



# Reflections in nature

*How to discover comfort and guidance from the great outdoors*

Everything is still but for the long, golden grass swaying gently in the tickle of a breeze. Birds swoop silently to the backdrop of a pure duck-egg-blue sky, their wings in seamless motion. In this moment, there is only this moment, and it's a powerful reminder that life is but for a minute and that standing still in appreciation is as necessary for us as it is for nature.

There's an inherent human need to connect with nature, which can easily be neglected as modern-day living pulls people along at speed. But it remains nonetheless and is relatively easy to fulfil, if time is taken to pause and tune into nature's messages, whether they come from the wind or rain or take the shape of towering trees or resilient weeds. And the results can be transformative.

### Springing forward

Susan Baxter, from Carlisle in the north-west of England, discovered this upon reaching a crossroads in her life. Unsure of which way to go, she began a nature-journaling course, and it opened her up to fresh possibilities. She recalls: 'When I was looking at tiny flowers coming into bloom in the spring, I felt aware that, unlike nature, we often find it hard to step into new things and leave old things behind, not always feeling confident enough to leap forward. Yet it struck me that flowers bloom without question, without fear, without permission.'

Recognising this truth and pondering on it, Susan decided to take a leap, too. She left her steady job and embarked on a long-desired passion to set up a theatre group for young people. Her enterprise, called Pure Drama, is based in her home city and aims to nurture a love of acting and writing in those aged between eight and 16. 'I'm in the early stages of this new

venture,' she says, 'but I often think about how nature played a part in guiding me here.'

Classic writers, too, have long found inspiration and guidance in Earth's offerings. Consider, for example, 19th-century US poet Emily Dickinson's reflections in *How Happy Is the Little Stone*, also known as *Simplicity*, and what they reveal. It begins: 'How happy is the little stone | That rambles in the road alone | And doesn't care about careers | And exigencies never fears.' It goes on to embrace the stone's independence, its ability to 'glow', whether alone or with 'associates'. These words illustrate that, when you take time to notice nature, it's possible to hear its messages and weave them into your own life. Or, to quote US naturalist, poet and philosopher Henry David Thoreau: '...there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.'

### Learning through observation

Colette Concannon, from County Mayo in the Republic of Ireland, recalls how she was able to ease her severe anxiety by tuning into these messages: 'My life was – and can get – very busy, especially in my head. I work full-time [and] I'm a single mum, and trying to create space for myself over the years has been difficult. I explored many ways to address my anxiety, but nothing really worked until I began reflecting on and journaling about my time in nature.'

Colette already took regular walks, but they were perfunctory – her attention glued to a fitness tracker as she pounded her way to the daily step count. So, she shifted her focus. 'I ditched the Fitbit and began noticing nature in a completely new way, observing that the changes around me were also happening



within me,' she says. 'The dark rolling clouds ready to burst with rain reflected the anger and stress I, too, was feeling. On a wet day, when the trees lacked their prettiness and their branches and leaves were spread wide and unkempt, I realised I often felt like that – not as put-together as I'd like.'

#### Reconnecting with nature

With each walk, Colette came to learn that this was okay. 'I realised Earth wasn't perfect, that it shows its rawness, and I thought: "Why can't I be more authentic in showing the real me?"' This powerful (re)connection with nature led Colette to take an unexpected direction and she began training as a yoga teacher. Today, she shares her experiences of slowing down and taking notice with her local community. 'I couldn't have imagined before that such subtle messages would lead me towards the truest version of myself,' she says.

Nature can be the antidote to much that humans build up around themselves: responsibilities, expectations, tasks...

It's a place to return to when there's a need to recognise that, amid it all, you, too, can stand in patient contemplation in gently swaying grass or soar alongside birds (see opposite for journalling tips). It's a reminder that, no matter the weight of your cloud on any given day, there will also be a time to meld into the blue sky and that, in this minute of life, you can find time to stop, be still and absorb life-changing messages.

#### Words: Alice Elgie

Alice is a writer and yoga teacher who's passionate about exploring connections between nature and self. Within her online community, Slow into the Seasons, she leads journalling courses that delve deeply into these themes. Find out more at [slowintotheseasons.substack.com](http://slowintotheseasons.substack.com)

To learn more about Susan, go to her Facebook page @PureDramaCarlisle/  
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ILLUSTRATIONS: LAUREN THORLEY



## EARTHLY LESSONS

*Get started on your observations and reflections with this nature journalling exercise*

### Immerse

Sit or walk in nature and focus on emptying all thoughts, bringing attention to your breath.

### See

Without thinking too much, notice something that speaks directly to your heart. It could be a flower blooming, leaves fluttering, the broken limb of a tree, a swaying willow.

### Ponder

Consider how this discovery could reflect your own life. Are you waiting to break free, feeling restless or torn? Conversely, is nature demonstrating a way that you would like to be, such as flexible?

### Write

Find a quiet spot (preferably outdoors) and write your chosen discovery at the top of a blank page in your journal. Set your timer for 10 minutes and let go. Remember, journalling is a conversation between you and you – nobody else needs to read your words.

### Reflect

Read back over your thoughts and consider how you can embrace this wisdom to implement change or deeper understanding within your life. Be kind to yourself, recognising that while what you discovered today might be true, each day can bring other truths.

