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Local yoga classes move to more pastoral settings outdoors



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Bristol Yoga Studio co-owner Christine Reed helps Tara Stevens with a posture during a “Yoga in the Gardens” class at Blithewold Mansion, Gardens, and Arboretum.

[By Jim McGaw](#)

EAST BAY — If yoga can help you calm the mind through relaxation and meditation, it’s only seems natural to move the ancient Hindu practice to the great outdoors once in a while.

More and more yoga studios are taking advantage of Mother Nature’s warmer months by bringing their students to pastoral settings such as Blithewold Mansion, Gardens, and Arboretum in Bristol and the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown.

Every Monday through July and August, Bristol Yoga Studios has been running a “Yoga in the Gardens” series at Blithewold. Instructor Christine Reed, co-owner of the studio, is introducing Hatha yoga styles during the 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. classes, which are open to all levels. This is the third year that Blithewold has hosted the outdoor classes.

“It’s more expansive outside,” said Ms. Reed, whose studio has also offered classes at Colt State Park in Bristol. “The whole idea about yoga predominantly is about opening up, to keep it simple. Because we live in such a beautiful area and can do it outside, we’ll take advantage of it.”

Participants need not worry about the heat.

“In the past we’ve done the class in the North Gardens, which is in bright sunlight. This year we’ve been practicing under the sequoia trees in an area they call the Nut Grove. It’s completely shaded and has a bay breeze,” said Ms. Reed.

The program also affords participants an opportunity to explore the beauty of Blithewold.

“If anyone comes to the 11:30 a.m. class and they want to bring a picnic lunch, they can enjoy it in the gardens and walk around. It’s a great deal if you’ve never been to Blithewold,” she said.

Although the summer series ends on Aug. 30, Bristol Yoga Studio is planning a daytime yoga retreat at Blithewold some time in October, said Ms. Reed.

Beginners and walk-ins are also invited to take part in yoga classes at the Norman Bird Sanctuary on Mondays at 6 p.m. through the end of August. The classes, led by Diana McCallister of Innerlight Center for Yoga & Meditation in Middletown, focus on breathing, stretching and strengthening the body as well as calming the mind with beginning meditation exercises. Participants are asked to bring a yoga mat and wear comfortable exercise clothing.

“This is gentle yoga — very gentle stretching and relaxing and breathing. It’s meant to add some strengthening and you move through the poses slowly,” said Ms. McCallister, adding that the majority of people in her class tend to be senior citizens.

“In fact, I have an 86-year-old student. It ranges from 45 up, but it seems that more of them are 65 and older,” she said.

Whatever their age, the yoga enthusiasts love being outside, she said. “They just think it’s so wonderful, especially in that setting. We have it in that grassy area; you can see Third Beach off in the distance. The participants feel it’s really nice to be under the trees and in the fresh air. A woman last night told us it was nice to lay down on the grass, which as adults we don’t get to do very often.”

Although most people who take yoga classes tend to be women, the practice benefits everyone, she said.

“It’s very good for relaxation, stress reduction. It really helps to stretch all the muscles of the body and it helps people who sit a lot at desks, which gives you that tightness in your hips and lower back,” said Ms. McCallister.

The classes at Blithewold (253-2707), 101 Ferry Road, Bristol, are held from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Monday through Aug. 30. The drop-in fee is \$12 for Blithewold members, \$15 for non-members. The Norman Bird Sanctuary (846-2577), 583 Third Beach Road, Middletown, offers yoga classes at 6 p.m. Mondays through Aug. 30. The walk-in fee is \$12 (\$7 for seniors). If you’re interested in martial arts, ask about the Sanctuary’s tai chi program, held Tuesdays and Fridays at 8 a.m.