



**British Heart  
Foundation**



## **Woodland walks for autumn**

### **A tree in a wood in autumn**

With the autumnal colours beginning to show outside, there couldn't be a better time to get out in the fresh air and go for a woodland walk.

Going for a walk in the woods is always enjoyable, no matter what time of year, but it's hard to deny that autumn provides the most beautiful backdrop. As the leaves begin to change into hues of russet and sienna and the air is crisp and clear, it's a perfect time to explore the great outdoors.

"Autumn is a great time to go for a walk because you get to see all the different colours and shapes of the leaves," says Tony Hall, Manager of Arboretum Collections at Kew Gardens. "When the leaves fall on the ground, it's like a natural mosaic."

He explains that the reason we can only see the different colours of the leaves in autumn is because during spring and summer they are covered in chlorophyll (green pigment), which masks the colour pigments in the leaves. As the days shorten and temperatures cool, the amount of chlorophyll decreases because the leaf veins close down.

## Wonderful woodlands

Tony, who is a keen walker, thinks beech woodlands have the most impressive autumn colours but he is also a fan of mixed deciduous forests as they contain such variety – maples and oaks both have lovely autumn colours. Two of Tony's favourite places to walk are Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire, because it has such beautiful beech trees, and the New Forest due to its wide variety of trees and stunning scenery.

Des de Moor, from walking charity The Ramblers, says: "Remember that you don't need to travel far to go walking, because there's always something nearby, even if you live in a city." Oxleas Wood in Greenwich is one of Des's favourites. Crookes Valley Park near Sheffield is also a great example of a wood that is not only a fantastic place to walk but is easy to get to if you live in the city.

One of the many things that Des loves about walking is how accessible it is. "Walking is great because it's something nearly anyone can do and it doesn't cost you anything," he says. "Although it's nice to walk by yourself sometimes, walking can be very sociable as you can walk and talk at the same time."

In addition, brisk walking is great for our hearts and counts as a moderate-intensity activity, which we should all aim to do a minimum of 150 minutes each week.

There are also lots of fun activities that the whole family can do together while going for a walk. From playing hide and seek and running through fallen leaves to picking blackberries and looking for conkers and chestnuts, woods are natural playgrounds for all.

Tony says autumn is a great time to look out for the varieties of fungi, such as the red and white spotted toadstool (fly agaric, or *Amanita muscaria*). However, it is one of many mushrooms that are poisonous, so it's best to look, not touch. But there are still plenty of hands-on things you can do, from bark rubbings to picking up fallen leaves. How about turning the walk into a treasure hunt for your grandchildren by looking for as many different coloured leaves as possible? You can then take the leaves home and get creative by making a collage with them.



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