

# Forests bring peace of mind in a stressful world

*With her forest therapy sessions at Manitou, Amanda Kenyon uses nature as a healing balm*

By Annie Landenberger  
*The Commons*

**W**ILLIAMSVILLE—Deep in the Williamsville woods, a few participants sat with their guide, Amanda Kenyon, to meditate before venturing to seek nuances of color in the forest, then to share; to dial into the forest's rich scents and then share again.

The 90 minutes of this uniquely refreshing Japanese tradition of shinrin-yoku — “forest bathing” — floated by, and the outcome promised on Kenyon's website ([landkindguide.com](http://landkindguide.com)) — to “slow down, breathe, and let the forest work its quiet magic” — was fulfilled.

As Kenyon's website explains,

“these sessions go beyond relaxation.”

“Research shows that forest bathing can reduce stress hormones like cortisol, boost immune function, improve mood, lower blood pressure, and enhance focus and creativity,” she writes. “The sessions are designed to foster mindfulness and presence — practices that have been proven to reduce anxiety and depression, improve sleep, and boost overall emotional well-being.”

Quite useful in today's roiling world.

The public is welcome to get a taste of this practice at one of two sessions left in this round of Kenyon's Forest Bathing Nature Therapy Clinic on Friday, Oct. 17, and/or Monday, Oct. 20, at 3 p.m. at Manitou Project, the

223-acre wooded sanctuary on Sunset Lake Road.

## **A vision of forest, mindfulness, and movement**

As she describes on her website, Kenyon is a “nature therapy and meditation guide, woman, voice for the land, belly dancer, accountant, cook, sister, volunteer, builder of stone walls, hiker of high peaks and a humble human learning every day from all the beings of this shared planet Earth.”

In a recent conversation with *The Commons*, she quipped, “I don't know which version of Amanda Kenyon I'm on, but there are definitely past lives of mine. Yeah, I have two business

■ SEE FOREST BATHING, A3



ANNIE LANDENBERGER/THE COMMONS

When contemplating her future, Amanda Kenyon thought of three words — “nature,” “mindfulness,” and “movement” — and soon the former corporate and nonprofit professional discovered the Japanese tradition of shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing.

# ■ Forest bathing

FROM SECTION FRONT

degrees and I started out with a long career, a decade in the accounting and finance world — the corporate arena.”

She left the corporate world as that work became unfulfilling; circumstances then led her to become a band manager, music promoter, and booking agent.

“I did that for a while and then got back into accounting and finance work with an environmental nonprofit, because love of the Earth has been there for a long time for me,” she said.

Coming to Vermont, where she’d moved to be closer to the mountains than she’d been in her home state, Connecticut, she took a director’s role at HatchSpace in Brattleboro, “guiding that organization through the shutdown for the pandemic into relocation to High Street & Green and the grand reopening in a new space with full programming.”

As that project wrapped up, Kenyon started to ponder “What next?”

“I started a visioning process where I had a whiteboard and any word or phrase went onto the board with no rhyme or reason: I just spit out a bunch of things — everything from ‘events coordinator’ to ‘fire,’” she said.

“And after a month or so of that, I had this complete download from the universe, like a mandate, to create a retreat space in the forest where people could connect to nature and themselves,” through mindfulness and movement, she continued.

“Like, wow, that’s great,” she’d thought — but what did that mean?

Noting three key words on the whiteboard — “nature,” “mindfulness,” and “movement” — she discovered forest bathing.

Kenyon welcomed forest bathing’s fit with her love of hiking, meditating, being in the mountains, exploring the woods.

She soon found and worked with different guides and collected “an array of experiences to evaluate.”

The first was with Nadine Mazzola, a Boston-based author and certified forest therapist.

“It kind of blew me away,” Kenyon said. “It was definitely different. It wasn’t just a walk in the woods. And it felt profound to me.”

Thus inspired, Kenyon pursued certification as a forest therapy guide in 2022 through The Forest Therapy School, which involved in-person training in Maryville, Tennessee.

Needing a place to fulfill her plan, Kenyon did research that led her to Mike Mayer, vice president of the Manitou Project. After participating on a guided forest walk with him, she shared her interest and needs.

“And he listened and said, ‘Oh, do you want a place to do that?’ So the universe kind of opened up all the doors, and Manitou became my first partnership, the first place that I’ve guided at,” Kenyon said.

As Kenyon continues to lead at Manitou, she’s added more locations, more partnerships, more offerings, but “Manitou is still very special to me. It’s very magical land.”

## De-stressing the world

Kenyon described the need for programs like the one she offers.

“It hurts my heart to hear when people are stressed about what may happen in their country, in the world,” she said. People who can benefit from forest bathing might have “personal concerns about being able to maintain their job, health care, and all the many things that are sort of trickling down from how the political environment has been progressing and how our culture is being shaped by that.”

“I think the weight of the world is a lot heavier for a lot of people these days, and we get caught up trying to make ends meet and trying to do all the things we need to do,” Kenyon said. “And it can be hard to really take a break and really do something to help with your stressor level or your depression or your anxiety.”

When she guides people into this peaceful support of nature, Kenyon said that “people might just cry at how much tension they’ve been carrying.”

“So I see the relief that it gives people, or the joy, or maybe they are rediscovering a love of nature that they had earlier in life,” she said.

In forest bathing, “we get to also live those parts of us that get suppressed when we’re in an environment of a stressful life,” Kenyon also noted.

## ‘Peace and harmony and joy with nature’

According to her website, Kenyon “guides mindfulness and sensory-based nature experiences that promote holistic well-being and strengthen our relationship with nature, ourselves, and other humans.”

She’s offered programs through Sētū Vermont, an Ayurvedic healing center, and she has been a guest presenter at Vermont Insight Meditation Center and at Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center (BEEC). All three organizations are in Brattleboro.

She also continues to fine tune her own offerings for the public and privately books individual and small groups sessions locally and to area visitors through national travel and hospitality sites.

In addition to her Forest Therapy certification, Kenyon is certified in wilderness first aid through Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities, and she is a trained Sierra Club Outings hike leader. While she still keeps a foot in the accounting world, she’s also become certified building dry stone walls through the Stone Trust in Dummerston.

Beyond the Oct. 17 and 20 forest bathing sessions, which is “pay as you can” and for which a donation of \$15 to \$45 is welcomed, Kenyon will offer full moon events on Wednesday, Nov. 5, and Thursday, Dec. 4, at BEEC.

She also offers an annual Grateful Forest immersion there the day after Thanksgiving.

“It’s an alternative to ‘Black Friday,’ where we find peace and harmony and joy with nature and be grateful for what we’ve got,” she said.

For information about all of Kenyon’s offerings and to book, visit [landkindguide.com](http://landkindguide.com).