



Horticultural Therapy: As seasons change, it's important to continue to connect with nature

Laura DePrado, Community Contributor Published 10:00 a.m. ET Sept. 18, 2018



With shorter days and changing temperatures upon us, we will spend less time connecting to nature and outdoor gardening activities. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

The end of summer is here. Blooming flowers are tired and looking like they have thrown in the trowel. Summer plants of annuals and perennials, withered, worn and fatigued, make way for the new harvest: A cornucopia of mums, pansies, and fall annuals and perennials taking to the field.

We, the consumers, respond to the seasonal rhythms and cycles of plants, and plants in turn respond to our care. The cooler evenings are a reminder the harvest is here. We gather. We harvest. Our forefathers' winter survival depended on the harvest for their survival.

With shorter days and changing temperatures upon us, we will spend less time connecting to nature and outdoor gardening activities. Rachel and Steven Kaplan, research psychologists and professors at the University of Michigan, are known for their research on the effect of nature on people's relationships and health.

"In order for nature to best work its relaxing effect it is preferable for a place to have a high fascination value. An environment that automatically pulls the viewer into it is most beneficial," the researchers wrote recently.

The Kaplans' studies have found that office workers with a view of nature were happier and healthier at work. Exposure to natural environments of the most mundane sort has proven to lift people's moods and enhance their ability to mentally focus. "Attention Restoration Theory" has shaped how landscape and design professionals and others view humanity's relationship with nature.



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READ: [Horticultural Therapy: 'Scent ability' with herb bouquets and bundles](#)

READ: [Gardening is good for you — and plant a little lavender, too](#)

Here are some suggestions to get a dose of nature and combat fatigue.

- **Visit a local farmers market, greenhouse, garden center, or nursery.**
- **Walk through a local arboretum or county park.**
- **Cut flowers and herbs before they finish for the season, and continue to buy them during the winter months,.**
- **Get a plant or two to purify the air in your home. For a list based on Nasa Clean Air Study, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NASA_Clean_Air_Study.**

Some groups already seem to understand the importance of nature. Sales of flowers, seeds and potted plants have increased since 2016, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. The recent surge coincides with the fact that some millennials, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as "America's youth born between 1982 and 2000," are delaying home ownership, but still want something fresh and alive in their apartments.

We interpret the world through our five senses: Sight, taste, touch, smell, and sound. The brain processes information taken in through our sense organs of the eyes, tongue, nose, and the ears. An individual's sense awareness directly correlates to different parts of the brain. Sense awareness can be compromised by physical, emotional, mental, cognitive functioning, brain injury, and medication.



Alexander Kettles, masters of Counseling Services, and Kyle DePaul , therapist look at plants during Laura DePrado's recent horticultural therapy program at Carrier Clinic in Montgomery. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Carrier Clinic)

Take the time this autumn and winter season to discover and learn about horticultural therapy and sensory activities, healing gardens, therapeutic gardens, enabling gardens and “nature- poor” and “nature rich” garden designs in healthcare. Take note of your own abilities and circumstances, or that of a loved one, and consider how to make gardening and tasks easier next year by having a horticultural therapist maximize your connection with activities in purpose and meaning and assess your garden space (if applicable).

Gardens should be designed so that even when they are not physically accessible, they can be viewed from indoors and are a pleasure to see in all four seasons. According to Roger Ulrich's Theory of Supportive Garden Design (1999), healing gardens should provide the following:

- **Nature engagement (plants, animals, water, fresh air)**
- **A sense of control (doorways that are easily navigable, and areas where people can find privacy)**
- **Opportunities for social support**
- **Opportunities for movement and exercise.**



Isabel Quilang, RN, and Dr. Jacqueline Bienenstock look at flowers and plants during Laura DePrado recent horticultural therapy program at Carrier Clinic in Montgomery. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Carrier Clinic)

Nature should and must be present in a healing garden and unfortunately, “nature-poor” healthcare gardens are too common. Biophilia, coined by Edward O. Wilson, suggests that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life. Consider picking up a copy of “Biophilia Hypothesis,” by Stephen R. Kellert and Wilson. It reveals a natural perspectives of some of the greatest scientific minds of our time.

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