
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Gardening



Note: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sophie

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Sophie...

Neil

And I'm Neil... What did you do at the weekend, Sophie?

Sophie

I did a spot of gardening.

Neil

So, you are you a keen gardener?

Sophie

Yes, I am, Neil. And gardening is the subject of today's show! Now why don't we start with a quiz question?

Neil

Good idea.

Sophie

What percentage of people in the UK said that gardening makes them happier, according to a survey conducted by the Royal Horticultural Society? Is it...

a) 22%

b) 52%

Or c) 82%?

Neil

Well, I'll guess: b) 52%.

Sophie

Well, we'll find out later on if you got it right or not. So, does gardening make you happy, Neil?

Neil

Well, I tried to grow some tomatoes once. And to be honest it made me rather anxious. All the leaves curled up... and then dropped off.

Sophie

Did you get any tomatoes?

Neil

No.

Sophie

So you don't have green fingers, then? Why are you looking at your fingers, Neil? I wasn't asking whether you literally have green fingers! Having **green fingers** means a natural ability for growing plants. It's funny you should say gardening makes you anxious because other people find it calming and relaxing.

Neil

Do they? Do you?

Sophie

Yes, I do. Being in the fresh air, in all weathers, communing with nature...

Neil

Sounds very unpleasant!

Sophie

In all weathers means something you do in all types of weather – rain, snow, sunshine. And **communuing with nature** means feeling close to nature, and being a part of it.

Neil

Well, when I tried communuing with nature my hands got all scratched – I got stung by nasty creepy-crawlies – and I got soil up my nose. I didn't enjoy it at all.

Sophie

Try wearing protective clothing next time – and maybe a nose plug too! A **creepy-crawly** is a small insect, by the way.

Neil

So do you like getting your hands dirty, Sophie?

Sophie

Yes, I love it. And it turns out there might be a good reason for this. Dr Christopher Lowry from the University of Colorado conducted an experiment to test whether soil gives us a **natural high** – meaning to make us happy without taking drugs. He injected a bacterium

commonly found in soil into mice to see what affect this would have on them. Let's hear what he said in this BBC programme.

INSERT

Dr Christopher Lowry, neuroscientist, University of Colorado US and Helena Merriman, presenter

CL: Rodents like mice and rats are very good swimmers and it was found many years ago that if you treat animals with antidepressant drugs and then put the animals in just a beaker of water it would cause the animals to swim for longer periods of time.

HM: After injecting the mice with the bacterium Dr Lowry placed them in a cup of water.

CL: These mice that had been injected with bacterium swam during a 6-minute test for a longer period of time than animals that just got a placebo.

Sophie

So the bacterium had a similar effect on the mice as an antidepressant drug might. When we dig in soil we **ingest** – or absorb – the bacterium through our lungs or cuts in our skin. A **placebo**, by the way, is a substance with no physical effects that is used when testing a drug. So here one group of mice were injected with the bacterium and another group were injected with the placebo. And since the mice seemed happier when treated with soil bacteria, there's a good chance we would too.

Neil

Let's move on and hear about how gardening can be **therapeutic** – or used to try and treat addiction. Here's Scot Stephenson, a recovering alcoholic, who is learning to garden to help cure him.

INSERT

Scot Stephenson, recovering alcoholic

I left school early or should I say I got expelled... came here, I got my NVQ level 2 which is my first qualification and enjoyed it ever since.

Neil

So Scot Stephenson was **expelled** from school – he was forced to leave – with no qualifications. But with the help of a support group he now has an **NVQ** – that's a National Vocational Qualification here in Britain – in gardening.

Sophie

That's right. At a centre in the UK, recovering alcoholics have been given the opportunity to plant, grow, and even sell their produce. These addicts are literally breaking their addiction by breaking the soil.

Neil

Nicely phrased, Sophie!

Sophie

Thank you! Now, are you ready, Neil, for the answer to today's quiz question?

Neil

I am.

Sophie

I asked: What percentage of people in the UK said that gardening makes them happier, according to a survey conducted by the Royal Horticultural Society? Is it... a) 22%, b) 52% or c) 82%?

Neil

I guessed b) 52%. I'm wrong, aren't I?

Sophie

Oh, you are Neil, I'm sorry. The percentage of people who really enjoy gardening is much higher. You should have chosen option c). A survey from the Royal Horticultural Society has shown that Brits truly are a nation of gardeners with 82% saying it makes them feel happier. The results also revealed that 70% said that given the choice, they would prefer to spend their working day in the garden with just 9% opting for an office and 21% undecided.

Neil

Well, I'm with the 9% I'm afraid. Now can we hear the words we learned today, Sophie?

Sophie

They are:
green fingers
in all weathers
communing with nature
creepy-crawly
natural high
ingest
placebo
therapeutic
expelled
NVQ

Neil

Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Now go back outside Sophie and get your hands dirty! Please do join us again soon!

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

green fingers

a natural ability for growing plants

in all weathers

(describes something you do) in all types of weather

communing with nature

feeling close to nature and being a part of it

creepy-crawly

small insect

natural high

something that makes us happy without taking drugs

ingest

absorb

placebo

a substance with no physical effects that is used when testing a drug

therapeutic

used to try and cure an illness

expelled

forced to leave

GNVQ

General National Vocational Qualification (UK qualification)