



BLOOMING MINDS

DIY Ecotherapy

For self-guided practice

Helping you take simple steps
to improve your wellbeing.





Richmond Foundation

Founded in 1993, the Richmond Foundation is Malta's leading provider of community support for people with mental health problems. As a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, the Richmond Foundation works to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health through education and help people living with mental health problems to enjoy satisfying lives.

BirdLife Malta

Established in 1962, BirdLife Malta is the oldest environmental organisation in Malta, committed to the protection of wild birds and their habitats. A non-governmental organisation (NGO), BirdLife Malta is also part of the BirdLife International network working towards conserving global biodiversity and the sustainability of natural resources.

Social Impact Awards Malta

The Social Impact Awards is an initiative organised by The Gasan Foundation and Inspirasia Foundation. By bringing together companies and philanthropists, the initiative aims to provide Malta's changemakers to receive financial and non-financial support to develop sustainable projects that have a positive social impact.

In this booklet...

You will find information about **ecotherapy**, how nature can benefit you, how to grow herbs and vegetables; two **Maltese nature walk's** and step-by-step instructions on how to **enjoy the great outdoors** using all of **your senses**.

What is **Ecotherapy?**

Ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, is a formal type of therapeutic treatment which involves doing outdoor activities in nature. Structured activities in a green space helps improve mental and physical health as well as increase connectivity to nature. We created this guide to help you on your ecotherapy journey with simple activities you can do at home or around Malta.

What is **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.



How can nature benefit your wellbeing?

Have you ever experienced being totally surrounded by nature and feeling truly at peace with yourself, just enjoying the moment of where you are? Nature is a sensory, calming and inspiring environment.

No wonder the research demonstrates that spending time in nature has helped with mental health problems including anxiety and depression! Spending time in nature can really help everyone by:



Improving your mood



Increasing motivation



Reducing ADHD symptoms



Improving your physical health



Reducing feelings of stress or anger



Improving your self-empowerment and self-esteem

Everyone has their individual experience of nature; it doesn't matter whether you are snorkelling or walking in the countryside. The important thing is that you spend some time really connecting with your feelings about the nature around you, appreciate the sights, sounds, smells and different textures. Which you can learn more about in this booklet!

It's OK not to be OK.

If you or a loved one need support please visit the **Richmond Foundation** on www.richmond.org.mt for more information or call **1770** for help.

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, for 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 can help reduce stress making you feel calmer. Follow these simple steps to train your senses and find peace in the present moment.

**Everyone connects with nature differently
and there is no time limit on this activity.**

1 Choose a place to return to throughout the seasons.

Listen

close your eyes and concentrate on one sound

2 Take some time to sit, look, listen feel and smell.

See

open your eyes and look around at the smallest details

Touch

close your eyes and feel the ground around you, pick things up

Smell

close your eyes and breathe deeply to inhale the scents around you

3 Focus on each sense and if you feel your mind wandering, bring your focus back to your activity.

Top tip!



Keep a diary and describe what you have experienced and how you felt after each sit spot to see if you can see a difference in your progress.

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 maps to learn where in Malta you can take a walk-in nature to help you reduce your stress.

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!



Bring a camera or a notebook to draw or write with. Being in nature can be your opportunity to get creative.



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.



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.



Breathe deeply and notice the different scents, the pine trees, the herbs such as rosemary and thyme, the smell of the sea!



Don't be afraid to go by yourself, walking alone in nature can be a rare moment to reflect and relax.



Try a nature sit spot along your way!

Don't forget to wear appropriate outdoor clothing!

Up and down Marfa Ridge

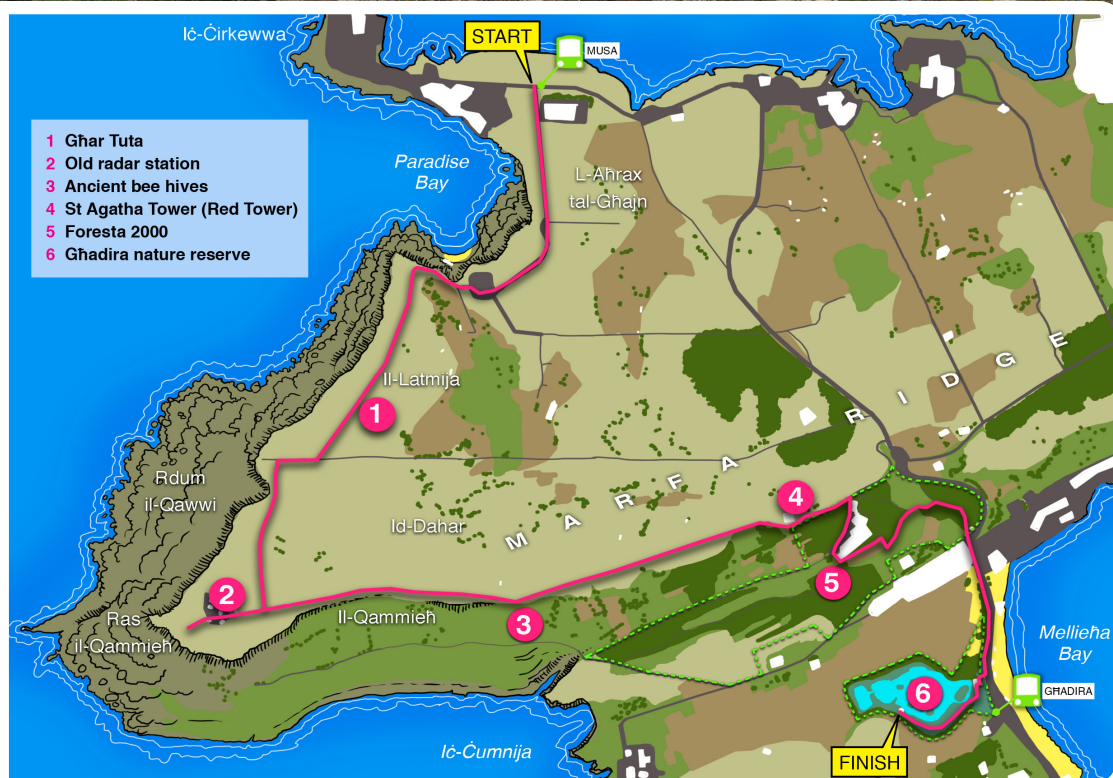
Points to keep in mind

Length of the route: 6km

Suggested time for the walk: This walk is best undertaken on a clear day, as the ridge offers some of the best views in the north of Malta. However the ridge can be equally as exciting in harsh weather, as those willing to brave it will feel the full force of nature on this exposed ridge.

Starting Point: Musa Bus Stop, Mellieħa

End Point: Ghadira Nature Reserve



Walk with Bird Migration

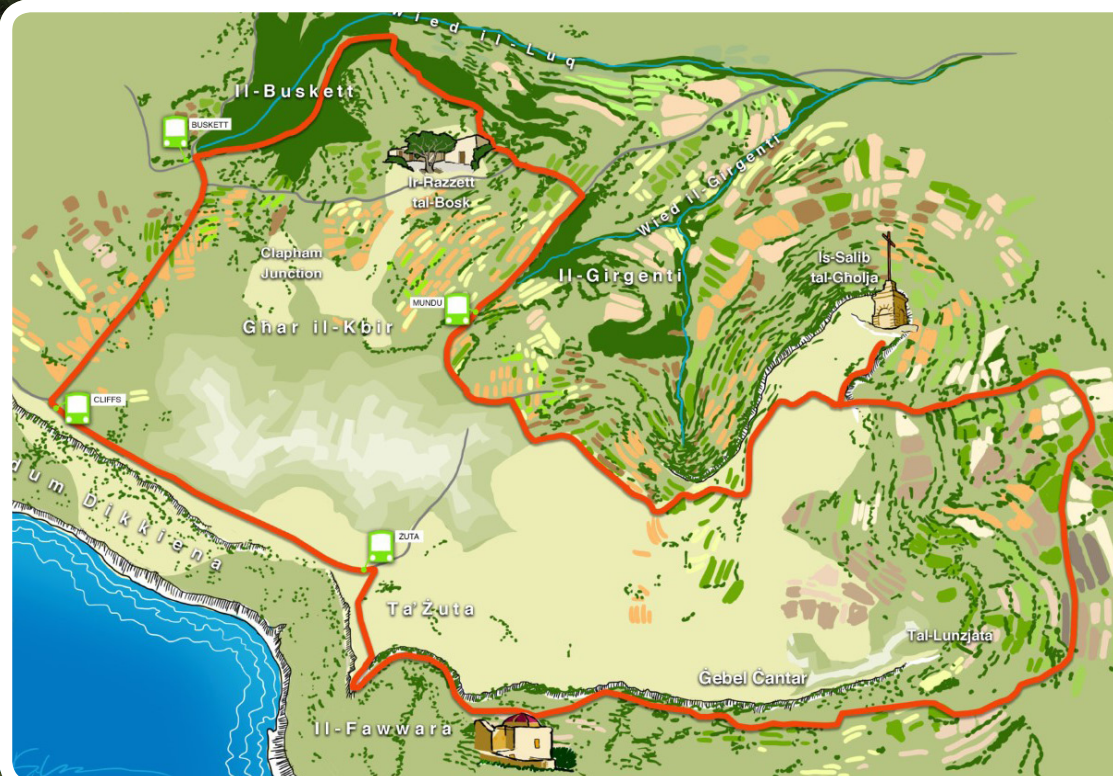
Points to keep in mind

Length of the route: 10km

Best suggested time for the walk: For the closest bird migrations sightings, start your walk at 2–3pm. Birds arriving on the island in the afternoon will come down to look for roosts in the trees and shrubs, meaning closer viewings

Suggested starting point: Mundu Bus Stop, Siggiewi

Peak bird migration dates: 15–30th September (Autumn), 10–30th April (Spring).



Planting Basil

Planting flowers or herbs in your home can help you reconnect with nature in an urban world. It can help you overcome feelings of self-absorption and reduce stress making you feel more relaxed. It can also be great exercise! Follow these simple 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!

Fresh basil can make a great addition to your home cooking!

Materials need



Basil seeds



Any container with drainage holes is suitable



Bowl (or something similar)



Nutrient rich soil

1 Prep the soil

Fill your chosen container with dry soil and add water. Mix this up well. Add your moistened soil to your pot (about ½ to 1 inch from the top).

2 Plant a few seeds in a pot

Once seeds are in the pot sprinkle dry soil over them until they are at a depth that is twice their size. Moisten the top soil.

3 Pick a location

Place your seeds in a warm location and check them daily. They should sprout within five to ten days.

4 Watering

Water only when the top layer of soil is dry when you touch it. Water from the bottom of the pot as this will be absorbed quicker.




5 Harvesting

When two pairs of leaves start to show, thin the plant out (this will encourage growth). Prune regularly for a healthy plant!

Growing tomatoes

If you don't have a green thumb, starting with simple herbs and vegetables can help you improve your gardening skills. Follow these simple steps on how to grow your own vegetables.

Materials need

-  Tomato seeds
-  Large plant pot
-  Nutrient rich soil

Why not put your skills to the test and start planting more herbs or plants?

1 Sow the seeds

Fill $\frac{3}{4}$ of your plant pot with soil. Sow a handful of dry seeds $\frac{1}{4}$ in of an inch deep into the soil. Cover the seeds with soil and pat down.

2 Watering

Mist your tomato seeds with water daily for the first 7 days. Until they have grown to 6 inches high. Feed and water the plant from the bottom to avoid mildew.

3 Location

Tomato seeds like to be in a warm room temperature for the first 7 days or when they start to sprout through the soil. Move to a bright sunny location when this happens.

4 Encourage growth

By removing any suckers from between the side stem and the main stalk you can encourage your plant to grow more. Placing a bamboo stake next to the plant will give some support and prevent snapping.

5 Pick your tomatoes

Fruit should appear within 60 days of planting and will appear green. Pick the fruit when fully red and ripened.

We hope you enjoyed our ecotherapy guide!

We would love to hear from you please contact us on
education@birdlifemalta.org
and for more top tips on ecotherapy visit our webpage
www.birdlifemalta.org/ecotherapy