

The European Green Year for Europe's health will be completed next year.

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The importance of green spaces and nearby forests has become clear to many Europeans at the latest during the coronavirus pandemic, which has only highlighted the need for a European Green Year. Exercising in nature reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and refreshes the brain and memory. Green environments also prevent depression. The Year will have a number of positive effects on people's lives.

Yesterday, the European Commission finally approved my initiative for a European Green Year for 2022. The Year will take place next year. It is part of the action plan on pollution that the Commission published yesterday.

I am really pleased and happy with the adoption of the Year. Urbanization is accelerating further and people are increasingly moving to cities, so built green environments are becoming increasingly important for health, people's quality of life and the environment in cities.

Greening cities is an easy and cost-effective response to urban health and environmental challenges. The Green Year highlights the potential of built green environments and nature to improve the quality of life of Europeans. Built green environments can be, for example, green roofs and walls, greened streets, parks and other green areas. They positively change many aspects of life. Vegetation has important health effects such as cleaner air quality, reduction of noise pollution and encouragement of exercise.

The forthcoming Green Year will improve people's quality of life in general, increase the mobility and outdoor activities of the elderly, for example, and bring nature closer to people. Green Year has great potential to improve the state of biodiversity in cities and agglomerations. The Year will have a number of positive effects on people's lives.

Exercising in nature reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and refreshes the brain and memory. Green environments also prevent depression. Cleaner city air could improve the quality of life of millions of people with asthma and allergies. The green urban environment provides an opportunity to enjoy nature even for those who find it difficult to get to nature. Nearby nature can be easily reached on foot or by bike, with unpolluted modes of transport. Direct contact with nature can strengthen the immune system through wider microbial exposure.

The importance of green spaces and nearby forests has become clear to many Europeans at the latest during the coronavirus pandemic, which has only highlighted the need for a European Green Year. With restaurants, museums, sports centres, and other leisure venues closed, for many, moving around in nature has been one of the only ways to move outside the home, take care of their health, and maintain social relationships. The coronavirus has further highlighted the need to add green spaces to cities where people can move freely and loosely, taking care of physical distance.

In addition to the health benefits, the green environment also sequesters carbon dioxide from the air, mitigates the effects of extreme weather events and, when well designed, protects biodiversity. As climate change progresses and the biodiversity crisis deepens, more green spaces are urgently needed.

On top of all that, greening also increases the economic value of real estate in the area, as Green Neighbourhoods are more valuable and attractive. Their design, construction and maintenance are of great economic importance, and the sector can also employ the hard-to-employ. The Year is also of economic importance.

Parliament's Environment Committee, on the initiative of Sirpa Pietikäinen, drew up an own-initiative report on designating 2022 as the European Green Year. The report was adopted by the Committee on the Environment in January 2020 and adopted in plenary in September 2020.

The aim of the Green Year is to increase the number of European green spaces in agglomerations and cities and to raise awareness of the health, environmental and economic benefits of green spaces. The aim is also to increase research and development, encourage citizens to be active in greening their own neighbourhoods and increase the value of green spaces.