



**Get Outdoors Florida!** is a coalition promoting outdoor experiences to help Floridians have healthier lifestyles and develop an appreciation for our abundant natural resources.

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# Enjoying Everyday Nature

By Meghan Mick

We in Florida are lucky to enjoy not only accommodating weather, but also some of the most naturally diverse and beautiful surroundings found anywhere. Our white sand beaches, longleaf pine forests, freshwater lakes and species-rich marshlands attract naturalists and tourists from around the globe. These places are special and are ones that everyone should have the opportunity to visit and enjoy. They are places that create an



appreciation for nature in even the most “plugged in” individual. And considering the vast amount of research supporting the fact that nature has both physical and psychological benefits – we should be seeking her out, whenever and wherever possible. Time outdoors not only encourages activity and physical health, but has also been attributed to alleviating symptoms of ADD and depression, as well as enhancing creativity and self-esteem in children.



Our state and local parks do a wonderful job of preserving pockets of Florida’s natural beauty, allowing us to escape from the everyday hustle and reconnect with nature. Places set aside for this purpose are important, and they are beneficial when we’re able to get there. But what about the other spaces, the spaces in-between? What about where we spend most of our days – schools, neighborhoods, offices, shopping centers? These everyday places are accessible to everyone; they are places that can be used to fulfill our connection to the natural world, small spaces of reprieve and reconnection.

To this end, developers, planners and designers have an opportunity to rethink outdoor spaces of all kinds. Schoolyards can be enriched with gardens and trees that serve to stimulate the senses and provide valuable opportunities for learning. Playgrounds can be enhanced to include more than metal and mulch. Water features, native plants and other natural elements attract birds and other wildlife and enrich the play experience. Neighborhoods with preserved and embellished natural settings encourage children to use their imaginations to create their own activities: balancing on logs, climbing on rocks, rolling down hills and digging in the dirt. Offices can invest in a green roof and/or a butterfly garden next to an outdoor break area (which studies have shown can improve both energy efficiency and employee productivity). Considering the countless healing benefits of nature, it seems only natural that hospitals and doctors’ offices can better integrate outdoor spaces into their facilities to be more restorative, green and peaceful. These are some of the places where everyone spends time. They are small pockets of opportunity to preserve our natural surroundings and encourage stewardship. Places that we all share and enjoy – where people can discover and appreciate nature everyday.



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