

People love their trees more than their neighbors, says survey

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Twice as many people (16%) say they have a closer relationship with their trees than with their neighbors (7%), according to new research.

The University of Derby has today revealed the results of a survey of more than 1,800 adults, investigating the importance of [trees](#) and the environment on people's daily lives and the impact on their well-being.

Commenting on the findings, Miles Richardson, Professor of Human Factors and Nature Connectedness at the University of Derby, said, "Centuries of mass farming, industrialization, roads, railways and [urban expansion](#) have resulted in the U.K. becoming one of the most deforested nations in Europe, so we were surprised to find that so many people felt so connected to trees.

"Half of the people who took part in the survey told us that they have a 'favorite tree,' with 81% noticing trees wherever they go and over 90% agreeing trees are enjoyed by children. Almost all who took part told us that they felt a relationship with nature was significant and that it helped their [mental health](#) and well-being."

More than 1,800 residents of the National and Mersey Forests and Brecon Beacons National Park took part in the YouGov survey in October 2022, designed and commissioned by the University of Derby.

It also revealed that awareness of the importance of trees to the environment is high. More than 85% of respondents agreed that trees create better air quality (94%), sustain wildlife (95%), and prevent flooding and erosion (86%). Nearly all respondents agreed with at least one of these statements.

Additionally, about 90% of respondents said that trees were important for supporting health (86%) by reducing air pollution and creating places for relaxation and peace. Almost all (92%) said that trees contribute to health (e.g., by air pollution reduction and by creating places for relaxation and peace for better mental health).

Professor Richardson added, "Although asking about people's relationship with trees might seem unusual, we found that it is those who feel a close relationship with the natural world who take positive action towards it. Having a close emotional bond and feeling closely connected to trees and the wider [natural world](#) enhances our desire to protect and restore natural environments."

However, awareness does not always translate into action—for example, only half of those surveyed reported that they planted pollinator-friendly flowers frequently, and just 36% said they make homes for wildlife and insects in their gardens.

David Sheffield, Professor of Psychology at the University of Derby, said, "Biodiversity has declined at an alarming rate around the planet since 1970. Although many cherish what seems to be a 'green and pleasant land,' there is a need for a wider understanding that things are not well. Nature needs to be central to our everyday lives and trees are a great starting point. They contribute to our mental well-being and physical survival as individuals and as a species."

Overall, respondents felt that [urban development](#) (74%) presented the greatest threat to trees—higher than [climate change](#) (65%), storms (63%) and exotic/new diseases and pests (55%).

Provided by University of Derby

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