



Horticultural Therapy Week grows awareness of people-plant connection

Laura DePrado, Contributor Published 5:00 a.m. ET March 12, 2019

Horticultural Therapy Week in the Garden State coincides with the Vernal Equinox and the beginning of spring!

New Jersey is the first state, and the only state, in the nation to designate the third full week in March Horticultural Therapy Week through a joint resolution signed by Gov. Chris Christie in 2015. The resolution is to increase public awareness and the importance of horticultural therapy in improving the quality of life for all and increasing opportunities for individuals to experience the endless benefits of the people-plant connection. The resolution was co-sponsored by state Sens. “Kip” Bateman, R-16th District, and Joseph Vitale, D-19th District.

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.



New Jersey is the first state, and the only state in the nation to designate the third full week in March “Horticultural Therapy Week” through Senate Joint Resolution Number 12 signed by Governor Chris Christie in 2015. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Final Touch Landscaping)

Horticultural therapy provides an opportunity for people to experience meaningful contact with plants and the living soils that support life on earth. It 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.

Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, environmental psychologists from the University of Michigan, offer the first research on the effect of nature on peoples’ relationships and health. Their research on “Attention Restoration Theory” determined that for nature to best work its relaxing effect it is preferable to a place to have high fascination value. An environment that automatically pulls the viewer into it is most beneficial.

The Kaplans’ research has 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.

Nature and plants have universal appeal. We wear them, we cook with them, we use in medicines, we build with them. They purify the air according to NASA research. They have aesthetic appeal. We use in sickness and in health, in celebration and in sorrow. Gardening is a popular leisure activity among elders. It promotes mental and physical stimulation and may be cognitively protective according to research. Gardening is an activity that promotes overall health, quality of life, physical strength, fitness and flexibility, cognitive ability and socialization as health promoting activities. Gardening can take various forms and the simple acts of planting and maintaining house plants to horticultural complex multistep activities.



Carrier Clinic in Belle Mead has deployed a mobile cart therapeutic gardening program fresh with seasonal plants to engage the five senses of sight, sounds, taste, touch and smell, in connecting patients with activities that are purposeful and meaningful as the first phase of a Horticultural Therapy program facilitated by Laura DePrado, Registered Horticultural Therapist, president of Final Touch Plantscaping, LLC. Shown at the Acute Care Unit Nursing Station are from Left to Right: Susan Barry Certified Group Counselor Specialist, Dr. Jacqueline Bienenstock DNP, RN-BC, back of photo behind Alexander Kettles, Horticultural Therapist Laura DePrado, BS-HTR, and Masters of Counseling Services Mi Hee Kim MT-BC. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Hackensack Meridian Health Carrier Clinic)

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. 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.



Horticultural Therapy offers benefits for social and wellness programs, and vocational, and therapeutic programs, for ages 6 to 106 in facilities such as adult day care, psychiatric, addiction and recovery, memory and rehabilitative care, skilled nursing, and workplace wellness. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Final Touch Plantscaping)

The evidence-based benefits are gaining notoriety – such as physical, social, 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.

Since the beginning of time, gardens have been the center of well-being from the Garden of Eden to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon to the Laboratory at the Temple of Edfu, where more than 100 plant recipes and their

applications were used by ancient Egyptians for a variety of health conditions still inscribed on the temple walls — the world's first “pharmacy.”

READ: [Horticultural therapy harvests healing and wellness in recovery at Carrier Clinic](#)

Individual and group participant activities may take place in a greenhouse, a garden or in a 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.



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READ: [Horticultural Therapy: The gift of a family connection](#)

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, orthopedic, a nurse, an occupational or speech therapist, social worker or counselor. In a vocational setting the team could consist of vocational counselor, social worker, teacher and employer.



Laura DePrado (Photo: ~Courtesy of Final Touch Plantscaping)

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 <http://www.ahta.org/professional-registration>, and accredited college and university programs [ahta.org](http://www.ahta.org). To learn about the history and practical application of horticultural therapy view co-authored Fact Sheet, <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1208/>

Laura DePrado is a registered horticultural therapist, and president of Final Touch Plantscaping, LLC