



Autumn blooms with horticultural therapy and community connections

Laura DePrado, Final Touch Plantscaping Published 12:00 p.m. ET Oct. 16, 2017



Blooming through the Seasons in purposeful and meaningful activities that guide connection and engagement, and bring about success for all. ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado

The Monarch Butterfly migrates to seek new life. Leaves are turning brilliant golds, reds and bronze at their own seasonal pace across the canvas of the landscape. Leaves are dropping. Trees, shrubs, and summer's flowers bloom are no more.

October is falling into a cornucopia of mums, pumpkins, gourds, corn stalks, celosia, pansies, cabbages and kales, while Horticultural Therapy and community connections are blooming and creating another landscape in the making.

New Jersey horticultural therapists represented the largest percentage (15 percent), of attendees from 31 U.S. states and seven countries at The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) annual conference "Community Connections through Horticultural Therapy," in Burlington Vermont last month. The conference was hosted by the Northeast Horticultural Therapy Network (NEHTN), and sponsored by Gardeners Supply Co. NEHTN and Legacy Health,

The therapy network is comprised of members from the Northeast region, including Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Its membership is comprised of HTM's, HTR's, HT certificate holders, horticulturalists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, landscape designers, university and college educators and students, independent consultants, master gardeners; working with children to the elderly, with and without disabilities in a variety of settings., from hospital and schools to training programs and correctional facilities.



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The Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture published by the AHTA is set to release any day its quarterly issue which will include a comprehensive article authored by me on raising awareness of Horticultural Therapy and the Roots of

New Jersey Agriculture. New Jersey agricultural products and materials are used in many programs around the Garden State.

The Journal will be available through Amazon.com books, and released to AHTA members through ahta.org.

The National Gardening Bureau and Sakata Seed America awarded three grants totaling \$5,000 for horticultural therapy programs which create community connections.

The first-place \$3,000 grant recipient is The Monarch School of New England, in Rochester, New Hampshire. This is a private, non-profit, and year-round, specialized, day school for students, 5 to 21 years of age, with severe physical, intellectual, emotional, medical and developmental disabilities. Its programs are based at two sites. The first is an elementary/middle school, which has just completed an outdoor classroom/therapeutic garden after eight years of planning and fundraising. The second site is a brand-new high school/vocational training center, which includes an indoor horticulture room as well as outdoor space to create a therapeutic garden that is user-friendly to all. Led by a full time horticultural therapist who is also an occupational therapist, group and individual horticultural therapy sessions focus on decreasing stress while addressing individualized therapeutic goals as identified in the students' Individualized Education Programs.



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The second-place winner of a \$1,000 grant is the University of Wisconsin-Extension Milwaukee County, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. The one-acre Vets Healing Garden site is a partnership between UW-Extension, Veterans Affairs, and Milwaukee County open to all veterans of military service. The Vets Healing Garden is coordinated by a VA readjustment counselor. Through a community partnership, a greenhouse, brick patio, meeting house, rainwater cistern, and tool shed with tools were donated and constructed using Milwaukee County House of Corrections inmate and volunteer labor.

XDS Inc., The Farm at Penny Lane in Pittsboro, North Carolina, is the third-place recipient of a \$1,000 grant. Since 2014, the Horticultural Therapy Program of the North Carolina Botanical Garden has provided weekly horticultural therapy sessions for adults with serious and persistent mental illness at the Farm at Penny Lane. The farm is

operated by XDS Inc., a local nonprofit that provides community-based services to adults living with serious mental illness in partnership with the Center for Excellence in Community Mental Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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The Mid Atlantic Horticultural Therapy Network conducted its annual conference “Horticultural Therapy and the Garden to Table Movement: Growing Food for Health, Wellness and Healing,” on Oct. 13 at Foulkeways Retirement Community in Gwynedd, Pennsylvania. The keynote presenter was Anne Novak, manager of the Edible Academy at the New York Botanical Garden.

In New Jersey, programs connecting people and plants through purposeful and meaningful activities continues to bloom.

Programs are offered through the following: Atlantic Health System Healing Arts Program, Somerset County Library System of New Jersey, Middle Earth after school programs for youth at risk, Adult Day Center of Somerset County, Anew Wellness in Somerset, Care One Highlands and Princeton and private in-home.

Interactive displays of horticultural therapy by my company took place at Somerset County Government’s Healthy Employees Day sponsored by the Wellness Committee of the Office on Aging and Disability Services, at Children’s Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick for employee groups, and at Affinity Federal Credit Union in Basking Ridge for an employee health fair. I will be participating in the Third Annual Workplace Health & Wellness Expo on Oct. 26 at the Imperia presented by the Somerset County Business Partnership in collaboration with Healthier Somerset and Franklin Township Chamber of Commerce.

All of these efforts make a difference in the lives of people, including your neighbors.

"We have seen the beneficial effect of utilizing Horticultural therapy in the treatment of our clients," said Jerome Mitchell, co-owner of Anew Wellness. "Horticultural Therapy is both a valuable clinical tool and practical way to engage in self-care."

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