

WHAT IS HORTICULTURAL THERAPY?

A seed is planted. With the right care and a bit of patience, that seed sprouts. Flowers, greenery, and even food are some of the gardener's rewards. Horticultural Therapy (H.T.) expands on this life-affirming cycle by appreciating some other benefits of working in a garden, such as stress reduction, problem solving, socialization and physical activity. Many a home gardener will enthusiastically declare the restorative healing effects of tending their landscape.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF WORKING IN A GARDEN

For a person recovering from illness, be it mental illness, physical injury, or addiction, harnessing the healing benefits of gardening can produce amazing results. The tasks involved require concentration that may reduce negative, worried or obsessive thought patterns. Learning new skills, or practicing those sidelined by illness, instills pride and confidence. Simply being outdoors, engaged in light to moderate physical activity, has the double benefit of absorbing essential vitamin D from the sun and improving cardiovascular health. Gardeners follow directions, practice fine-motor function, develop social skills and enjoy the tangible evidence of their labor.

GARDENING AS THERAPY

As a complementary modality in a therapeutic environment, these significant positive effects can lead to breakthroughs in treatment. Horticultural Therapists seek to maximize the skills and insights thus gained, leading to improved psychological, physical, social and cognitive functioning.

WHERE IS HT PRACTICED?

First documented at the turn of the nineteenth century by Dr. Benjamin Rush, the "Father of American Psychology", the use of gardening in therapy has a long history of helping people rehabilitate from illness, trauma, and social isolation. Early examples included hospital farms where psychiatric patients tended crops. More recently, a particularly successful inmate program at Riker's Island Prison has been thriving since its inception in 1989. Other current H.T. programs can be found in nursing homes, trauma and psychiatric hospitals, and drug rehabilitation facilities. In these settings, therapeutic gardens benefit both those tending them and those who simply enjoy their beauty as a meditative space, thereby improving the quality of life for countless people.

Whether doing physical therapy, dealing with emotional or cognitive issues, or learning life skills, people who work with horticultural therapists can experience long-lasting positive changes. Including H.T. in a treatment plan may be just the thing to plant a seed of hope.

For more information, visit www.EastMountainHospital.com