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# WHY DO PLANTS MAKE US HAPPY?

## HOW EVOLUTION PLAYS A ROLE IN OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Have you ever noticed how a room feels more alive with vines hanging on the walls and potted plants scattered around? You're not alone! Plants have been shown to boost well-being and happiness, reduce anxiety, improve concentration, and even increase productivity (Capaldi et al., 2015; Cleary et al., 2017; Larsen et al., 1998; Liu et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2013). While there are many reasons behind this phenomenon, most can be traced back to our ancestors and the evolutionary advantages of seeking out nature.

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At the core of this idea is the notion that lush environments with abundant vegetation likely indicated abundant sources of water, food, materials for shelter, and other resources essential for survival. Humans who were drawn to these environments had a better chance of survival and reproduction, naturally selecting for this behavior (Ulrich, 1983; Wilson, 1994).

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This also set the stage for these natural environments to be associated with safety and well-being. Humans who sought out these regions and experienced their calming effects likely had higher survival rates, further reinforcing this trait through natural selection (Ulrich, 1984; Wilson, 1994).

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Over time, living in such environments would have brought additional benefits, such as fostering community living in forests and providing vantage points to avoid predators and other dangers (Foley, 1995).



These are just a few of the many hypotheses that help explain why humans have a natural affinity for nature. This topic can also be viewed through other lenses, such as cultural or religious perspectives. In many cultures, plants hold spiritual or symbolic meanings, while religions like Indigenous belief systems regard nature as sacred (Harvey, 2006). Similarly, in traditions like Taoism and Shinto, nature is seen as a manifestation of balance and peace (Kohn, 2004; Picken, 1987). Overall it seems that plants benefit us, especially in a world filled with artificial stimuli. Sometimes, our brains need a break, and natural stimuli can bring us back to our "roots," helping us relax.



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