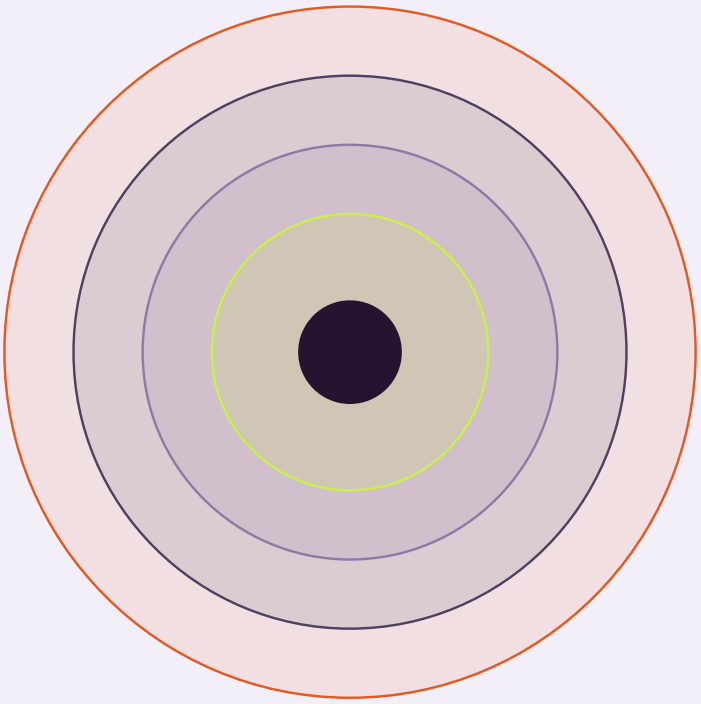


The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communi-cate—Discoveries

from a Secret World

A reading of the book by Peter Wohlleben (2016)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from a Secret World, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Peter Wohlleben is a German forester who spent more than twenty years in the state forestry service before running a community-owned forest in the Eifel with gentler, more ecological methods. In this book he argues that the trees of an undisturbed forest behave more like a community than a crowd of rivals. He describes trees passing sugar and warning signals through their roots and the fungal threads around them, parent trees keeping their young in shade so they grow slowly and strongly, and a forest that manages its own water and climate. His stories come from his own woods, such as an old beech stump still kept alive by its neighbours, and from research, such as acacias that warn each other when giraffes start to eat. He writes about trees in human terms on purpose, and some of his claims are debated by scientists.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A forest works more like a community than a crowd of competitors.

Wohlleben argues that trees of the same species in a natural forest support each other, because a tree is only as strong as the forest around it. When a neighbour dies, the gap lets in wind and hot sun that dry out and topple the trees left standing. In his account, strength belongs to the group.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Trees share food underground, even with the weak and the slow.

In the book, roots and fungal threads link trees so that sugar can move from those with plenty to those in need. Wohlleben describes research suggesting that beeches in one stand even out how much sugar each one makes, so the weaker trees are not left behind.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Growing slowly when young is what makes a tree last.

Young beeches under their mother's canopy get very little light, so they grow slowly for decades. Wohlleben sees this as an education: the narrow rings make dense, flexible wood that resists rot and storms. Trees that shoot up fast in the open tend to die younger.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The wood wide web runs on a trade between roots and fungi.

Fungal threads wrap around tree roots and spread far through the soil. The fungi help bring in water and nutrients and take sugar in return. The book presents this network as the forest's internet, carrying both food and messages from tree to tree.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Trees warn each other, by scent and through the ground.

The book's best-known example is the African acacia. When giraffes start to browse, the leaves fill with bitter compounds and the tree gives off a gas that nearby acacias pick up, so they get ready too. The giraffes respond by moving on to trees further off.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

An old stump can stay alive because its neighbours feed it.

In his forest Wohlleben came across the stump of a beech felled centuries before, still green and living under the surface. With no leaves of its own, it could only be living on sugar from the trees around it. He reads this as care rather than chance.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A tree on its own lives a harder life.

Street and park trees often stand alone in packed soil, with roots cut by pipes and pavements. Wohlleben calls them street kids: they grow fast, have no network to lean on, and often die young.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Rows of planted trees are not yet a forest.

Wohlleben is critical of tidy plantations of a single species. In his view, trees planted that way rarely build the links a natural forest has, so they are more exposed to storms, drought and pests. He argues for leaving forests more to themselves.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Trees run on a slower clock than ours, so we misread them.

Trees count warm days before they leaf out, store reserves for winter, and many species flower together in mast years. Because a tree's life spans centuries, its responses look to us like nothing happening. The first step to seeing them is to slow down.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Pick one tree to follow for a year
- [ ] Find your nearest old woodland
- [ ] Put the field card on your phone
- [ ] Read the rings on a cut stump
- [ ] Learn three trees by their bark

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Take one slow walk a week
- ◯ Look under the leaf litter
- ◯ Write one line about your tree

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Pick one tree to follow for a year

Choose a tree you pass every week.

Take a photo of it from one fixed spot today, and set a monthly reminder to take the next from the same place.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Find your nearest old woodland

Look on a map for the closest wood that was not planted in rows: trees of mixed ages, deadwood on the ground, a few very large trunks.

Plan a two-hour visit in the next fortnight.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Put the field card on your phone

Copy the forest walk card from this page into your notes app, so you can tick it off outdoors without a signal.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Read the rings on a cut stump

Find a fresh stump or a log pile and look at the rings.

Notice where they are tight and where they are wide: tight bands mark years of slow growth.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Learn three trees by their bark

Pick three common trees where you live and learn to name them by bark alone.

Then you can tell them apart in winter, when the leaves are gone.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Take one slow walk a week

Spend thirty minutes under trees without headphones, at half your usual pace.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Look under the leaf litter

On each walk, lift a handful of leaf litter or crumbly soil and look for fine white fungal threads.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Write one line about your tree

After each visit to the tree you chose, note one change: new leaves, a colour, a broken branch, a fungus.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

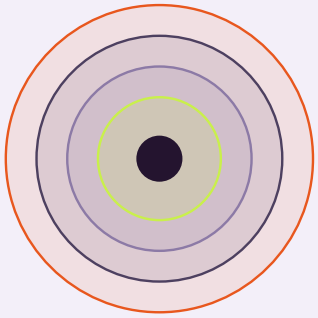
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



A forest is not a crowd of separate trees. It is a slow, shared life, and you only notice it when you slow down too.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER PETER WOHLLEBEN

Read it online, and vote on the takeaways: hourlife.com/books/the-hidden-life-of-trees
Made November 6, 2026 · HourLife, hourlife.com

The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from a Secret World · The reader's edition