

SENSATIONAL Autumn

Katy Lassetter, writer for holistic therapists and Story Massage Practitioner, takes us on a sensory journey of autumn, discovering how spending how spending time in nature can bolster community wellbeing

WORDS KATY LASSETTER

Autumn is a treat for the eyes, ears, nose and taste buds. Delight in glowing golden hues. Inhale grounding earthy scents. Forage for a fruity feast. Whatever tantalises you, woodland wanders and garden gaits from September to November offer a myriad of mindful moments. And with a dash of community spirit, you can optimise your wellbeing. Take a walk on the wild side this autumn and drink it all in.

NATURE CONNECTIONS FOR COMMUNITY WELLBEING

• You could start a local walking group and see if others want to search for scents or savour fallen leaves. Giving back to your local community, by creating something for all to enjoy, brings a huge sense of wellbeing.

• When foraging or harvesting in your back garden or community space, why not divvy any gluts? One neighbour might have elderberries while another has apples, combined they would make a delicious cordial. Share the wealth and wellbeing – from the pleasure of making to the benefits of healthy eating.

• Visit your local nature reserve's website and check for seasonal wildlife walks or workshops. Go along and you are sure to gain insight from experts and fellow enthusiasts for a richer experience.

EXPERT WORDS ON THE WILD

Christine Iverson, author of *The Hedgerow Apothecary, The Garden Apothecary* and *The Hedgerow Apothecary Forager's Handbook*, says:

"Not only is getting outside great for your physical health, but it's also beneficial for your mental wellbeing. Foraging is an activity for all the family. In fact, I positively encourage you to teach your children foraging skills and hopefully they will pass them on to their children – we need to keep these old ways alive.

"Don't be afraid to forage... The autumn hedgerows are bursting with safe things to gather, from blackberries, elderberries and cobnuts to crab apples, rosehips and rowan berries, all of which can be used to make simple remedies and recipes at home. Always take a good field guide with you when you forage and be 100% sure of what you are picking – if in doubt leave it out!"

Anna Allum, Visitor Experience Manager, RSPB Pulborough Brooks, says:

"A woodland wander at this time of year uses all your senses and is my favourite way to connect with nature, helping me adjust to the changing rhythms and the shorter days. The scrunch of autumn leaves under your feet, the pops of colour as purple Amethyst Deceiver toadstools peak through, the golds and russets of the woodland floor, a sneaky taste of a hedgerow blackberry that sends you home with stains on your fingertips and a smile on your face." TWR



5 SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

1 COLOURFUL CRUNCH

As Delia Owens wrote in *Where the Crawdads Sing*, "Autumn leaves don't fall, they fly. They take their time and wander on this, their only chance to soar," and their flight is only half of their joy. On landing, they create new magic...

There was nothing like jumping on a pile of freshly fallen leafy crispness as children. If you have not tried it since, you are missing out on a release that is wellbeing wonder stuff. Live in the moment and take the plunge! But appreciate those seasonal shades as you do.

2 SEASONAL SCENTS

Have you ever relished breathing in the petrichor perfection brought by fresh autumnal rainfall? Why do we enjoy it so much?

Our pleasure in petrichor, the unique scent of rain hitting dry soil, is believed to originate from our ancestors' reactions – as they relied on rain for survival. Perhaps the smell washes us with relief, like the water washes over the land.

3 MUSHROOM MARVELS

While autumn invokes images of toadstools, mushrooms we see above ground are the fruits of a more complex fungal organism whose tiny threads (mycelium) entwine with tree roots to form the mycorrhizal network. This astonishing communication system, which Peter Wohlleben (*The Hidden Life of Trees*) coined the "wood wide web," connects individual plants to transfer water and minerals. With that wonder in mind, seek high and low for fungi fruits and see how many different types you can spot...

4 FORAGING FORAY

More than a fleeting foodie trend, foraging has been around since the days of our hunter-gatherer descendants. Autumn is one of the best seasons to forage with fantastic health benefits – connecting us to nature and expanding our plant-based diets – and is free.

So, grab your trug and collect enough goodies to make blackberry jam, nettle pesto or rosehip tea and let nature nourish you. But remember: respect the area you are gathering from, only pick mushrooms and berries you can identify and leave something behind for the wildlife.

5 MATING MELODY

My most memorable autumn soundscape includes the comforting honks of migrating geese, haunting hoots of territorial tawny owls and rousing rumble of the deer rut. This last one is a primeval treat. Whether it is a roaring red stag, a belching fallow buck or the shrill whistle of a sika, that ancient auditory connection to nature is incredible.