

# The Connecticut Landscape Architect

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Landscape Architecture  
Practice in the COVID-19 Era



# The Natural Remedy

BY DANA CEVA

When the pandemic hit Connecticut in March, I expected the worst; not only was I scared for the health of those around me, I was prepared to lose my job. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment reached 14.7%; the unemployment rate had not been this high since the Great Depression. I was the most recently hired employee at my firm, having graduated in May of 2019 and therefore assumed I would be let go. Who was going to be spending money on their landscape when people couldn't even go out to the grocery store at their leisure? Luckily, my assumption was wrong.

In my experience, the correlation between Covid-19 and the design-build residential industry has been a strong one. Business has boomed. As Connecticut residents spent more of their time at home and realized they couldn't travel for the summer, they wanted to turn their yards into their own vacation spots. City dwellers without yards quickly sought refuge by purchasing a home in the suburbs.



People who hadn't ever given their property a second thought were forced to stare at it outside their window every day.

When people want to improve their properties, pools, fire pits, and outdoor bars always seems to be first on their wish list — a space to enjoy the outdoors that includes entertainment, a clean green lawn, seating for dinner parties, and space to entertain guests (in the future). While this does give people the chance to get outside and enjoy "nature," it misses the mark.

The relationship between the environment and human beings is more important than we think. After working in an office all morning, that headache seems to go away after eating lunch outside at the picnic table. After being locked in the house for weeks, going for a walk through the neighborhood seems to diminish that stir-craziness. This is

not a coincidence; immersing ourselves in nature (real nature with bugs and plant diversity, messy and wild) is proven to be good for our health. We need to integrate nature into our everyday lives. And in the time of a global pandemic, I find this important to understand.

Forest bathing is a leisurely trip to a forest to enjoy trees, insects, and vegetation. The air seems fresher, easier to breathe, and calming. The weight of the world feels lighter on our shoulders. Spending time in nature eases feelings of stress and anxiety. What's even crazier are the proven ways that forest bathing affects our physical well-being. According to a study done by Qing Li in 2010 (Effect of Forest Bathing Trips on Human Immune Function, *Environmental Health and Preventative Medicine*), forest bathing not only proves to significantly decrease anxiety, depression, and anger, but it strengthens the capabilities of our white blood cells. When taking a walk through a forest, we breathe in the volatile organic compounds that trees produce to protect themselves from bacterial and fungal diseases. These compounds are called phytoncides. When these phytoncides enter our bloodstream, our bodies respond by increasing the num-

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Sidewalk planting by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West (see their book at right). Sidewalk plantings don't have to be seas of mulch with a few isolated plants within them; they can be full of life.



*Planting in a Post-Wild World: Designing Plant Communities for Resilient Landscapes*, a book by Claudia West and Thomas Rainer, was a meeting point in the author's beliefs around design and the environment.

## The Natural Remedy cont'd

ber and efficiency of a type of white blood cell, natural killer cells (NK). NK is exactly what it sounds like: cells that are able to bind to certain tumor and virus-infected cells and kill them. So not only does spending time in nature improve your mental well-being, but it is proven to improve your immune function. The answer seems obvious. Spending time in nature could not only

help ease our stress and anxiety, but it could physically help our bodies fight this virus.

As stewards of the environment during a pandemic, we need to be designing with the health benefits of nature in mind. Nature should no longer just be on the very edges of properties. Let's bring it closer. We need to allow more plant diversity into our lives and our properties. More trees, more meadows and grasslands, more

pollinator gardens. Let's not just plant the pretty perennials, but the perennials that support functional ecosystems.

Let's return some of that lifeless lawn back to nature. Turning our properties into healthier, more natural ecosystems will ease our minds, benefit our health, and as an added bonus, slow the effects of climate change.

— Dana Ceiva is a landscape designer with Hoffman Landscapes.

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