



Dear State of Missouri Team:

Let's talk about the dreaded "S" word. STRESS. It's all around us. We have stress from many outside things, some out of our control. We also have stress that bubbles up internally from worry, fear, or uncertainty. Each day is different with stress—one day we may feel in control and the next day stress grabs a hold of the wheel.

Going outside offers an opportunity to de-stress, providing both mental and physical benefits. Many research studies have shown the benefits of being outdoors, including:

- Spending 20 minutes outside can **give your brain an energy boost** comparable to a cup of coffee;
- Taking a nature walk can **increase attention spans and creative problem-solving** by as much as 50 percent;
- Exposure to nature, including trees and green space, helps with physical well-being. It also **reduces blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension**, and the production of stress hormones;
- Exposure to sunlight increases the brain's release of serotonin, prompts the body to make Vitamin D, and can **help with getting a restful night's sleep**.

Finding Nature Near You

Reaping the health benefits of nature can be as easy as spending time in your own backyard. Connect with the outdoors by planting, reading a book in a hammock, or hanging a bird feeder. Enjoy nature at a park by having a picnic, throwing a frisbee, or getting in some steps with a four-legged friend.

Missouri is a state with more than 1,000 [conservation areas](#), including millions of acres of public land to explore. It has more than 90 [state parks and historic sites](#). These outdoor spaces also provide an opportunity to take a deep breath, rest, and refuel.

Connect with Nature in Other Cool Ways

To find a nature spot near you, download the Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) free mobile app, [MO Outdoors](#). It is available through Google Play or the App Store. The app shows area information, directions to get you there, and trail maps once you arrive.

Fishing at local libraries. Fishing is a great social distancing outdoor activity. Don't let lack of fishing equipment get in the way of learning how to fish. MDC has a [rod-and-reel loaner program](#) at 145 loaner locations across the state. This includes local libraries, where you can check out a fishing pole and tackle box for free to give fishing a try. Just don't forget your license!

Nature boost podcast. For those who want to learn more about nature, check out MDC's new [Nature Boost podcast](#). It explores topics such as nature and health, outdoor activities, and native Missouri wildlife. Each episode features an MDC expert or partner. It highlights ways everyone can benefit from nature.

Join a wild webcast. Interested in attracting birds, bees, and other wildlife to your backyard? Join a free live [MDC Wild Webcast on Attracting Backyard Wildlife](#) on Wednesday, July 1, at noon. MDC Urban Wildlife Biologist Erin Shank will explain the basics of:

- creating backyard wildlife habitat;
- the importance of native plants and insects for pollination, wildlife food, and other benefits;
- planning and designing native plantings;
- attracting birds;
- and supporting pollinators such as butterflies and bees.

Summer education and virtual programs. MDC will be offering its nature-focused programs through [online formats](#) this summer. You can also access [free educational resources and activities](#), including learning curriculum, activity sheets, and educational videos for all ages.

Free nature magazines. Check out MDC's free [Missouri Conservationist](#) magazine and kid's magazine, [Xplor](#). Readers can learn more about the fish, forest, and wildlife in Missouri. The magazines also highlight fun ways to get outside in every season. You can [subscribe](#) to get a copy in the mail or read the full issues online.

I hope you will find time to de-stress and refresh this summer. Missouri has some incredible outdoor spots to explore. Even in the outdoors, please be sure to still enjoy responsibly within guidelines and safety precautions.

Enjoy the fresh air. Stay safe and healthy. Keep exploring nature...even in your own backyard.

Best,

Sara Parker Pauley

Director, Missouri Department of Conservation