



Horticultural Therapy Week blooming March 18 to 24

Laura DePrado, Final Touch Plantscaping Published 7:00 a.m. ET March 19, 2018 | Updated 9:47 a.m. ET March 19, 2018



Horticultural therapy is a vehicle to meet wide-ranging goals, and it successfully enables and empowers individuals to achieve their maximum independence in settings such as mental health, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals including veterans, adult daycare, vocational schools, nursing homes, substance abuse rehabilitation, developmentally disabled day programs and group homes, day and residential housing for adults with autism, community and county parks, gardens and arboreta. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

It's Horticultural Therapy Week in the Garden State to coincide with the Vernal Equinox and the beginning of spring.

Since 2016, New Jersey has been the only state to designate the third full week in March as Horticultural Therapy Week to increase public awareness and the importance of horticultural therapy in improving the quality of life for all and increasing opportunities for each individual to experience the endless benefits of the people-plant connection.

Horticultural therapy is the process of connecting people and plants through vocational, social, and therapeutic programs under the direction of a horticultural therapist, who is trained and skilled at creating customized activities, with, or without a garden space that accommodates people with a wide range of abilities. It is the process of engagement through an activity with guidance that creates the benefits, not the end product.

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Horticultural Therapy "Peaceful Planting" workshop facilitated by Registered Horticultural Therapist Laura DePrado, (second from right) president Final Touch Plantscaping, LLC, Branchburg, Somerset County, at Alstede Farms LLC, Chester, Morris County on March 18th. Participants from around the Garden State joined DePrado, and Alstede Farms Brand Manager, Maxine Finney, (far right), to connect and engage with plants of herbs, lettuces and vegetables to create container gardens of their own unique expressions. New Jersey Horticultural Therapy Week is March 18 to 24 to coincide with the beginning of Spring and the Vernal Equinox. New Jersey is the first and only state in the nation to designate the third week of March since May 2015 as "Horticultural Therapy Week" to build awareness of the social, physical and psychological benefits of working with plants in purposeful and meaningful activities with guidance to result in success on some level for every individual. Photo courtesy Laura DePrado

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Plants do not judge or discriminate on age, gender, educational background, social status, religion, culture, or circumstance. Knowledge of horticulture and experience in gardening is not a prerequisite, and a "green thumb" is not required.

Dr. Benjamin Rush, 19th-century father of modern psychology and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, planted the first seed in research and published findings that patients who worked in gardens had better recovery rates from "mania" compared to those who did not.



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The evidence-based benefits are gaining popularity, such as physical, social and psychological, cognitive, emotional, sensory stimulation and community engagement. Horticultural therapy connects people to nature in purposeful and meaningful activities with goals and objectives for individuals and client groups.

State Sen. Kip Bateman (R-District 16), co-sponsor of Bill SJR12 along with state Sen. Joseph Vitale (D-District 19) said, "Horticultural therapy improves the physical and mental health of individuals and gardening is proven to help everyone young and young at heart."

Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher said, "Horticultural therapy is a beneficial activity for many reasons and working with plants encourages people to engage in a physical activity while fostering a sense of accomplishment. There are many diverse ways for people to participate and derive enormous benefits from horticultural therapy."



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Individual and group activities may take place in a greenhouse, garden or designated space that is accessible, barrier-free and designed for maximum safety, participation and development of the individual. Activities may include the growing of plants, nature crafts and floral design, garden maintenance from weeding to watering to pruning. Horticultural therapists provide any need support including adaptive devices, tools or physical assistance.

"Carrier and our 100-acre campus at the base of the Sourland Mountains is an eco-therapy paradise," Carrier Clinic CEO and President Donald Parker said. "From our therapy horses and beautiful peacocks to our 14-acre solar farm producing 60 percent of our power from the sun, we enjoy a special relationship with nature.



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What makes that romance even more special is the opportunity our patients have to engage in horticultural therapy. Our program has two benefits: the first is the cognitive benefits of enhanced mood, improved concentration and reduced arousal. The second is the social nature of the group activity where cooperation with others is required to achieve an end goal.

Our conversations switch from symptoms and deficits to skills and aspirations, two positive ingredients for successful recovery. What could be better than using plants as a metaphor for social and personal growth? Maybe it's the hope that seedlings represent as they grow, prosper and bear fruit and bounty, and the hope blooming in the hearts and minds of our patients.”

Horticultural therapists are typically part of a treatment team. Treatment teams vary depending on the client and the setting. In a clinical setting, for example, the team could consist of a clinical or medical director, a counselor or a social worker.

In a rehabilitative setting, the team might consist of a doctor, orthopedist, nurse, occupational or speech therapist, social worker or counselor.

In a vocational setting the team could consist of vocational counselor, social worker, teacher and employer.



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The American Horticultural Therapy Association is the only U.S. organization committed to promoting and developing the practice of horticultural therapy as a unique and dynamic human service modality. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, AHTA advocates on behalf of the professional interests of HT practitioners and strives to increase beneficial outcomes for participants, host facilities, researchers and educators.

The AHTA was formed in 1973 to promote and develop the horticultural therapy profession. AHTA provides training and professional registration within the United States. The professional designation of horticultural therapist registered, which is recognized nationally and internationally, requires a college degree with courses in horticulture, human services, and therapy, in addition to a 480-hour internship supervised by a credentialed horticultural therapist. To learn more about credentials, visit <http://www.ahta.org/professional-registration>.

To learn about the history and practical application of horticultural therapy, view co-authored Fact Sheet, <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1208>.



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In a written statement Director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension Larry Katz said, “The well-known Sociobiologist E.O. Wilson coined the term biophilia, referring to “the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms.” Horticultural therapy clearly provides an opportunity for people to experience meaningful contact with plants and the living soils that support life on earth.

In addition, The World Health Organization defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” To that end, horticultural therapy has proven to be a time-tested activity with beneficial and therapeutic efficacy. It is widely used within a broad range of rehabilitative, vocational, and community settings. Horticultural therapy and its applications in extension, teaching, and research are a central component of the community-engaged scholarship of the faculty and staff of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, a unit of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and Rutgers Cooperative Extension.