

Developing the field:

Earth Awareness

An overview of the Garrison Institute's 2024 study of Earth awareness practices

In this brief, we dive into the world of Earth awareness, asking what drives trends in the development of this emerging social field and how these practices can inspire responsibility, transform relationships with Earth, and regenerate planetary health.

We held over 45 dialogues with Earth awareness teachers, formed a steering committee, and engaged in the field. Our work examined relationships in the field and identified traditions, intentions, common sources of inspiration, and challenges and opportunities for further growth.



What is Earth awareness?

Earth awareness recognizes that all life is interconnected. This field fosters deep relationships with Earth and includes mindfulness practices, Buddhist meditation, Indigenous knowledge systems, and educational frameworks designed to inspire positive change for the environment and help people experience embodied interconnectedness.

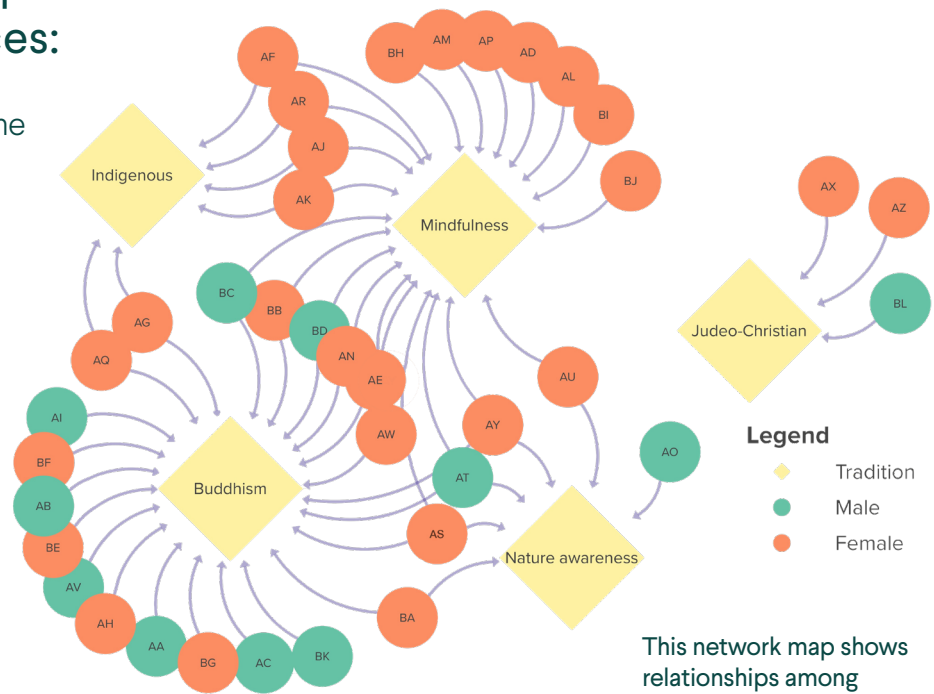
Awareness practices include rituals, ceremonies, and mindful actions that help people feel more connected with Earth and take responsibility for how they depend on, support, and impact Earth as they go about their daily lives.

Why does it matter?

Earth awareness has the potential to transform how we live in relationship with Earth. By applying ancient wisdom to modern sustainability efforts, these practices can help communities learn about the environment while developing deep, meaningful, ongoing relationships with Earth. Through convening Earth awareness leaders, we can create more opportunities for people to develop a sense of responsibility to care for the land, water, and air, ensuring a thriving future for all life.

Earth awareness comprises a wide range of practices:

- **Ecodharma retreats** combine meditation with time in nature
- **Climate cafés** provide emotional support for those dealing with eco-anxiety
- **Mindfulness-based sustainability programs** connect personal growth with environmental action
- **Earth-based rituals and ceremonies** honor nature's sacredness
- **Sensory-based nature awareness** exercises help people develop daily habits of consciously connecting with nature.



This network map shows relationships among Earth awareness teachers through the traditions they draw from.

We Highlight Three Key Trends

1. While Earth awareness holds promise, there are clear **obstacles** and **opportunities** for developing the field, including:

Obstacles

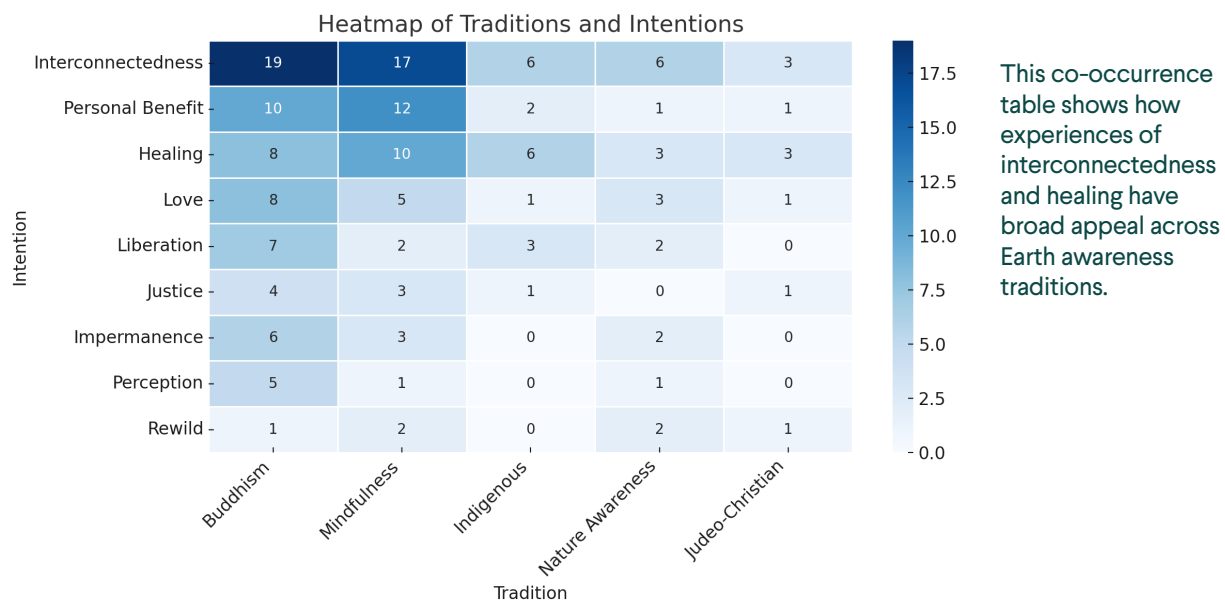
- Lack of accessibility and awareness of practices
- Disconnection from self, each other, and nature in modern life
- Challenges for teachers and practitioners to sustain their work and take care amidst feelings of overwhelm and isolation
- The need to integrate awareness with action.

Opportunities

- Introduce accessible, simple pathways into Earth awareness
- Support teachers in self care, logistics, and making their work widely available
- Strengthen relationships between elders and youth
- Bring together cross-sector perspectives to broaden diverse sensitivities.

2. Earth awareness is a **modern expression of ancient wisdom**. For example, the field is related to original and mainstream Buddhism, not a new interest at the periphery. Understanding historical context underscores the importance of justice and the need for ethical, respectful engagement with diverse cultural perspectives and traditions.

3. Earth awareness is deeply **intertwined with spiritual traditions**. The field reaches beyond science, observation, education, and the material environment. Many traditions hold nature as inherently sacred and teach Earth awareness practices that acknowledge spiritual aspects of living Earth.



What's next?

Earth awareness is growing as a field of practice, but it's developing in disconnected ways, resulting in an increasingly broad range of uncoordinated approaches to teaching and learning. To build on these findings, we are working to convene leaders, teachers, and funders to:

- **Strengthen relationships** and shared understanding within an Earth awareness community
- **Develop teaching and learning frameworks** for Earth awareness practices that link to responsible action
- **Develop new, creative practices**
- **Promote ethical guidelines** for engaging with rituals and ceremonies
- **Ensure the field is accessible and inclusive** for all people
- **Explore conditions, settings, and cohorts** through which practices are most effective.

What you can do:

Are you a teacher, leader, or funder who wants to support Earth awareness?

We want you to be involved.

We're planning retreats that integrate science with mindfulness and Indigenous traditions, convening key stakeholders to facilitate dialogue, connect siloed efforts, build coherence, and collaboratively develop the field.

Write to us:
info@garrisoninstitute.org

Learn more:
garrisoninstitute.org



Pathways to Planetary Health
GARRISON INSTITUTE