

Gardening Therapy

Last year was one of the most challenging years in recent history in so many ways. Commercial closures, travel restrictions, social distancing, gathering size limitations, and mask wearing took a toll on many of us. Luckily, 2020 is well in the rear-view mirror and, hopefully, 2021 will be much better.

The pandemic had a profound effect on humanity. We are creatures of socializing and having to spend more time quarantined and away from others has clearly had a negative effect on many people. Meetings, events, and appointments were cancelled, then free time suddenly appeared on calendars. So, as an alternative, some folks simply went outside and spent time with nature in their gardens as a method of therapy because, as they say, “gardening has not been cancelled”.

Since the 1800's the calming effects of the people-plant connections through Horticultural therapy has been documented and proven. More specifically, horticultural-therapeutic landscaping has been used to treat both physical and mental disabilities. Even if a disability is not involved, there are clearly upsides and advantages for spending quality time in the yard and garden. According to many experts, consider the following:

- Improves physical health - provides low-intensity physical activity; builds strength; supplements your body's Vitamin D via exposure to sunlight
- Improves mental health - strengthens memory and attention; increases happiness; reduces stress, anxiety, tension, and depression; heals and empowers; provides a sense of responsibility; boosts levels of serotonin and dopamine (good hormones)
- Connects us to nature - helps us to relax and let go, to live in the present, and to see the big picture
- Produces homegrown vegetables and fruits that are extra nutritious in vitamins and minerals
- Provides beautiful flowers for decoration

First and foremost, gardening is easy. Anyone can do it. But we must be cognizant of our own strengths and weaknesses. Consider the time, effort, and budget you wish to commit and start searching for ideas. That is also easy as there are multiple ways to do so - search the internet, stroll through nurseries, or simply walk through your neighborhood and see what others are doing and have done.

Unlike many activities to get started, it does not take a big space, a lot of time, or a large budget. Don't have a yard? Consider decorating a patio with container plants. It can provide a sense of control. Is time an issue? Set mini goals and take as much or as little time as you choose. Tight budget? Look around the house and yard for used stuff. The reuse of old items (containers, pots, vases, lumber, stones, etc.) can be both economical as well as creative, decorative, and unique.

Consider it as a multi-generational teaching opportunity. Looking for things to do with your children and/or grandchildren that all of you can do and will enjoy? Encourage them to get outside and connect with nature by planting a seed, a shrub, or even a tree. Or teach them how to grow a vegetable garden. What a rewarding experience this can be! It does not take long to do the work nor see the results. Be choosy and pick scents, colors, and foods that make you happy.

It's the perfect time of year to get planting and gardening, and it's a lot more affordable than many other forms of therapy. So, maybe it is time to forget that iPhone calendar and make some appointments with Mother Nature.

Happy gardening!