



# DIY Ecotherapy



For self-guided practice  
Helping you take simple steps to improve your wellbeing

# In this booklet...

You will find information about ecotherapy, a packet of seeds; instructions on how to care for them; a beautiful Maltese nature walk and step-by-step instructions on how to enjoy the great outdoors using all of your senses.

## **Ecotherapy**

So, what exactly is ecotherapy? There isn't one single definition of ecotherapy, but it's often used to describe a regular, structured activity in a green space that helps to improve mental and physical health as well as increase connectivity to nature. Studies have shown that ecotherapy works and that by incorporating more time in nature into our routines, we can feel less stressed, more positive and improve our mental wellbeing. We created this guide to help you on your ecotherapy journey with three simple activities you can do at home or by yourself!

## **Blooming Minds**

Blooming Minds is an ecotherapy programme that has been created by BirdLife Malta and the Richmond Foundation to support people living with mental health problems. The programme can also be used as a preventative measure for those feeling stressed, overwhelmed or who would like to simply enhance their mental wellbeing. By working collaboratively, we have used our respective areas of expertise to develop an engaging and inclusive programme of outdoor sessions that will work to improve people's wellbeing as well as foster an appreciation for the environment and the benefits of spending time in nature.

Thanks to your support, we are able to work towards ensuring Blooming Minds can continue and grow, so more people can enjoy the quality of life they deserve.





# Types of Ecotherapy

Ecotherapy programmes can involve a wide range of activities.

**Blooming Minds specialises in five:**



## **Green Exercise Therapy**

This involves doing exercise in green spaces such as walking, yoga, cycling, swimming, or even dance!



## **Green gyms**

Combines physical exercise with protecting and caring for natural spaces, or example building a pond or creating wildlife homes.



## **Nature arts and crafts**

Getting creative in nature! This can include creating art in green spaces, using the environment as inspiration or using natural materials such as grass, clay or leaves.



## **Social and therapeutic horticulture**

Gardening work such as learning how to grow and care for food or flowers in allotments, community gardens or even inside your home.



## **Wilderness therapy**

For those with a flair for adventure, this can be spending time in the wild, camping and doing activities in a group such as hiking.



# Nature sit spots

Spending time in nature and reconnecting your senses to your surroundings has been shown to reduce stress levels to help you feel calmer. Follow these simple steps to train your senses and find peace in the present moment.

1. This activity you can start with a short time (5/10 minutes) and train yourself to do it for 30 minutes.
2. Pick a spot in nature such as a park, nature reserve or a beach.
3. Find a space where you can sit undisturbed.
4. Start with one sense and with practice, learn how the different sense are linked to encourage a deeper connection to nature:
  - a. Listen – close your eyes and concentrate on one sound – the birds, rain, wind, etc.
  - b. See – open your eyes and look around at the smallest details – patterns in tree trunks, movement of the leaves, colours.
  - c. Touch – close your eyes and feel the ground around you, pick things up. Think about what it feels like, is it smooth? Rough? Cold? Hot?
  - d. Smell – close your eyes and breathe deeply to inhale the scents around you. What can you smell? Is it nice?
5. Focus on each sense and if you feel your mind wandering, bring your focus back to your activity.

## Top tips!

- ✿ Keep a diary and describe what you've experienced and how you felt after each sit spot to see if you can see a difference in your progress.
- ✿ Try and do this two or three times a week, slowly increasing the time you would like to sit and enjoy nature.
- ✿ Change where you sit and see if you can notice a difference in your surroundings.






# Nature Walk

Taking a walk can increase blood flow and release endorphins which make us feel happy and even improve our self-esteem! Use the following guide to learn where in Malta you can take a walk in nature to help you reduce your stress.

Linking up a number of well-known spots from Xemxija to Ghajn Tuffieha, this nature route makes a great circular hike and also a potential cycle route. The array of scenic views awaiting you are well worth traversing the uneven terrain for!

## Top Tips!

- ✿ Put your phone on silent, it's hard to enjoy nature and being in the present moment when your phone keeps going off!
- ✿ Use your senses to take note of the different colours that you see along the way, the beautiful aquamarine sea, the light green of the fennel leaves with highlighter yellow flowers.
- ✿ Breathe deeply and notice the different scents, the pine trees, the herbs such as rosemary and thyme, the smell of the sea as you draw closer to Golden bay...
- ✿ Try a nature sit spot along your way!
- ✿ Bring a camera or a notebook to draw or write with. Being in nature can be your opportunity to get creative.
- ✿ Don't be afraid to go by yourself, walking alone in nature can be a rare moment to reflect and relax.
- ✿ Remember to bring water, sun cream, insect repellent, good shoes and a rain coat depending on the time of year! It is important to be prepared for the outdoors to fully appreciate and enjoy all it has to offer.

A photograph of a person's legs and feet as they hike on a dirt path through a forest. The person is wearing grey shorts and black sneakers. The path is covered in fallen leaves and surrounded by green foliage. A teal speech bubble with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Don't forget to wear appropriate outdoor clothing!**

# A woodland stroll

Starting off from the scenic Xemxija Bay, take the first left turn while going uphill towards Mellieha, following the signs to the heritage trail. Apart from the numerous Punic and Roman-era archeological remains scattered in this area, it is also a great viewpoint, overshadowing Simar Nature Reserve and parts of Pwales Valley. After scanning the wetland and Wardija Hill opposite, the trail then leads to Mizieb. The largely afforested area mostly hosts Aleppo Pines, Olives and the non-indigenous Acacia trees. Continuing westwards along the quite linear walkways, cross the road intersecting the woodland, heading towards more rugged tracks. At the next crossroads, venture down a slope to your right and then immediately left onto a smoother path. With the landscape panning out ahead, the peculiarly shaped Manikata church comes into sight to your left. As you walk or ride past more cultivated land, approach the road with an adjacent aqueduct and turn right, climbing up the last major hill on this trek.

## Cliff-top views

When at the top of the ridge, move towards a tower, known as Ta' Ciantar. This recently restored structure marks your entry into Majjistral Nature and History Park, a Natura 2000 site. Most of the northwest coastline is visible from this secluded area known as Ghajn Żejtuna, as well as having splendid views of Gozo's Xlendi and Ta' Ċenċ cliffs. A rich garrigue covers Majjistral, which hosts a variety of native flora and fauna. Take time to listen and look out for birds in the vast habitat, especially the resident Blue Rock Thrush. Tread carefully on the bumpy path as you quickly approach Majjiesa Cliffs, passing by a pillbox closer to the perimeter. The trail then meanders around the cliff's edge above the boulder scree, but you may opt to cut across, taking a shorter track towards Golden Bay. A number of dome-shaped stone huts (giren) typical in our north countryside are another detail to observe, until you see the large hotel further south. Old British barracks are next in line, where the site management have a visitor's centre, offering an interesting and educational interval if open.

## The perfect finishing line

Next, leave the barracks onto a road which brings you to the bus terminus above Ir-Ramla tal-Mixquqa, better known as Golden Bay. While advancing south to Ghajn Tuffieha on the same road, veer right onto a final nature trail. A second fortification known as Ghajn Mixkuka Tower is close at hand, standing between the two picturesque inlets, with swimming opportunities on both sides. Just beyond the Ghajn Tuffieha car park, a 4km roadway takes you back to the starting point or hop on a bus back to Xemxija, Buġibba, Valletta or Sliema from the nearby bus stop.



# Make a greener home!

Planting flowers or herbs in your home can help you reconnect with nature in an urban world. By learning how to look after another living thing, it can take you out of your daily life and bring positive feelings of accomplishment as you see the plants grow thanks to your care! Follow these simple steps using the seeds provided to learn how you can grow your own basil plant. Basil is an extremely fragrant and versatile herb that is one of the easiest to grow indoors! Not only that, but fresh basil can make a great addition to your home cooking



## 1. Prepare your seeds and soil:

- a. Basil seeds require a good quality soil that is rich in nutrients and organic matter. A well-draining potting soil would be perfect for growing basil indoors.
- b. Once you choose a container for your basil seeds, fill it with soil. Then add water and mix the soil with water until it becomes moist. For best results, although you will get your hands dirty, you should mix the soil with your hands to ensure that it becomes evenly moist.

### Top Tip!

Any type of containers is suitable for growing basil indoors. Whether it is clay, plastic, stone, or concrete, as long as it has drainage holes, it is a perfect choice.



## 2. Planting:

- a. Sowing the seeds is easy! All you need to do is to sprinkle them into the container without pressing them. If you are using a relatively small container, you should sow two to three seeds. For a larger container, you could plant up to eight. Don't forget to leave an at least one-inch gap between the seeds.
- b. Once you scattered the seeds into the container, cover them lightly with soil.
- c. After planting your seeds, it's time to water them! Moisture is important for

their growth and germination. Make sure that the top layer of soil is moist and not overflowing.





### **3. Choose a sunny spot for your container:**

- a. Basil is one of the herbs that love sunlight exposure. In fact, sunlight exposure is crucial for the growth and the survival of basil. This lovely aromatic herb needs at least six hours of direct sunlight to grow and thrive so place your basil container on a sunny window sill or an area with enough natural light.
- b. Basil seeds usually germinate within five to ten days.

### **4. Watering:**

- a. Basil requires moderate watering. This versatile plant likes neither drought nor overwatering. Therefore, water only when the top layer of the soil is dry when you touch it. Water directly into the soil to allow the roots to absorb more and help plant will grow faster.

### **5. Harvesting:**

- a. You should start harvesting your basil before it flowers. Pinch off the flowers once you spot them. They will consume the energy of your plants. You could either pick off the leaves by hands or cut them off by a sharp knife or a scissor. If you want your plant to keep growing leaves, don't pick up more than 1/3 of it.
- b. It is recommended that you start picking the top leaves. You should always leave the bottom leaves to grow. Otherwise, it may prevent the growth of your plants' stem and you will have to harvest the whole plant.

