



Gardening For Health



In the crazy world we live in, it seems that more and more people are trying to get back to nature. Whether that is spending a day at the beach, hiking in the hills, going for a walk in the park or camping out in the mountains, every day people feel the need to reconnect to Mother Earth. But why is this? Well, because, in addition to being a great hobby, gardening improves your overall health. You may have seen garden spaces at hospitals or rehab centers. There is a reason for this. There have been numerous studies to show

that spending time and working in green spaces is beneficial to your physical and mental health.

Some of these benefits are obvious, such as simply walking through or spending time working in the garden. You are moving your body and typical garden tasks such as raking leaves or digging are just as good as hitting the gym. It's not just the movement though, that is good for us. The vitamin D that we get from the sun improves immune health. Lower blood pressure, stress and anxiety levels are some more benefits. In addition to these, gardening and horticultural therapy can offer a wonderful alternative or addition to traditional physical therapy.

Horticultural therapy is a practice that has been around for centuries but since the 1950's it has become a well-recognized and broadly accepted form of therapy for overall health. According to the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA), therapy can improve memory and cognition, strengthen muscles and motor skills and improve balance to name a few benefits.



There is a Japanese term and practice, *shinrin-yoku*, meaning forest bathing or taking in the forest atmosphere. It's simply being in nature and allowing it to fill your senses. In his book "Forest Bathing" Dr. Qing Li, expert on forest medicine, goes into detail on how we can bring this practice into our lives to improve overall health. The basic premise is to find a spot that you can connect to and unplug from everything else. For example, when I lived walking distance to a mountain range, I would go into the

foothills and sit by the little stream. I had my rock to sit on, and I could literally stay there for hours just listening to the water.

If you don't have the option of going out into the woods, this can be accomplished in your own garden. The key is to unplug from the stress of everyday life, including leaving all devices in the house, and to notice the simple things that nature has to offer. The colors, the sounds, the smells, all work together to bring a bit of balance back into your life.

I think most everyone living in Silicon Valley would agree that this is a high stress, very fast paced environment and too many of us spend far too much time indoors sitting at a desk. Taking time regularly to get out of the office or house and get out to a green space can be hugely beneficial for anyone looking to reduce the amount of stress in their life. If you are one of those people, try going outside more often and see how it can work for you.



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