

We are wired to be outdoors

By Simon Worrall, National Geographic

When we first see Elizabeth Bennett, in the 2005 film of “Pride and Prejudice,” she is walking through a field, surrounded by birdsong and trees. Nature, for Jane Austen’s heroines, is always a source of solace and inspiration. And as Florence Williams shows in her new book, “The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative,” modern technology is now revealing what goes on in our brains when we step outdoors—and why nature is so good for us.

When *National Geographic* caught up with Williams by phone in Washington, D.C., she explained why even a house plant can make us feel good, why the practice of “forest bathing” is now supported by the Japanese government, and how trees can lower the murder rate in our cities.

The Mappiness project was developed in the U.K. by a happiness researcher called George Mackerron. It’s a brilliant idea, which tries to capture in real time what people are doing and how it makes them feel. I downloaded this app onto my phone and used it for about a year.

The way it works is, it pings you at random times a couple of times a day and gives you a list of options. Are you driving, doing childcare, cooking, hanging out with friends? Are you outside or inside and how are you feeling? Like, “I feel happy, not so happy.”

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