

been generations ago – and could be in the future – as well as inform ourselves in the present. Sit spots are another way to engage with our senses (including our ‘sixth sense’) – this is any place outside where we can sit quietly to observe ourselves, our surroundings and connect more deeply with the nature around us. I confess I like a ‘moving’ version myself – wandering slowly around, doing some tai chi, or indulging in gentle gardening, all of which allow my sometimes busy mind to open up to the full suite of sensory input.

Another thing that we always do on our residential courses is to start the day’s opening circle outside. Feeling a warm breeze ruffling through our hair and the sun on our faces – or an icy blast penetrating our clothing and stirring us to find shelter elsewhere – are all teaching tools. Detecting the subtleties of these sensations helps us to reconnect with our innate abilities and fine tune them to our – and all life’s – advantage. After all, if we’re feeling cold, wet and windswept, imagine how a butterfly, tiny bird or young plant might feel, struggling to survive.

Our Natural Health Service

We need this opportunity to use our senses and places where sensory overload of the best, most natural kind can occur. If you don’t live in a nature rich environment and don’t have access to the richness of colours, sounds and other signs that mark the passing of the seasons, why and how would you notice or care about them? Our ‘natural health service’, which also supports our mental health, gifts us the opportunity to rejoice in the appearance of frog spawn, feel

anticipation at the touch of a prickly conker case, savour the sweet juice of blackberries (and turn our tongues purple!), deeply inhale the earthy scent of fungi, and celebrate the call of a cuckoo.

Robert MacFarlane has written about ‘lost words’, such as blackberry and willow, which have been removed from the *Oxford Children’s Dictionary*. Of course, these are not just words – they are signposts to a richer, more deeply felt experience of what it means to have contact with the natural world. We are meant to witness the unfolding tapestry of life – every day, week and month of the year – as part of our intimate attunement to our surroundings. This is a tragedy for our times, especially lack of access, yet lockdowns are waking up many to the beauty and value of Nature both around and inside us. Permaculture systems foster wonder as well as functionality and I’m constantly in awe of the fact that immense beauty can provide me with sustenance, medicine, fuel and more. Permaculture helps us to connect within and without and it helps us to wake up and take action. That is its greatest gift.



A residential course enjoying food cooked outdoors on an open fire

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