

It's Going to be OAK-Kay Mighty Kentuckians, We are TREE-Mendously BLESSED!

By, Madi Harrison

Has 2020 and the pandemic been stressful for you like it has been for me and my family? Have you felt like you have about gone nuts and your anxiety has hit the treetops? Well, take a deep breath! Like our Governor Andy Beshear says, "It's going to be okay, we will get through this and we will get through this together," he isn't wrong! As Kentuckians, we are tree-mendously blessed! Trees can help us get through it! Yes, you read that right! Trees are important to our mental and physical health!

If you're like me, taking a walk outside or reading a book under a big oak tree can help you to unwind and reduce your worry. I've had to take lots of these outdoor breaks throughout the pandemic, but I never realized that trees actually had anything to do with that stress relief. A study performed in 2016 by researchers at the University of Illinois proved that trees are a significant stress reliever. The study involved fully stressed out people who were shown 10 six minute 360 degree videos of trees. As the amount of trees increased in the video the people's stress levels decreased! I'm sure you've also heard that deep breathing in and out helps to reduce stress, well thank a tree again because their leaves produce oxygen and help to filter pollutants in the air! So, if you find yourself quarantined and going stir crazy, go outside and enjoy all the beautiful trees along with the fresh air and it's sure to make your worries float away like the leaves in the fall!

Trees are not only important to our mental health they are important to our physical health. Did you know that trees actually provide us with clean water to drink? Trees use their

canopies to slow rain down from hitting the surface. This reduces the pollutants that make their way into our water. Trees provide us with nourishing foods that are good for our bodies such as fruits, nuts, berries, and seeds as well. Along with the freshwater and nutritious food, trees are good for exercise! Some of my best memories are swinging on a tire swing tied to a giant oak tree limb in my backyard!

Here in Kentucky, we are blessed with lots of trees to keep us healthy and happy! I personally love Kentucky's variety of oak trees. There are 20 different oak species that are native to Kentucky including the white oak, southern red oak, black oak, and chestnut oak. Oak trees grow acorns which is a vital food source for many wildlife creatures such as deer, turkey, blue jays, and many others. If you're like me and many other Kentuckians you love and depend on our wildlife, as a source of food. My daddy is an avid hunter and without Kentucky oaks to provide a food source for our wildlife it would not be possible for him to harvest a deer or turkey to feed our family. Besides feeding our wildlife Kentucky oak trees are important to our economy, and contribute more than \$160 million in exports and thousands of jobs in forestry; To me that gives a whole new meaning to mighty oaks!

Kentucky is famous for its bourbon. Did you know that oak trees play a hand in that fame? Bourbon is made in barrels from only the oldest and best white oak trees here in the state. Oak trees are used because of their leak resistance and the rich flavor it produces. Each barrel contains enough bourbon for about 200 bottles which is about \$8,000 worth! Because bourbon is made here in Kentucky where white oaks grow it provides many economic benefits for us as

well. Some might even say bourbon is another way to survive the pandemic although I wouldn't suggest it unless you're over 21!

Times are tough right now, but Kentucky is as tough as our mighty oak trees! When you're feeling under the weather or stressed and need a breath of fresh air and some calming scenery, step right outside your door and look to the trees! Take a deep breath in and enjoy the fresh air our trees have helped to provide us with and just relax! "We will get through this and we will get through it together!"

Sources:

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