

Hello everyone! Let me begin with some introductions before we dig in. My name is Olivia Duke, and I'm a junior at James Madison University. I'm in the Independent Scholars program studying nature in art, and I consider myself a biophilic. Some of you might not have heard of biophilia; that's part of what I want to share today. But before we begin, I want all of you to take a few deep, measured breaths. In, out. In, out. How often do we give ourselves the opportunity to just feel our breath? It's important to stay aware of ourselves, and I want to share the philosophies of mindfulness and biophilia to encourage fulfilling lifestyles where we take the time to really consider ourselves and our surroundings.

First, what does mindfulness really mean? Some may think 'oh, this means having good manners' and others may say 'no, mindfulness is what they achieve in monasteries', but mindfulness is just taking time to care for yourself. Mindfulness is not only about physical care, but also making sure you nurture your emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. This can take many forms, from meditation and yoga to crafts and gardening. It is most important to find what activity nurtures *you*.

Next, we can examine biophilia and why might we need its philosophy. Biophilia literally means 'love of life' and stems from the philosophical belief that humans are inevitably drawn towards nature. Nowadays, this philosophy has grown to become a social movement which advocates for integrating nature back into our daily lives, even in urban settings. This is especially relevant now with the decline of our ecosystem and the increase in mental distress in ourselves, because fostering organic life makes societies healthier.

By combining the two concepts on mindful and biophilia we can work to facilitate a world that is better for both ourselves and our environment. We tend to focus so much on the work of the present that we don't consider long-term ramifications. Incorporating mindfulness and biophilia into your life can help you stay more aware of your state of being in both the present and future. Something as simple as finding an air-filtering plant for your home can create a healthier living environment, and a task as mundane as breathing can become a tool for regulating emotions in the body.

With these tools at our disposal we can learn how to live our best lives. When we focus inward, we can feel more connected to the present and find parts of ourselves we didn't realize needed attention. A mindfulness technique you've heard of to balance our inner selves is meditation. But did you know you can meditate while walking? While cooking? While gardening? Certain meditation techniques may rely on stillness and focus on the breath, but you can find guided meditations to help you be intentional with your actions during normal activities. Meditation is not just an activity, but a mind-set, and it is one you can easily adopt into your self-care routine.

Once we have found our inward focus, then we can extend it outwards. Coming back to fostering organic life, if we nurture our environment in any way that we can, then collectively we can make a huge impact in helping the earth. Every tree, flower, and fern has a purpose, whether it's providing a home to wildlife big and small, or filtering the very air we breathe. *This* is why biophilia is so important.

I hope this talk has given you insight to how vital nature is to our life and I hope it also inspired you to embrace mindful living. It is more important now than ever to practice good self-care as

well as be environmentally conscious, and biophilia can teach us a lot about both. Thank you so much for listening; I wish you all the best during these trying times. Stay well and remember to take time to breathe.

Some anticipated questions:

1. I don't have time in my day to just be mindful, what am I supposed to do?

Mindfulness doesn't have to be separate activity from what you already do. Try taking movements like sweeping or chopping and measure them to match your breathing. One of my favorite simple exercises is, when you're getting ready for sleep, take a scan of your body. See how your body is feeling in that moment, and clench and release tension in every body part (or ones of your choice) before drifting off to sleep.

2. I'm not good at taking care of plants, does that mean I can't say I practice biophilia?

Not at all! Even if you're unable to care for plants in your home at all you can still appreciate and practice biophilia. If you enjoy spending time outside, encourage others to enjoy the outdoors, or simply know and share the benefits of nature in any way you are still supporting the movement.

3. My quarantine means I can't go outside. How am I supposed to "embrace nature?"

Olivia Duke
IND Major
French Minor
VCHC Flash Talk

Do you live in an area that has parks or forests nearby? If you open your windows, not only will it circulate fresh air into your living space, but it will also allow you to hear the sounds of the world like birds, crickets, or passers-by. If you live in an urban area with too much sound pollution to do this, try rekindling your wildlife appreciation by watching nature documentaries on YouTube or a streaming service. Sometimes I play these in the background while working on other things.

One thing to remember is everyone has different privileges and abilities. Whatever yours are, they are always valuable.