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## **Horticultural Therapy: Experience a sense of 'being' through gardening work**

Written by  
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I am convinced that our most important sense is the sense of “being” and it is one of the greatest points of impact that horticultural therapy can achieve.

That is why I am so pleased that legislation designating the third week of March as Horticultural Therapy Week in New Jersey passed in a full senate unanimous vote on March 27. Bill SJR-12 is sponsored by Sen. Christopher “Kip” Bateman, R-16, and Sen. Joseph Vitale, D-19 as cosponsor. Companion Bill AJR-13 is co-sponsored by Assemblywomen Donna Simon, R-16, and Annette Quiajano, D-20, and Assemblymen Jack Cittiarelli, R-16, Erik Peterson, R-23, John DiMaio, R-23 and Upendra Chivukula, D-17.



Left to right: Laura DePrado, Final Touch Plantscaping; MaryAnne McMillan, president of the American Horticultural Therapy Association; State Sen. Christopher 'Kip' Bateman, R-16th District; and Assemblywoman Donna Simon R-16th District, immediately following the unanimous approval March 27 by the Senate Health Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee of a bill designating the third week of March as Horticultural Therapy Week in New Jersey. PHOTO COURTESY LAURA DePRADO

“The unanimous passage of SJR12 in the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens committee is a significant step in raising awareness of horticultural therapy,” Simon said. “I will encourage my colleagues in the Assembly to support my companion bill, AJR13, so that New Jersey can continue to build awareness and highlight the many benefits of this successful therapy that helps countless individuals in rehabilitative, vocational and community settings.”

In previous articles I have written about the five senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing and touch. Each of these senses gives us clues as to how we can interpret our environment. They instinctively warn us of danger, tell us when we are approaching food, shelter, and beauty. This is, of course, the basic information we need for our physical existence. These senses also help us to appreciate and understand the world around us. In addition these senses make it possible to experience emotion of pleasure, joy, sorrow and pain and like a well-oiled machine work best when they can work in cooperation with each other.

To see, feel and smell a flower is far more rewarding than looking at a picture of one.

Horticultural therapists in New Jersey facilitate activities and programs to individuals and groups who are denied the use of one or more of the five senses, the connection of “being.” Research-based evidence shows the physical, psychological, social and cognitive benefits of horticultural therapy. Horticultural therapy practitioners use a variety of methods to achieve results including sensory-stimulating environments with plants selected for fragrance, texture, color, whether they are ornamental, edible or both.

Horticultural therapists in New Jersey are working in hospitals, senior centers, nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, adult day care, group homes, day and residential housing for autistic adults, correctional facilities and vocational schools.

According to author Hank Bruce, in his book “Gardens for the Senses,” sensory limitations can be compensated for by nature and plants. We become connected to something beyond us with opportunity for new perspectives and awareness waiting to be discovered. People living with limitations of senses comprised, who are working with a horticultural therapist experience “being,” connection and fulfillment even if it is temporary.

It takes special training for a horticultural therapist to help a client, or participant to experience “being” and connecting them to the seasonal rhythms and life cycles of

nature and the days of yesterday with meaning for today and hope for tomorrow. Bruce writes that the “beauty in the garden is not the perfect plant, but the dynamics of life happening right there, before our eyes. The joy isn’t in a blue ribbon; it’s the sprouting of a seed, the unfolding of a leaf, the promise of a flower, the flavor of the harvest.”

We can all profit from a therapy program and garden setting that allows us to experience a sense of “being” as participants going at our own pace, permitting ourselves the opportunity to accept the connections we are experiencing without judgment, without fear and the desire to control. We can compost our problems and cultivate “being” in balance, and in harmony with the moment that nature brings, endlessly and abundantly.

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