

Horticultural Therapy

Feeling blue, go gardening

By Mel Holmes

We know that regular and frequent engagement with environment is good for human health. What is also clear is that gardening is great for mental health treatment and recovery.

In 2013 Gardeners World Magazine in the UK conducted a survey about self reported happiness and found that gardeners are happier than the rest of the population. Of the self-declared non-gardeners 67% rated themselves as 'happy'. 80% of the gardeners declared that they are happy and this rose to 87% if they gardened for over 6 hours per week. 93% of the gardeners thought that gardening improves mood.

So, we see that gardening and happiness go hand in hand, but the evidence suggests very strongly that gardening has a positive impact on deeper mental health problems. For example much study has been done into the link between being outside and the reduction of the symptoms of depression.

Depression is a deeply debilitating illness, which can lead to a complete lack of activity, withdrawal from family and friends, feelings of guilt, misery and a complete lack of confidence along with a range of physical symptoms. The depression can be brought on by

chemical imbalances in the brain or as a reaction to circumstances. The symptoms can last for days, weeks or even years. People can also go through cycles where they can recover but the symptoms later return.

Rachel Kelly, a journalist and writer in the UK, wrote an article in 2014 for The Daily Telegraph sharing her experience of her episodes of depression. In this she described the role that gardening had played in helping her to regain her life. Whilst acknowledging the role of her family, poetry, and medication, she also praised her garden for the benefits she gained from it. She singled out her dahlias, as "they needed my input when I felt no use to anyone"

She reviewed the recovery process through its various stages. At first the outside held only terror for her. However, slowly the garden became a mid-point between the safety of her bed and the outside world. The flowers 'gently' needed her care when she felt that she had no purpose. This gentle insistence drew her from her bed and allowed

her to engage with the world in the undemanding but persistent pull to the garden. The very act of going outside improved her mood and the way she felt about life. Initially the jobs she did were not big, planting one bulb or watering one pot was a challenge. As her mood improved, the time outside became longer and the benefits of being in the sunshine also grew.

Eventually, she was able to spend time working along side her family on gardening tasks and then was able to sustain tasks for longer periods as she became caught up in the activity.

Planning is part and parcel of gardening and can take up hours of thought and speculation even when not in the garden. Planning is a great way of keeping the mind away from dark thoughts and has the benefit of getting the next part of the treatment sorted out. The scale of the planning can be undertaken in line with how the person is feeling. The plans can lead the gardener into the future and are a powerful way to encourage engagement with that future.



Time spent outside on a regular basis is very beneficial to your mental health: Image supplied by Karen Smith



Enjoying gardening and nature can act as a mood raiser: Image supplied by Karen Smith

With all of the subtle range of opportunities to engage in future planning and care, horticultural therapy is able to provide a varied package of interventions for all stages of the treatment. These can be adapted to the capabilities of the person and provide inbuilt tasks to draw the person back where they are in control of their lives and their symptoms. Gardening is not just a therapy for the acute episodes, it is also a strong method for the ongoing management of depression.

Time spent outside on a regular basis is very beneficial to your mental health and acts as a mood raiser. Gardening is a powerful tool in helping to manage the effects of depression and is a helpful method of challenging the impact of this illness.

Mel Holmes – Horticultural Therapist
Kevin Heinze GROW

References:

<http://www.gardenersworld.com/downloads/PDFs/happiness-survey-results.pdf>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/11070093/How-gardening-helped-cure-my-depression.html>

<http://www.pnas.org/content/112/28/8567.full>

fertiss

PROPAGATION PLUGS

- ✓ Accelerates growth
- ✓ Stronger plants
- ✓ Increased rooting
- ✓ Ideal for tissue culture
- ✓ No transplant shock
- ✓ 100% Biodegradable
- ✓ Re-usable trays








GREENTECH

Tel: (08) 9389 1797
Mobile: 0412 186 933
Email: marion@greentech.net.au
Web: www.greentech.net.au

VARIOUS
TRAY & PLUG
SIZES



GREENTECH