

Take a hike with a Forest Therapy guide in North Hastings



By Chris Drost The Japanese have been doing it for years. Now it is finally available in North Hastings. Shinrin-yoku is the Japanese practice for forest therapy, sometimes also known as forest bathing. In Japanese, shinrin means forest and yoku means bath. It connects people to the forest through invitations to use all the senses as you spend time among the trees. Studies conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture in 1982, showed being in a forest environment lowered blood pressure and pulse rate and had other physical and mental health benefits. Marilyn Zehr, a resident of Hastings Highlands, has recently obtained credentials from the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy and is now offering forest therapy walks at her home in the Monteagle Valley. The Association of Nature and Forest Therapy is the world's leading provider of forest therapy guide training and certification. A forest bathing experience is not a long hike or anything strenuous. You may walk up to a kilometre or two at the most. Much of the time is spent using your senses to experience the forest in a way you have perhaps never experienced it before. Zehr also takes time for participants to introduce themselves along the way to make the entire experience more comfortable for everyone. Zehr invites each person to participate in a number of ways. Time is spent on your own experiencing things such as movement in the forest, watching the way the stream trickles down the hill imagining where it goes after it reaches the river and the rock face when it was first formed. I like to finish up the hour and a half to two-hour walk by brewing up some balsam tea and serving healthy snacks in the forest with participants, says Zehr. It is an opportunity for everyone who wishes to, to share what value they have taken from the experience. To learn more about what to expect and how to register for an experience, visit https://riseaboveguesthouse.ca/forest_therapy