve all kinds of anxiety, improve your mood, and boost feelings of happiness and well-being. This is what the American Heart Association website says (and this a website that can likely be trusted).

There's a book I've been meaning to read entitled *The Nature Fix -- Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* by Florence Williams, a journalist, author, and contributing editor at *Outside Magazine*. *The Nature Fix* demonstrates that our connection to nature is much more important to our cognition than we think and that even small amounts of exposure to the living world can improve our creativity and enhance our mood.

"We don't experience natural environments enough to realize how restored they can make us feel," Williams writes, "nor are we aware that studies also show they make us healthier, more creative, more empathetic and more apt to engage with the world and with each other."

We spend most of our time indoors as the increasing use of computers, smart phones, televisions and other technologies pull many of us away from the natural world. But it's argued that we have a deep connection with nature. In his 1985 book *Biophilia*, the biologist, naturalist, ecologist,

and entomologist E.O. Wilson, introduced the “biophilia hypothesis,” which suggests that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life. Nourishing that bond, as Williams’ book and many studies confirm, is beneficial for our general well-being and both our physical and mental health.

Distilling what she learned as she was writing *The Nature Fix*, Williams says she came up with a kind of ultra-simple coda:

“Go outside, often, sometimes in wild places. Bring friends or not. Breathe.”

All of us, not just those who suffer from Autumn Anxiety, would benefit from taking this “nature fix.”

And you need not spend a lot of time in nature. A 2019 study showed that spending just 120 minutes – two hours -- a week outside has health benefits.

While you can partake of outdoor activities no matter what the season, I’m looking forward to squeezing in those last days of summer in our neighborhood, whether at the beach or in the forests.

“Nature, it turns out, is good for civilization,” Williams is quoted as saying. It’s also good for our neighborhood.