

Horticultural Therapy

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What is Horticultural Therapy?

Horticultural therapy involves the use of plants and horticulturally related activities as a tool to help heal and rehabilitate people with special needs. The general purpose of horticultural therapy is to improve a person's physical and mental well-being.

Horticultural therapy is effective as an activity therapy because of the versatility it offers. Horticulture provides a wide range of activities that can be used for recreational, educational, and therapeutic purposes. These activities can be adapted to almost all situations, whether indoors or outside, at home or in a hospital.

A Brief History

Horticultural therapy has been practiced for many years. In 1768, Benjamin Rush declared that digging in the soil had a curative effect on the mentally ill. Farming and gardening were used in the work therapy program at the State Hospital in Pontiac, Michigan (now Clinton Valley Center) since its beginning in 1878. In the 1950s, the first workshops in horticultural therapy were held at Michigan State University. In the early 1970s, academic programs in Horticulture Therapy began to be offered at universities. These programs provide background in the areas of educa-



tion, psychology, therapy, and horticulture.

In 1972 the National Council for Therapy and Rehabilitation through Horticulture was formed. The Council was organized to promote and encourage the development of horticultural and related activities as a tool for therapy and rehabilitation. Many states, including Michigan, have local chapters of NCTRH. In 1973, the U.S. Civil Service Commission recognized the profession of horticultural therapist. Professional status is offered at three levels: Horticultural Therapist Technician, Horticultural Therapist Registered, and Horticultural Therapist Masters.

What is a Horticultural Therapist?

A horticultural therapist is a person who has the ability to assess the therapeutic needs of an individual and uses knowledge in the

horticultural area to meet those needs. A horticultural therapist must have compassion and patience when helping people, have knowledge in horticulture, and skills in teaching.

Who Benefits from Horticultural Therapy?

As a preventive and curative therapy, horticulture is beneficial to anyone who is interested in plants and nature. Established programs are used with many special populations including the mentally impaired, the emotionally impaired, the elderly, the mentally ill, the physically impaired, juvenile delinquents, and prisoners. Institutions that use horticultural therapy include hospitals, correctional institutions, schools, geriatric homes, nursing homes and retirement centers.

Even though horticulture provides a large variety of valuable activities, not every one will respond. To those who do, it is a valuable tool to achieve objectives and goals set to improve their lives.

What are the Benefits of Horticultural Therapy?

Horticultural therapy is successful and effective because of its many benefits to people and their needs. Some of these benefits include stimulation of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical develop-

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ment. Intellectual development can be stimulated by studying and researching such areas as plant physiology, plant morphology and plant breeding. Social benefits come about through group interaction. Working together toward a common goal can increase levels of cooperation, responsibility, and development of leadership skills. Group interaction is encouraged through community projects, plant sales, and field trips. Emotional growth can be seen through increased determination and motivation.

Successful projects and activities lead to improved confidence and self-esteem. Activities that do not end successfully can teach patience and help one learn to deal with frustration and loss. Certain physical activities provide outlets for aggressive drives in a socially acceptable manner. This can lead to increased self control. Physical benefits include the development and improvement of muscle coordination and basic motor skills. Increased outdoor activities can be beneficial by providing exercise and relieving tension and stress.

Additional benefits of horticulture are pre-vocational and vocational training. Physically handi-

capped and/or mentally impaired individuals can be trained to be partially self-supporting which can also be very important to their morale.

Horticulture is effective as a therapy in the sense that it uses living plants which provide a touch of reality: plants need care, they "get sick," and they die. Through work and determination, some can be brought back to health. Plants help people become more aware of their environment and the world in which they live. Horticultural activities also serve as a source of relaxation and enjoyment.

Activities

There is a wide variety of activities that can be applied to horticultural therapy. Planning is an essential factor in an effective program. First, the needs of the individual must be determined so that goals and objectives can be established to meet those needs. Activities should be chosen to accomplish the goals and objectives and an evaluation should follow each activity to determine its effectiveness.

All that is needed in starting a program is a sunny window sill and a number of household items. Seeds can be started in egg cartons and plastic cups. Popsicle sticks can serve as labels. Many craft projects can be created with natural materials.

The goals and objectives developed for an individual or group can center around the activities presented in the chart.

Conclusion

The main challenge in horticultural therapy is to motivate and stimulate a person by the use of horticulturally related activities and thus, to foster, maintain and promote emotional, social, and physical health. Horticulture is a valuable medium. It helps people adjust to disabilities, learn new skills, renew confidence, and develop self-esteem. This can lead to new interest in life and improved mental and physical health.

For more information contact:

National Council for Therapy
and Rehabilitation Through
Horticulture
9220 Wightman Rd., Suite 300
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

LISTING OF HORTICULTURAL THERAPY ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY OR TOPIC	TIME (Month)											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Order seed catalogs	X	X	X							X	X	X
Construct dish gardens and terrariums	X	X	X							X	X	X
Propagate indoor plants	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Force flowering branches	X	X	X	X								
Make pomander balls	X	X	X									X
Make collages (pictures from seed catalogs) ...	X	X	X									
Plan gardens (vegetables, flowers, herbs, etc.) .		X	X	X	X							
Discuss indoor plant care	X	X	X									
Trade or exchange indoor plants	X	X	X	X	X							
Have a plant identification contest (pictures and/or plants)	X	X	X									
Start seeds indoors		X	X	X	X							
Grow pineapple tops, avocado pits, citrus, pomegranates	X	X	X	X	X					X	X	X
Plant hardy seeds/plants outdoors				X	X							
Transplant cool season plants to garden				X	X							
Transplant warm season plants to garden						X						
Get containers ready for container gardening ..			X	X	X					X	X	
Get raised beds ready			X									
Sow seeds of warm season plants outdoors			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Take care of yard, trees, shrubs			X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Have a flower show								X				
Go on a garden tour	X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X
Visit a greenhouse, garden center, florist	X	X	X		X	X	X	X				
Visit a garden, nursery, roadside stand					X	X	X	X				
Collect plants for drying							X	X	X			
Collect flowers and/or plants for a potpourri ..							X	X	X			
Make book markers with pressed plant materials						X				X	X	
Collect materials for wall plaques						X		X	X			
Visit a pick-your-own operation						X		X	X			
Go on a nature walk			X	X	X							
Harvest vegetables from garden				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Have a garden produce sale						X	X	X	X			
Can, freeze, or dry vegetables						X	X	X	X			
Have a garden fair or exhibit								X	X			
Harvest vegetables for storage									X			
Carve pumpkins										X		
Clean up yard and garden								X	X	X	X	
Collect nuts for eating								X	X			
Collect seeds, fruits, and cones for plaques, etc.									X	X	X	
Force tender bulbs (amaryllis, paperwhite narcissus)										X	X	X
Force hardy bulbs (tulips, daffodils, crocus, hyacinth)										X	X	X
Go on a color tour								X	X			
Collect seeds to germinate (honey locust, white oak, nuts, etc.)								X	X			
Divide spring flowering perennials								X	X			
Show a movie or slides on plants	X	X	X								X	X
Watch a TV show about plants	X	X	X	X						X	X	X
Make wind chimes (use clay pot pieces or other materials)											X	X
Make holiday decorations (wreaths, door swags)											X	X
Sand design (terrariums, planters)	X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X
Carnivorous plants	X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X
Macrame plant hangers	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Paint/glaze clay pots	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X



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