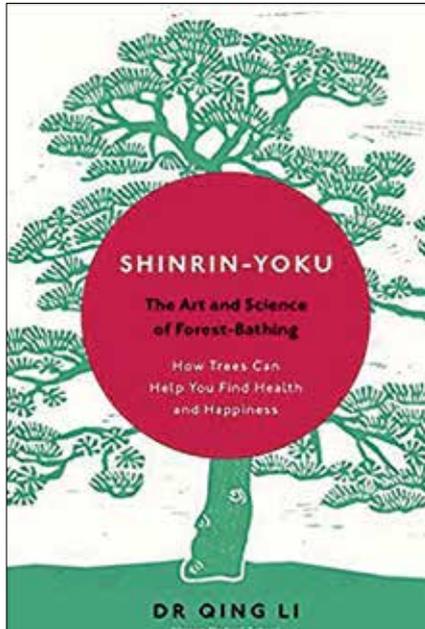


New books

Ian Baker leads by reviewing 'forest bathing'. Is it the next big thing in woodland?



Shinrin-Yoku: The Art and Science of Forest Bathing

Dr Qing Li

This book is predicted by some to become a publishing phenomenon, much as *Hygge* and *Norwegian Wood* have been in recent years, which it probably deserves as the book and its author Dr Qing Li certainly have much to convey. The book is full of practical and philosophical observations and advice on the benefits of engagement with the forest environment.

Firstly, the theory. Forest Bathing, or Shinrin-Yoku is the regular practice of immersion in a forest environment – which might be a better translation – for health and well-being benefits. The practice is said to provide multiple benefits, for instance in reducing stress and anxiety, as well as alleviating physical conditions, such as heart and respiratory disease and cancer.

And even where the gains are not so strong, patients feel better about their condition. Forest bathing lifts mood as much as anything else. This book makes the point very well that forest bathing can help improve health and reduce stress by improving sleep and can put you in a better frame of mind.

It also shows how the science of forest bathing is being brought out of the

forest and can benefit every home and office, as the terpenes (fragrant oils) from which many of the health benefits are gained can be diffused indoors in much the same way they work in the forest. You can literally bottle the goodness. But I am glad to say that the trip to the woods is not made redundant, as it is from forest immersion that the greatest benefits come.

The results quoted are certainly impressive, with measurable improvements quoted across all the conditions examined. One example used that might be of direct relevance is the work that the author quotes from the US Forest Service regarding the effects of emerald ash borer (and the consequent removal of ash trees from American cities). USFS looked at deaths from coronary and respiratory disease and found that significantly more deaths, 15,000 and 6,000 respectively, occurred in areas where ash trees had been removed.

There are perhaps lessons in this work for how we regard the loss of our own trees, particularly in urban areas (and especially for the brutal Sheffield street tree removal programme). This analysis may lead to the conclusion that although the streets may be easier to clean, people may have shorter lives to enjoy their cleanliness.

Dr Li takes care to ensure that examples are drawn from across the world, which helps to broaden its relevance beyond its origins in Japan. However, there are still aspects of the work that could be said to be so rooted in Japanese culture that they would be hard to translate, given the significance of Japan's forests to Shinto Buddhism and how that informs Japanese art, design and architecture.

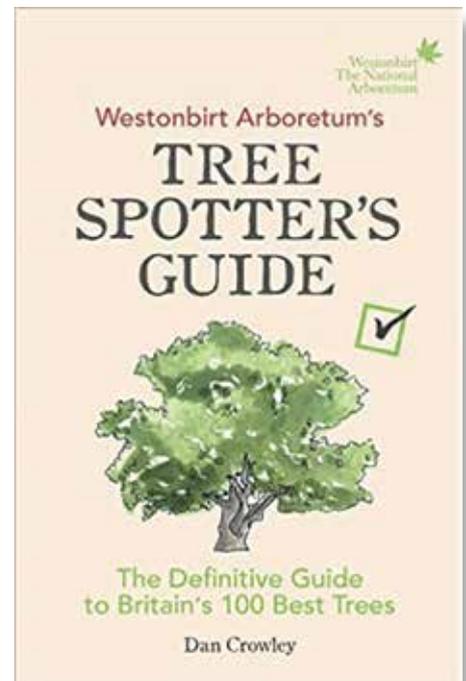
A couple of small niggles. Given that the book is as much about the scientific basis of forest bathing as its practice, the fact that frequent references are made to research that are unreferenced is a shortcoming. This is clearly an editorial decision to ensure the text is not cluttered with endless footnotes. However, it means that assertions made cannot be verified. The fact that there are no mentions that forests can be difficult and unwelcoming environments also might lead people to underestimate the reality that these

challenges do exist.

Nevertheless, Shinrin-Yoku and Dr Qing's insights have a great deal to recommend them.

Ian Baker

Shinrin-Yoku: The Art and Science of Forest Bathing by Dr Qing Li is published by Penguin Life, price £12.99.



Westonbirt Arboretum's Tree Spotter's guide: The Definitive Guide to Britain's 100 Best Trees

Dan Crowley

A handy size to fit in your jacket pocket for a day out in the woods, this tree spotter's guide is a useful aid to identification and is sturdy enough for you to make some notes about the trees you find in the field.

Dendrologist Dan Crowley has included some fascinating notes about hybridisation, including the statements that Leyland cypress and black poplar are the product of chance hybridisation.