

‘I still consider myself to be A WORK IN PROGRESS’

Presenter Julia Bradbury’s passion for nature is truly infectious. Here, she shares her top green tips, the importance of kids spending time in the dirt, and why she’d choose writing by hand over using a computer



Julia, 50, lives in London with her partner and three children, son Zephyr, nine, and twins Xanthe and Zena, five.

MY WORLD OF WALKING

The pandemic has made us all realise how important nature is. There have been very few places we’ve been allowed to go during the various lockdowns, but the one thing we’ve been allowed to do is to exercise outdoors. People have been flocking to parks and outdoor spaces. I think there’s also been a readjustment for people in how they spend their time and their work/life balance, as well as a new appreciation of how important nature is to all of us.

We’re incredibly blessed with hundreds of thousands of networks of footpaths and walkways in the United Kingdom. My new series, *Cornwall And Devon Walks*, is a real celebration, in its truest form, of nature, green spaces, wildlife, our oceans, our seas, our coastlines and our walking pathways. *Newsnight* called me an outdoor evangelist; I loved that! But I’ve loved walking my entire life. I’ve dipped in and out of it as and when needed, and when lifestyle allowed. There are times when it seems incredibly boring and dull and there are other times when you think, ‘This is going to literally save my life.’

There’s so much to explore within Cornwall and Devon, where the series is set. You have woodlands, ➔

Julia wears (opposite page) Fur blanket, stylist's own.
(This page) Dress, Atelier Zuhra

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the coastline and you have the green bits in between. There's 5,000 miles of paths and walkways! The range of landscapes is just fantastic. We've managed to include some amazing contributors and beautiful locations. We have everything from forest bathing to the Tresco Abbey Gardens on the Isles of Scilly, which is like nowhere else on earth. The gardens have the nickname 'Kew Gardens without a roof' because of the temperate climate.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you do, we all need nature. We know that being outside in daylight makes our body produce vitamin D, which we need to stay healthy. We know that spending a certain amount of time in daylight optimises our circadian rhythm, which helps us sleep and operates our human function. We all need clean soil because we need the food. We all need trees because they're soaking up the pollutants, enriching the soil for us, and purifying the water. I hope this series creates even more awareness of how much we need to connect with nature.

IT'S IN MY NATURE

My memories of growing up in our little village are really vivid. My dad was the outdoorsy, let's-go-for-a-walk parent and my mum was the I'm-not-outdoorsy, but-come-around-the-garden-with-me one. When you're little, you just want to be with your parents so you do whatever they do. We moved logs, potted plants and cut grass together, and I remember harvesting the apples; the taste of them and the smell of them. My parents still live in that house, so we eat those apples every year, and when I do, I'm biting into my childhood.

My dad and I did a lot of walking in the Peak District. It was on our doorstep, so he would take me walking there from when I was about the age of six. He'd make it so adventurous and tell stories, and he had a fantastic imagination. You'd come across an

old sheep carcass and bones and he'd say that they were the ruins of some old pirate. We'd go to Hathersage in deep winter and tunnel through the huge snowdrifts, make igloos and create mazes. It was magical stuff.

Passing on my love of the environment to my children is so important. The kids are in the garden every single day. If you catch them early, kids can be captivated by nature. Playing outside creates independence. They will climb trees, they will find twigs, they will make things. More importantly, from a health point of view, it builds their immunity – letting kids play in dirt and soil, all of those microbes and the bacteria that they're inhaling while they're outside in green space is good for them. That's what you want – healthy, fit, dirty kids!

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I make up nature stories with the kids. They all love reading, so we read to each other. We'll sit around and read books, or I'll make something up. At the moment, there's a magical mouse who goes on a planet-saving mission, or we head up to space and learn about the rocks on our magical mountain mission. We get dressed up and I weave the kids' names into the stories, and that's always good fun. It's really good for me, too.

I'm an ambassador for Keep Britain Tidy and the Two Minute Beach Clean. I'm horrified by plastic production. I'm genuinely scared about the level of plastic being created and what it's doing to us. Nobody really knows. Since we've started producing plastic in the 1950s, half of all of those plastics have been manufactured in the last 15 years. Every year, 8m tonnes of plastic waste gets into the oceans. Only 12% of plastic has ever been recycled.

FAMILY COMES FIRST

Becoming a mum later in life was magical for me. I went through lots of IVF to have my girls, and I'm so grateful. I have gorgeous, lovely children and I'm just so happy to have these little human beings in my life. I think what having children helped me do was to maintain that breadth of openness and learn that it's not all about me. Motherhood has made me care even more about the planet. I want the world to be as good a place as possible for them.

A big topic of conversation in our house is sleep. We discuss with the kids how important it is, and we talk about how sleep gives you superpowers. It makes you grow and it cleans your brain every night by getting rid of all the bad things. It puts all the good things in and helps you cement your memories if you've had a good day. If you have a good night's sleep, it helps you remember the good things.

It's lovely seeing my kids' relationship with each other develop. The girls love and despise their big brother

Zeph in equal measure. He absolutely adores them and he also absolutely terrorises them, too. He seems to like nothing more than making them cry, stealing their favourite toy, and then, in the next five minutes, cuddling them. It's quite extraordinary to watch.

The dynamic between the twins is fascinating, too. Zena and Xanthe are not identical twins. They're in different classes at school, so they are developing their own friendship groups and their own characters, which is important. But ultimately, they're pretty much together all the time and know each other better than anyone. They interpret each other. All I know is that at 15 they are going to be a nightmare. They can look you in the face and tell you they haven't done something, and you know that they have and they don't even flinch! They'll always protect each other. ➡



Julia wears Shirt, Louise Kennedy. Jeans, Julia's own. Earrings, Celeste Starre at Katie & Jo



‘I always find it a bit weird when people ask for the secret to a relationship. Who knows what the secret of a good relationship is?’

Stylist Gayle Rinkoff **Hair & Make up** Alice Theobald using Mavala nails, Benefit Brows, Diva Pro hair & Guinot skincare **Julia wears** (opposite page) Trousers, Daily Sleeper at OutDazl. Jumper, Samsoe & Samsoe at POM London. Earrings, Celeste Starre at Katie & Jo. (This page) Cardigan, shopatanna.com. Skirt, LoveShackFancy at OutDazl. Earrings, Tada & Toy at Katie & Jo. Longer necklace, Tilly Sveaas at Katie & Jo. Shorter necklace, Soru. Bracelet, Tilly Sveaas at Katie & Jo

Every relationship is different. I always find it a bit weird when people ask for the secret to a relationship. Who knows what the secret of a good relationship is? Living apart? [laughs] Being away a lot? My partner doesn't like being talked about, so I don't really speak about our relationship.

FIFTY AND THRIVING

The wonderful thing about being 50 is that you have experience under your belt.

I celebrated that landmark in July last year. You probably know more than you ever have done – I'm not saying you know everything – but you're at that bit of the Venn diagram where you have past experience, a little bit of wisdom and knowledge and it's just that bit in the middle. I think you're more accepting of yourself, too.

My approach to life is more measured than it once was. I'm still excited by life and I still take risks, but I have more patience. I have an ability to pause and reflect a little bit before I make a decision, which is something that I didn't necessarily have when I was younger. I let things rest for a moment.

The best advice I've been given is to never instantly respond to something that tweaks you emotionally. With social media, it's so easy to just jump in with your gut reaction, but your instant response will not be what your response 24 hours later would be. Once you've had that time, then you can respond in a measured way and in a way that means that situation won't escalate. I think that's a top tip for the 21st century – no knee-jerk reactions!

MY SELF-CARE

Physical health and mental health are completely intertwined. I think walking is genuinely one of the best things for mental health. There have been studies all over the world that prove that walking



JULIA'S TIPS TO SAVE THE PLANET

The little swaps we can make to help protect the environment.

- **You can make small changes in your community.** Ask your local restaurant or takeaway to consider switching to alternative containers if they use plastic ones.
- **Reuse the packaging you get your parcels in.** You could also ask your supplier to not use plastic in their packaging.
- **Clingfilm is the devil's work!** You can buy reusable silicon lids that stretch over pots and pans. Or use wax wrap, which lengthens your food life more than clingfilm. The initial purchase is more expensive, but you can reuse it again and again.
- **Use old jam jars and reuse packaging to store things.** Our grandparents would use cotton with elastic bands round the top.
- **Get reusable straws and cutlery.** My sister Gina bought the kids metal straws, and I've got a set of wooden reusable knives and forks.
- **Recycle your food waste.** If you have a garden, compost. If you don't, ask your local authority to see if they offer a food waste service.
- **Eat seasonal to cut down on food miles.** If you can, try to feed your family seasonal fruit and veg.

Meet your cover star

reduces your anxiety levels. It elevates your mood, increases oxytocin (the love hormone), and brisk walking is good for your cardiovascular health as well as your blood pressure. So there's a very real correlation between walking and mental health and the elongation of life, and also mental resilience. It all feeds into taking care of yourself.

I try to hand write as much as possible. I think we've lost that art, because we're all on our keyboards. I've actually found all my old address books in the house, and I've decided to go back to that analogue life a bit, writing out people's details. But I think writing is a very important part of being

a human being; it's something that sets us apart from other animals. Writing connects your thoughts and your brain. I write poems, I write journals, I write notes about my thoughts of the day. It's a good exercise to do for your brain, even just for five minutes a day. I wonder how many people do that any more?

Every day I walk. But if I don't go out for a walk, I'll do yoga, both for my mental health and my body. Walking and yoga give me a physical workout, but there's also a mental workout there, too, as you're concentrating on your breathing and your focus, where your hands and feet are, and being engaged in the moment. You have to be mindful and I think that's good for my mental health as well as physical.

I still consider myself to be a work in progress. I've had a fortunate life. I have lovely parents, family and great friends. I've had a rewarding career. I've been to fascinating places and interviewed fascinating people, but I'm still learning. I learn something new every single day and think curiosity helps you stay positive.

• *Cornwall And Devon Walks With Julia Bradbury is on ITV and ITV Hub now. Visit theoutdoorguide.co.uk for downloadable UK walking routes*