

## ***Therapeutic Advantages to Gardening***

Tough day at work? Afterwards, get out in the garden and take out your frustrations on the weeds. A little sun, a soft breeze and a feeling of accomplishment can allow the tensions of the day to just melt away. There is increasing evidence that gardening is beneficial to both physical and mental health, as well as social interaction. It combines physical activity with exposure to nature and is conducive to social interaction...just ask a Master Gardener.

### **The Physical Aspect**

Physical inactivity has been shown to contribute to preventable physical and mental disorders and is a leading cause of premature death. Regular, moderate exercise is thought to reduce the risk of dementia. Gardening activities can help build strength, balance, and flexibility. Sunlight has been shown to lower blood pressure and increase levels of Vitamin D. Just don't forget the sunscreen! Hoeing, digging, and mowing are good, inexpensive ways of getting an aerobic workout. The beauty of gardening is that you can do as much or as little as you choose. It's up to you! Scale it to your time constraints and physical abilities and what your pocketbook will bear.

### **The Mental Aspect**

Increasingly, we see gardening's benefits to mental health. Several trials have shown that just observing nature has beneficial effects on our mental wellbeing. Gardening can help reduce stress. It gives you a chance to focus on something and put your mind to work on a project - be it a pot or planter for your porch or patio, a bed for vegetables or flowers, or a complete landscape plan. A healthy bacterium (*M. vaccae*) that lives in the soil can increase levels of serotonin and can reduce anxiety when inhaled. Sometimes very simple things like digging in the soil and

getting dirt under your fingernails and washing your hair to clean your fingernails can make you happy!

### **The Social Aspect**

Gardening can also open the door to the benefits of social interaction. Gardeners, as a rule, love to share. They share seeds, plants, cuttings...and stories. They invite neighbors and friends to enjoy the fruits of their labors. There is a treasure hunt to explore in one's own backyard - caterpillars, chrysalis, butterflies, and various pollinators. Snacking on blueberries or grape tomatoes is a real treat of nature! Forming a special bond and encouraging a new generation of gardeners is priceless! We are so fortunate to have nature centers all around us: Woodward Park, Tulsa Garden Center, Tulsa Botanic Garden, The Gathering Place...just to name a few. Visit one of our many local nurseries or plan a day trip to the OSU Botanic Garden. The beauty of gardens is that they are ever-changing and always a work in progress!

If we have learned anything over the last two years, it is how important social interaction is to our well being. Gardening is a safe way to interact with others and with nature. It provides so many opportunities to improve our physical and mental health and social interaction – consider the sunshine, fresh air, physical exercise, fresh fruits, and vegetables—take your pick!