

Using Nature to Overcome Isolation

Tips for managing your health while staying home – by Barb Kreski, Horticultural Therapist

Research now shows that even brief contacts with elements of nature support our mental and physical health.

Here are some simple ways to give our systems a positive boost while we need to stay home:

- Let the sunlight in—open your shades or curtains during daylight hours.
- Get outside, even for a few minutes—it is okay to step outside or to take a walk as long as you stay 4-6 feet away from other people. If a walk is not appealing or safe, just step outside and tilt your face up to the sun or to a soft spring rain for a few minutes.
- If your normal routine has been disrupted, a morning walk, run, or a circuit around your house or building is a great way to start each day. Consider doing it first thing or even setting an alarm, so you have a reason to get up and get dressed at the same time each day.
- If you take a walk that follows the same route day after day, adopt a few specific trees or shrubs to watch closely and see them “wake up” after winter. Notice changes in bark color, buds, and (soon!) the first leaves.
- Nurturing a houseplant or two can lift your spirits.
- If you have space for a container or two on a balcony or patio, you can start some early spring plants now (pansies, alyssum, and kale are examples).
- Big home improvement stores such as Home Depot are staying open and will deliver or have curbside pick-up. Call their garden departments. Order a flat of colorful pansies, a container of bulbs ready to bloom, or a houseplant.
- Plan for tomatoes, peppers and more flowers in mid-May. They can all grow well in containers.
- If you have a garden, it's best not to compress the soil in your garden by walking on it in springtime, but if you have stepping stones or lay down a board to distribute your weight, you can venture out to pull those early weeds. Don't clear away any leaves that have gathered around the roots of plants until May, when the temperatures are warmer. Leaving them alone now will help things start to grow.
- Gather things that will help the birds build their nests: dryer lint, bits of yarn, fabric torn into very small pieces can be left on the twigs of shrubbery. If you do this near a window where you can observe the birds gather them, it is extra pleasurable.
- Nature sounds are especially soothing. When it rains, crack open a door or window and listen to the sound of the rain falling and the runoff from the drainpipes. If you are awake around sunrise, you will hear more and more birds joining in the chorus.

