



# FIREWEED

A Treeplanting Zine Series



Brought to you by  
the TWIG Zine Committee  
Art by Branwen, Pim and Maia  
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MENTAL HEALTH  
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# What is TWIG

Tree Worker's Industrial Group is a grassroots advocacy collective that is pushing for worker representation within tree planting. Since its founding in October 2018, TWIG has grown to include members from across "Canada" and has been involved in collective action at multiple planting companies: advocating and promoting the legal rights of workers; developing tree-planting specific policies, bringing awareness to sexual violence; and, returning over \$60,000 of stolen wages to the pockets of planters.

Our mission is to support workers from the bottom up and to build solidarity and representation across company lines. We are volunteer-run and are spearheading a sectoral culture shift toward worker empowerment and transparency. We aim to educate and empower workers to both support each other and be critical and aware of the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist aspects of this industry.

TWIG's membership is open to any worker within the industry,  
for more info find us on facebook or visit our website:  
[treeworkersindustrialgroup.work](http://treeworkersindustrialgroup.work)

## Acknowledgments

This zine was a collaboration by many individuals far and wide, but we would like to acknowledge that the original run was printed and assembled on the traditional and unceded territories of the WSÁNEĆ (Saanich), Lkwungen (Songhees), Wyomilth (Esquimalt) peoples of the Coast Salish Nation. We are aware that as tree planters we participate in a larger resource extraction industry that continues to cause harm to the Land and the communities who've lived in relation and cared for this Land for time immemorial. We would also like to acknowledge that the topics covered in this zine affect certain groups, individuals, and communities disproportionately because of colonial, racist, and patriarchal systems of oppression that continue to be upheld by our society. We hope to continue learning and to use this platform to amplify the diverse voices of our community.



Cover Illustration by Maia Grisé

# Why are we making this zine?

Every season, as we pack up our winter lives and head back to the bush, many of us ask ourselves what keeps us coming back year after year. It can be easy to think of the positive aspects of planting but many of us have ample experience with the negatives. The purpose of this zine is to try and address a few of these negatives, attempting to shed light on them for ourselves and the betterment of our community. We hope to share some strategies, resources and ideas that can help us navigate an industry that has historically upheld a culture of silence and toughness at all cost. Our aim with this project is to build on the momentum stirring in the industry to begin to shift camp culture into a more inclusive, less toxic environment by helping to tear down the stigma surrounding mental health issues within our workplaces.



Thankyou to everyone who contributed to this zine, from writing, to editing, sharing stories and resources, making art, for listening and for the insurmountable amount of work that has already been done by our peers to make this industry more safe.

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Faceplant and lose all your trees? Rain soak through to your merino baselayer? Are you lost in an alleged “fill plant”? Not only can tree planting be incredibly frustrating and monotonous, it can also often be a time of processing emotions -whether that's working through a recent breakup, developing your five-year plan or reliving the shameful moments of your childhood. The land can mimic your emotional landscape, leading you through vastly different emotions over the course of a work day. Sometimes you just get stuck in a bad loop. Here are a few choice strategies to help ya out when you just can't quite crawl out of the vortex.

## MINDFUL PLANTING

I get it, you're a busy treeplanter with many important things to do: you don't have time to be sitting around finding your bliss, right? Truth is, if you've been planting for a while now it's likely you incorporate some form of mindfulness into your day already, even if it's unintentional, and shifting your perspective to allow for a more intentional approach to the practice can do wonders for your mood on the block. Next time you're heading into the land, give this a try:

- Bring your awareness to the action of putting your first tree in the ground. (Notice the feeling of your shovel hitting the ground, the tree in your hand, your breath)
- Repeat with the next tree, and the one after that.
- As your mind begins to wander (and it will), make a mental note that you've been distracted, and bring your awareness back to your planting.

The catch here is that while you are definitely going to get distracted, the idea is to notice when you do, and calmly bring your attention back to your trees. Treat every time you catch your mind wandering as a victory!



## GROUNDING

When my existential dread sends me spiralling I like to ground myself with this exercise to bring myself back to the present:

- 5 - LOOK: Name 5 things you see (i.e. a double plant, a grouse, a ghostline, a danger tree, a morel)
- 4 - LISTEN: 4 things you hear (i.e. someone swearing one piece over, a territorial bird, a song, the bugs)
- 3 - TOUCH: 3 things you feel (i.e. your sunburn, a thorn in your hand, the weight in your bags)
- 2 - SMELL: 2 things you smell (i.e. the dirt up your nose, dried fir needles)
- 1 - TASTE: and 1 thing you taste (i.e. Gatorade)

## BOX BREATHING

Inhale 4 seconds -> Hold 4 -> Exhale 4 -> Hold 4  
(try extending your exhale)

## OTHER COPING STRATEGIES

- Change your self-talk (would you talk to a loved one this way?)
- Question your thought pattern: can I fix this right now? Is this thinking benefitting me?
- Request a partner to plant with
- Think of things you're grateful for each bag up
- Tune your focus to your environment, appreciate it
- Pick an animal to embody for the day
- CRY if that helps you release
- Think of positive affirmations
- Blast some tunes or put on a podcast
- Be GENTLE and kind to yourself



## “Tending the Garden” in Isolation

Thoughts and offerings to fill your cup

There are many factors that can affect your mental wellbeing during the season. The emotional processing, the physical exhaustion, the give and take of living with 40+ roommates...planting can be transformative, but it can also cause burnout. Finding the time and energy to check in with yourself during a planting season can prove challenging but once you make it a habit you may find yourself better able to recognize your limits before exceeding them.

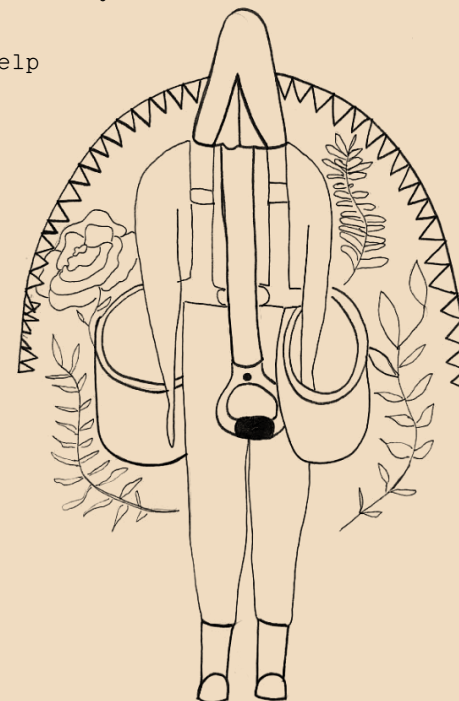
“Tending the garden” means different things to different people. For some, it can mean things that you do or refrain from doing with your wellbeing in mind. The following lists are simply meant to spark your imagination and help you when you need.

### BODY

- Check-in with your body -- Are there any aches or pains that need tending?
- Know your limits and when you need to take a day off -  
- Am I pushing through an injury?
- Rest
- Move your body in ways that feel good (dance, stretch)
- Consider... How much sleep do I need to feel refreshed?
- Am I being nourished by what I'm putting into my body?
- Am I staying hydrated?
- Do I need a party break this shift?

### MIND/SOUL

- Bring some comforts from home
- Fix something that you've been putting off
- Tune into your boundaries
- What are your boundaries? If someone asks you to do a task or take part in an event/project-- check-in with yourself before saying yes-- is this something that you have energy for? Are you agreeing to something out of enthusiasm or fear of judgement from others
- Remember your responsibility to care for yourself before you care for others
- Make a routine if that feels good or get out of your comfort zone if THAT feels good
- Organize your tent/van/trailer/nest
- Make sure competition is consensual and feels good for all parties
- What brings me joy?
- What gives me energy?
- I am nourished by...I am depleted by...
- Write or call your people
- Consider when to ask for help



# Planting Sober

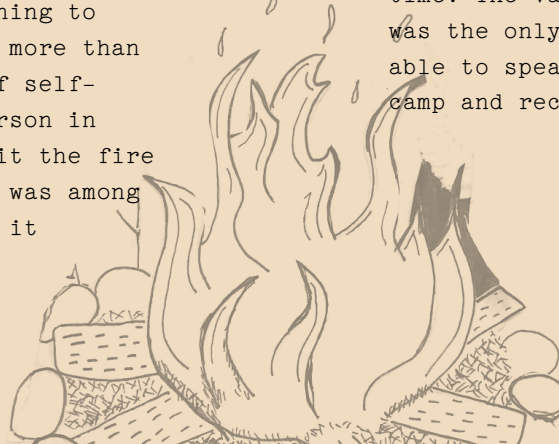
Last year (2020, good riddance) I planted my fourth season so far, and the first season sober. It was a hugely different experience from my previous three years in the bush. When I first started planting, I found appeal in the partying aspect of being at a larger camp. It played a significant role in bringing me back for my second season. After moving from Spectrum (A bigger company) to a smaller workers co-op, I found such a huge change in camp culture. At the co-op, everyone knew each other fairly well, especially when compared to Spectrum where there were about 60 people at any given time.

In camp there were a few people who were sober, and I really admired them for being able to endure planting without the vices that I had grown to associate with my planting experience. By the time my fourth year had rolled around, I had been sober for only a couple of months, and had a desire to replicate what I had seen in my sober peers the year prior. Knowing that I had spent way more money than I'd like to admit on weed and beer in the previous three years, I felt pretty excited at the prospect of being able to spend all that money on other stuff. I was also excited about the idea of being more focused on the block, and developing my skills as a planter, to maybe one day be able to graduate from my low to mid-baller status.

I started the season with the intention of learning to love myself more, as I had found that planting, more than most other things for me, had been a catalyst of self-growth. The previous year, there was a sober person in camp who went to bed early, got up early, and lit the fire in the mess tent on the cold spring mornings. I was among many who appreciated this gesture, so I thought it

would be nice for me to try and do the same. Every year prior, I was almost always the last one around the camp fire, smoking weed and drinking beer, and my sleep quality and quantity suffered as a result. Planting can be tough on mental health without question, and good sleep is one of the most valuable things when it comes to keeping your mind healthy. My first few days adjusting to this new routine of rising and falling early were difficult, but it was really nice for me to have a good amount of time to meditate in the morning, then light the fire and speak to the cooks. I found it very relaxing and grounding. I found that I was also able to experience the beauty of my surroundings more presently, as I wasn't clouded mentally. This reinforced my decision to spend the season sober as the right call for me. As a person, I find that I'm an extroverted introvert, so I really value my social interactions, but I need a lot of "me" time to feel really good, and this new schedule and routine was providing a good quantity of both of those things.

Getting deeper into the season, I did start to feel a little isolated when it comes to the night-off parties, but I did find myself hanging out and socializing as much as I felt I wanted to. I never really felt too lonely. One thing that greatly aided me in not feeling lonely was that we had WiFi in camp, so if I wanted to speak to anyone out of camp, I could call them at practically any time. The value in this resource was tremendous because I was the only sober person in camp. It was great to be able to speak to other sober people about my sobriety in camp and receive their encouragement.



In speaking to the sober early riser from the year prior about feeling a difficulty to connect, he suggested creating ways of connecting that do not revolve around consumption. As a result of this, every once in a while on day off, I would host a poetry reading event. It felt really rewarding to bring people together and be able to enjoy each other's self-expression. It also helped me to feel seen.

I noticed that I was planting better than I ever had before, and it made sense to me. It's a lot easier to be perceptive when you're not zonked. That in itself was a huge reward, as I felt a lot more pride in my work, and I felt the relationship with my labor change.

I found that as a result of being sober, I had so much time on my hands that I could do whatever I pleased with. I picked up a new hobby, practiced other hobbies, did lots of swimming. Additionally my hygiene was better, and I was generally more happy. With that being said, the clarity I had was also extremely daunting.

Planting, being as extreme as it is, I find has a way of pushing me inwards into reflection and thought. You're out there for hours every work day by yourself after all. Being newly sober, and in a very comfortable and cushioned environment before the planting camp, I hadn't really pushed myself past my comfort zone in terms of introspection. Planting can be very far from my comfort zone in a lot of ways, and I found that as a result of that, I felt more courage to delve into uncomfortable things that I had repressed in the past.



As someone who had recently quit smoking as well, it was super testing to be in a planting camp, as smoking darts was something that was synonymous with planting a tree beforehand. I found that people were very accommodating though.

One thing that was slightly uncomfortable for me was how people perceived me different. I felt like the sober "other" at times. Once again, I had a great support network, so that feeling was generally short lived. Supportive friends really make a world of difference. The 90's animated X-Men series also makes a world of difference. Great show.

In the interest of not dragging on, here is some of my:

#### Super Sweet Sober Silviculture Survival Kit:

- A laptop for watching X-Men, the Animated Series
- A flash drive with the aforementioned show
- Some artistic supplies, (paint, sewing gear etc)
- An instrument
- A means of contacting a good friend
- A means of contacting a good sober friend
- A willingness to face nasty things in yourself
- Self compassion
- A desire to make change
- Playful energy
- Your biggest smile



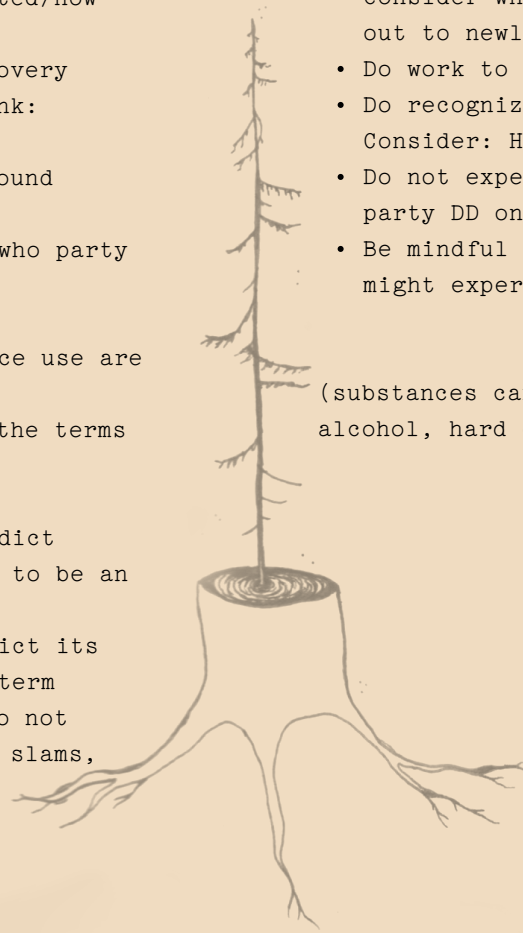
# Ways to support sober folk in a camp setting

There are many reasons why someone chooses sobriety. There are planters in recovery, straight edge folk, those who are sober-curious, and people who don't use substances for a myriad of other reasons. A part of living in community is being curious about each other's realities and coming together to find ways to make space safe and inclusive for everyone. Here is a list of ideas I've compiled from talking to sober planting friends from around the province:

- ASK someone how they would like to be supported/how you can be an ally
- Don't offer people substances who are in recovery
- Don't pressure anyone to use substances. Think: Consent
- Be mindful of glorification/normalization around substance use
  - This can look like idolizing highballers who party hard then PB
  - Incentivizing your crew with alcohol
  - The mindset that treeplanting and substance use are inextricably linked
- Avoid stigmatized language but also respect the terms people use for themselves
  - Substance use not substance abuse
  - Someone who uses substances not junkie/addict
  - Someone in recovery, not someone who used to be an addict
  - If someone refers to themselves as an addict its not for you to tell them not to use that term
- Do plan fun activities for connecting that do not revolve around substances (workshops, poetry slams, crafts etc)

- Do understand that recovery can look different depending on the person and the situation (people can be in recovery and still use substances)
- If someone has a drink or a slip up, do NOT be condescending, check-in: you could gently ask if they're okay or if they meant to do that
- Do make sure there are tasty non-alcoholic drinks around
- Don't be infantilizing
- Know that some people use some substances but not others (ie someone doesn't drink but they will do mushrooms)
- Do have resources available (safe people, safe space, print/zines, crisis numbers)
- Educate yourself and be compassionate and non judgemental
- If you are someone who has been sober for a while, consider whether you might have the capacity to reach out to newly sober people in camp
- Do work to create normalcy around sobriety in camp
- Do recognize that being sober in camp can be isolating, Consider: How can camp be more inclusive and welcoming?
- Do not expect the sober person in camp to always be the party DD on party nights
- Be mindful of the culture at your camp and how others might experience it

(substances can range from coffee, nicotine, psychedelics, alcohol, hard drugs to prescription drugs etc)





# WHITE BREAD, BUTTER & PAD-THAI



"I have been in planting camps for several years, this is a collection of writings from over those years painted into one poem. A personal testimonial about being a person of colour in tree planting camps that are known to be and continue to be predominantly white."



## White Bread, Butter & Pad Thai

Back broken into a million pieces.

I looked up from my thousandth tree, eyelashes caked in shit, dirt & debris.

"How are my trees"

The two checkers stood  
gawkingly.

"How are they?"

I asked for the thousandth time  
as if dirt clogged their ears, every summertime.

"You look like a sushi chef"

their words dripped,

Mimicking the sweat off the bandana I had worn on my head.

We get home and eat butter and white bread.

"You would have made a good Indian" he said

Because emptying the jerrys, I mentioned I liked the smell of gasoline.

My friend told me he was just being mean.

I don't know if those are the right words.

Hadn't they heard,

Of the time when a man pulled up next to my truck  
blue eyes glistening off the oil on the brown muck.

In his eyes,

he told me to go away, far away from here.

He must have wanted to repo this land that wasn't his

A feeling out of sorts

In the great white north.

Dinner, white bread, butter, and Pad Thai, as the main course

We all love "Asian food"

It's in the name, popular, but here we call it Asian food.

Comment on that and now you're just being rude.

I don't know if those are the right words.

Socks wet from shredded boots

Planting trees where we were never allowed to grow roots

She pressed the cigarette into the soil religiously as she exerted her last breath

In a full camp here was my only other non-white bread friend

dripping, damp, caked in mud again

She told me her body hurt, tired, robbed

Yes,

But we were tired, not even from the job.

I perspired a token to tell you how I feel,

Were these the right words for you?

If not, enjoy your meal

# Mental Health First Aid

Many of us struggle with our mental wellbeing during the season (and the off-season). The invisibility and stigma surrounding mental health makes it easy for problems to be swept under the reefer. Why is it that we can take a day off for tendo (though sometimes it can be hard to even do that) yet feel ashamed to take a mental health day? An important part of mitigating crisis is being able to recognize symptoms in yourself and others as soon as possible. Here are some things to keep an eye out for:

Possible Signs of a Mental Health Crisis to look for:

- Rapid and extreme mood shifts
- Extreme energy or lack of it, noticeable change in sleeping habits
- Severe agitation and/or pacing
- Talking fast or non-stop
- Confused or irrational thoughts
- Paranoia, losing touch with reality
- Experiencing hallucinations or delusions
- Making threats to others or themselves
- Isolating themselves
- Noticeable change in eating habits
- Overuse of substances
- Suicidal thoughts and statements such as "I want to die" or even vague statements such as "I don't want to be here anymore"



A mental health emergency is characterized as any potentially life-threatening situation in which an individual is:

- Imminently threatening harm to themselves or others
- Severely disorientated or not in touch with reality
- In need of immediate medical aid
- Has a severe inability to function
- Or is otherwise distraught and out of control

# Mental Health First Aid Actions (ALGEES)

Approach, assess, assist with any crisis

- Approach at an appropriate time/place
- Assess whether crisis or emergency supports are needed (see previous page)
- Assist with any crisis (access crisis supports, take care of their immediate needs)

Listen without Judgement

- Not in crisis requiring immediate attention? Engage in conversation and LISTEN before offering resources (see active listening p). DO NOT use stigmatizing language

Give reassurance and info

- Listen first then give info, encourage them to be hopeful, be compassionate and caring

Encourage them to reach out to appropriate professional help

- Therapists, Psychologists, Doctors, Crisis lines

Encourage other supports

- Loved ones, other self-soothing strategies

Self check-in for first aider

- Assess your own mental health and reach out to support if needed.



The ALGEES acronym comes from the Mental Health First Aid Standard Course through the Mental Health Commission of "canada"

# Active Listening

The process of active listening involves listening attentively while someone else speaks, paraphrasing and reflecting back what is said, and withholding judgement and advice (unless advice is consented to).

## Signs you aren't listening

- You say you understand when I'm not making sense
- You say you have the answer before I finish telling you what happened
- You cut me off when I'm talking
- You finish my sentences
- You tell me about your experiences, making mine seems unimportant
- You refuse thanks saying you haven't done anything

## Signs you are listening

- You ask questions to better understand me if I'm not making sense
- You grasp my point of view even when it's against your convictions
- You realize talking has left you a bit tired
- You encourage me to make my own decisions, even when you think they're wrong
- You don't take my problem from me, You let me deal with it in my own way
- You hold back your desire to give advice
- You don't offer religious/spiritual solace if not wanted
- You give me room to discover what's going on myself
- You accept my gratitude by telling me how good it makes you feel to help

From the Mental Health First Aid Standard Course through the Mental Health Commission of "canada"

# Managing a Diagnosis in Camp

Generally speaking, only you, in combination with trusted friends and health care providers, are going to know what is best for your mental health. There are however a few things to consider when managing a mental health diagnosis in a bush camp that might be a little different then the outside world.

The work itself: planting for 8-10 hours a day, alone with your thoughts. This can be difficult during the best of times so it might be worth considering how this could impact you and the headway you've made with your diagnosis.

Being outside your usual routine: For some people who are managing a diagnosis, routine is what makes things okay. If this is true for you be sure to prioritize setting up a routine for yourself once you arrive in camp and consider setting up video check-ins with your health care providers throughout the season to help you stay on track and reflect on how your new routine is working.

Medications in bush camp: If you are on new medication or at any point going off a medication during the season please tell someone. Also, consider communicating the specifics of your medication to a few trusted people for example some antipsychotics make it really difficult to wake up and that would be pertinent info for your crew to know generally and in case of a camp evacuation.

Basically, tree planting can be great. The physical exercise and general routine are something many planters feel is amazing for their mental health. But it is important to account for the fact that it is a dramatic change to most peoples usual lifestyle, so be sure to communicate your needs to your crew lead and/or a trusted friend, and consider setting up a formal or informal safety plan.



## Let's make a plan!

A safety plan is a tool that can be used in conjunction with professional and self-led supports to help mitigate a personal crisis. Developing a safety plan is about self-regulation and self-responsibility.

Some possible elements to include:

- 1.Warning signs that I am becoming stressed
- 2.Warning signs that I am extremely stressed
- 3.My triggers (events, people, situations, thoughts, feelings, etc)
- 4.My coping strategies: things I can do on my own to self-sooth if I begin to experience my warning signs
- 5.People I can contact when I begin to feel stressed (names and numbers)
- 6.People I can contact when I am in crisis (names and numbers)
- 7.Professional supports I can contact if I am in crisis (names and numbers)
- 8.Who can I contact in case of an emergency (local #s)

Write down your safety plan somewhere you can easily refer back to later - on your phone, a piece of paper in your wallet, in a journal you use regularly, etc.  
Consider sharing it with a trusted friend.

## Crisis Info and Resources

If you're struggling, or if you're worried about someone else in camp, please call:

- 9-1-1 if you are in an emergency.
- 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) if you are considering suicide or are concerned about someone who may be.
- 310Mental Health Support at 310-6789 (no area code needed) for emotional support, information and resources specific to mental health.
- Alcohol & Drug Information and Referral Service at 1-800-663-1441 (toll-free in B.C.) or 604-660-9382 (in the Lower Mainland) to find resources and support.

NOTE: The crisis info for this edition of the zine are BC specific. If you have other province-specific resources you would like added to future editions, please send them to [treeworkersindustrialgroup@gmail.com](mailto:treeworkersindustrialgroup@gmail.com)

For more info, check out:

- [mhfa.ca](http://mhfa.ca) - Mental Health First Aid Canada
- "The Body Keeps the Score" by Bessel van der Kolk M.D.
- "How to Unf#ck Your Brain" by Faith G. Harper
- "If You're Freaking Out, Read This" by Simone DeAngelis

We'd love to hear your feedback!  
[treeworkersindustrialgroup@gmail.com](mailto:treeworkersindustrialgroup@gmail.com)



Note: Many crisis lines are required to intervene if they believe you may imminently harm yourself or others. This may mean sending emergency services and/or the police.