



Green Health

Activity Guide

Creating Meaningful Nature Activities



NHS Lothian
Charity

Green
Health



“Patients often felt very happy when speaking about the beauties of nature with others, sharing stories and memories of their experiences within the natural world.

Meaningful Activity Co-ordinator,
Western General Hospital.





© Ida Fabrizio

Creating Meaningful Nature Activities

Hospital environments, with their long corridors, medical equipment and artificial lighting can feel disconnected from nature. On wards many patients have limited access to the outdoors and can be indoors for long periods.

Nature has been proven to impact on patient's recovery, mood, anxiety levels and sleep quality. When we connect with nature, we connect with ourselves. There is an ever increasing body of evidence showing the positive impact that contact with nature can have on physical and mental health.

Fortunately, we don't have to be in nature directly to feel its benefits and simple activities with 'everyday nature' play an important part in keeping us all physically, emotionally and psychologically healthy. There are many ways to incorporate nature into people's daily lives in hospital.

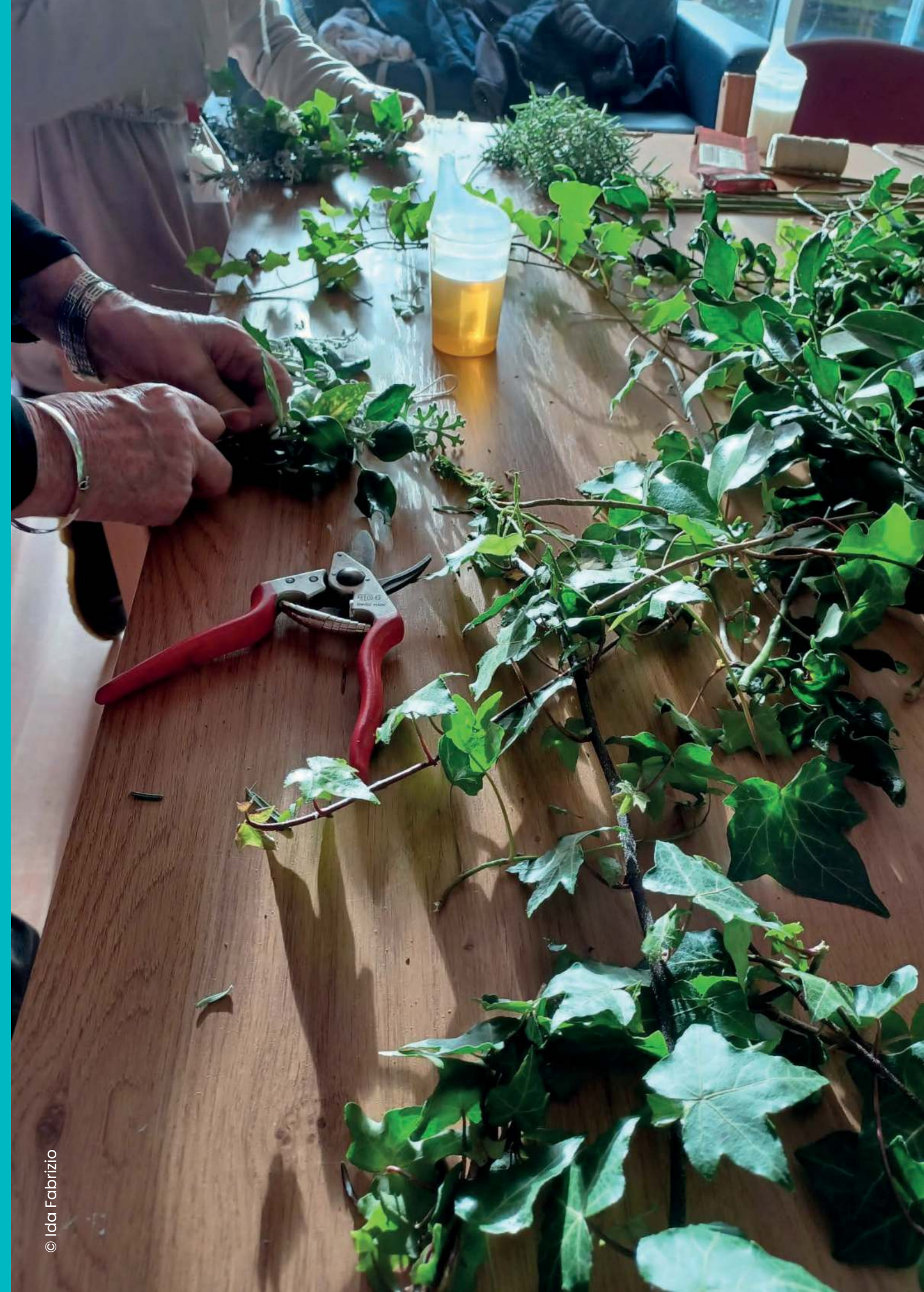
This activity guide has been created following a pilot project between RSPB and NHS Lothian Charity to test nature prescriptions at the Western General Hospital. It contains ideas for how to bring nature into hospital wards and how to connect patients to seasonal shifts and nature's rhythms.

Bringing nature into the hospital

Our nature connection activities are designed to create a soothing atmosphere and have a restorative effect within the hospital. These activities work well both in a group or in one-to-one. For groups, use the Day Room or a similar shared space where patients can be brought together. For one-to-one sessions, use the patient's own room or a room where they feel comfortable and relaxed.

Bringing nature to individual rooms

All of the following activities can be tailored to individual rooms. However, we recommend checking ward policies regarding natural objects such as feathers and plants and considering policies on cross contamination.





Scene setting with vision and images

- Bring in wildlife magazines and fold out ID sheets featuring various species, such as birds, bees, butterflies, and images of trees and plants.
- Set up a TV screen showcasing wildlife photos and montages, along with engaging wildlife documentaries.
- Provide jigsaw puzzles and playing cards with a wildlife theme.
- Bring in bird and butterfly stickers on patient's window.
- Put together a wildlife trivia quiz
- Encourage creative expression, providing paper, coloured pens, colour pencils, charcoal and paints for those who are inspired to draw.
- Encourage patient recall of favourite places in nature. Their art, with accompanying descriptive words can be displayed to allow them to revisit this natural location in their mind.

Take time to discuss what these images bring up for the patients and explore what topics and memories they evoke. Write down the patients' thoughts – perhaps from their childhood, holidays or homelife.

Put these memories up on the wall for other staff to see, also their family/friends who visit. Add a gallery pictures or drawings that the patients have made during the activity.



Stimulating the senses with smells

- Mix essential oils like lavender, peppermint, rose, orange, and lemon, with a carrier oil for soothing hand massages.
- Source herbs from the hospital grounds, including rosemary, sage, lavender, mint, marjoram, oregano, thyme, chives and roses depending on the season. Do these smells evoke particular memories or emotions?
- Ask patients to make small packages of dried herbs to keep.

Take time to discuss what these smells bring up for the patients and explore what topics and memories they evoke. Write down the patients' thoughts – perhaps from their childhood, holidays or homelife.

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Textures to touch

- As well as plants mentioned above, patients can handle and explore various natural textures like dried leaves, pine cones, pebbles, feathers, shells, sand, clay, dried flowers, acorns, dried poppy heads, and sticks. Take time to see where handling these objects takes your conversation.
- Introduce soft toys that emit specific bird calls when squeezed, combining sound and touch. Can patients match the bird to their call? Recreate a dawn chorus with your group!

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Soothing sounds of nature

- Hospitals are full of artificial noises like alarms and beeping machines which activate our stress hormones. Counteracting these with natural sound-scapes increases our feeling of safety and can decrease stress and pain.
- Create with the sounds of bird song, wind rustling through trees, and the gentle sound of water, like streams, waterfalls, ocean waves and rivers. How does it make staff and patients feel?

Take time to discuss what these sounds bring up for the patients and explore what topics and memories they evoke. Write down the patients' thoughts - perhaps from their childhood, holidays or homelife.

Put these memories up on the wall for other staff to see, also their family/friends who visit. Add a gallery pictures or drawings that the patients have made during the activity.

Activities for every season

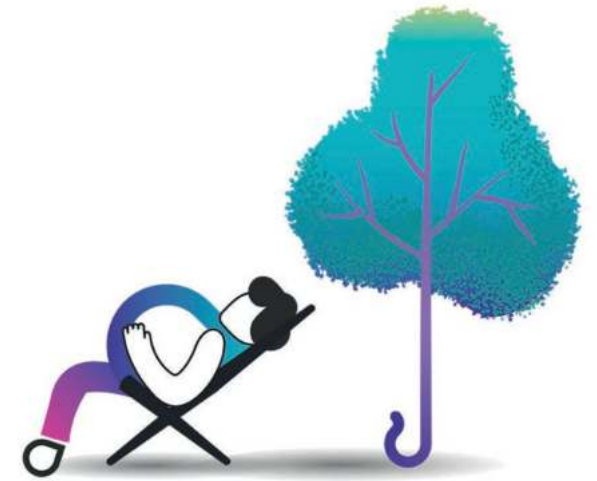
Illness is unsettling and unpredictable but nature is a constant touchstone in our lives that can be called upon to reassure patients and reduce anxiety. Our activities connect patients to seasonal shifts and nature's rhythms. Where possible allow patients to experience and identify the features of the seasons outdoors-what does the air feel like? What are the smells and sounds of this season? If possible taste some food of the season.





Spring

- Create vase arrangements together with bulb flowers, green plants and small tree branches
- Patients can have fun with “sticky willy” or cleavers reminding them of childhood play.
- Nature and Bird watching – where possible look out the window observe any birds, spot signs of spring
- Spring indoor picnic, egg hunts, flower crown making, and nature meditation all bring the joys of spring to the hospital.
- Nature Art and Nature journalling – draw/ write what favourite aspects of spring
- Nature and Bird watching – where possible look out the window observe any birds, look for signs of spring
- Make flower crowns for Beltane, maybe a mini maypole with coloured ribbons
- Read out nature poems / stories of Spring
- **Seasonal celebrations** – Spring Equinox 21/22 March, Easter, and May Day 1st May (Beltane)



Summer

- Patients can enjoy vases of summer flowers, engage in flower pressing, and explore summer-themed nature art and journalling.
- Activities also include looking up images of butterflies, bees, and other summer insects for drawing and painting.
- An indoor beach day with pebbles, shells, and sounds of ocean waves, summer parties and nature crowns provide a summer escape.
- A virtual hike- bring some maps of a nature reserve or wild area and talk through the journey going through the landscape, include the playing of sounds.
- Flower pressing – collect flowers from a garden, press in between paper towels and use a hard back heavy book to press – in a week or two, stick onto card/ into a frame for the wall
- Gather green leaves and white fabric, hammer green leaf imprint onto fabric and create leaf print fabric
- Leaves onto clay- imprint leaves onto clay to make patterns
- **Seasonal celebrations** – Summer solstice – 21/22 June



Autumn

- Autumn-themed activities include making nature mobiles made from twigs, autumn leaves, pine cones and dried flower heads. Create leaf mandalas.
- Patients can explore leaves, acorns, pine cones, and twigs on the table.
- Autumn nature journalling and art, along with autumn harvest festivals, create a warm atmosphere.
- Autumn harvest festival/ food – apples, pumpkin, squash, ginger tea.
- Autumn “campfire” storytelling/ poems. If possible, get image of a campfire and share stories/ poems of autumn, songs
- Smells of autumn – aromatherapy – spiced smells, nutmeg, apple, cinnamon
- **Seasonal celebration** – Autumn Equinox 21/22 September, and Samhain 1st November



Winter

- Snowflake art – cut up paper into snowflakes to hang up
- Winter wildlife documentary – showing hibernation, animals in winter climates
- Nature wreaths – get some evergreens – ivy, conifer branches make some wreaths – use willow for the basic circle and add on evergreen leaves. These smell wonderful.
- Any festive themed sounds are uplifting – carols, classical music for winter
- **Seasonal celebration** – Winter solstice 21/22 December, Christmas, and Imbolc 1st February

Further resources and ideas

If you feel passionately about the benefits of nature and their potential in addressing health inequalities, join our Green Health Network. All you need are a few good ideas, a little time to spare and a willingness to be involved with promoting and supporting green health activities across NHS Lothian.

Other organisations and resources:

- The **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (RSPB) have a wide range of resources that could be adapted for hospital settings. The Big Garden Birdwatch takes place each January and there is a wealth of resources to support engaging with this.
- The **NHS Forest** inspires and supports healthcare sites in transforming their green space for health, wellbeing and biodiversity. They run training courses and conferences specifically for NHS staff
- **Outdoor Woodland Learning** (OWL) are a fantastic organisation with a great website full of resources and contact details for local groups who run CPD training for anyone interested in outdoor learning.
- **The Woodland Trust's website** has brilliant information about trees including identification, distribution, folklore and conservation.
- **The Royal Horticultural Society** (RHS) has a wealth of information about gardening and growing including beginner guides

Further support for NHS Lothian services

To help you to bring therapeutic green health and arts activities to your patients, funding may be available through the NHS Lothian Charities Small Grants and specific or ward funds to support you to excel for your patients, their families, visitors and staff.

Email us to find out more: loth.greenhealth@nhslothiancharity.org



●● Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Emily Bronte, *Fall, Leaves, Fall*



Read more about the RSPB project
at the Western General Hospital here:



Or get in touch with us at
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