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Cultivating the field of horticultural therapy in NJ

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Horticultural Therapy Week March 15 to 22 coincides with the birth of spring, St. Patrick's Day, Shamrock of green clover, promotion of Horticultural Therapy, the good work of horticultural therapists.



The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders recently designated March 15-21 as Horticultural Therapy Week to help raise awareness of the benefits of horticultural therapy for people of all ages. Freeholder Director Mark Caliguire presented the Board's proclamation to horticultural therapist Laura DePrado at the board's March 10 public meeting.

This week is national Horticultural Therapy Week March 15 to 22, coinciding with the birth of spring, St. Patrick's Day, Shamrock of green clover, and the week of promotion of horticultural therapy and the good work of horticultural therapists nationally and locally. You don't have to be Irish to recognize that horticultural therapy and the people-plant connection makes eyes smile across the garden state as research-based evidence shows the physical, psychological, social and cognitive benefits of horticultural therapy. The New Jersey Senate became the first legislative body in the United States to pass a resolution designating the third week of March as Horticultural Therapy Week established by Congress in spring 2006.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- NJ Senate passed a resolution designating the third week of March as Horticultural Therapy Week.
- Horticultural Therapy connects people and plants through vocational, social, therapeutic programs.
- Horticultural therapists are typically part of a treatment team.

What is horticultural therapy?

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, and/or garden spaces that accommodate people with a wide range of abilities (with goals, objectives and recorded outcomes). Horticultural therapy designs and programs can offer cognitive, social, physical benefits with year-round application indoors and outdoors in schools, senior and community centers, adult day care, assisted living, nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals including veterans, vocational schools, substance abuse rehabilitation, family shelters and resource centers, developmentally disabled day programs and group homes, day and residential housing for adults with autism, community and county parks, gardens and arboreta.

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



Herb Scented Shamrocks: Everyone is Irish with horticultural therapy Shamrock Herb plates that awaken and stimulate the senses, inspires curiosity, wonder, creative expression, hand-eye coordination, repetitive tasks, culinary creations, gardens, and planting past and present. (Photo courtesy of Laura DePrado)

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. "Horticultural therapy puts into practice what those of us in the green industry already know, plants do improve peoples' lives," said Dominick Mondì, executive director New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association.

Horticultural therapists are trained to use plants and the cycles of nature to teach life skills. Nature and plant life cycles have built-in and unending benefit to people. In working with clients therapists explain and implement social and psychological concepts. Concepts like nurturing, responsibility, the importance of strong "roots" and the value of rejuvenation.

"Designating a week each year to raise awareness to Horticultural Therapy will hopefully expand opportunities for more people to take advantage of the many benefits it offers," said Senator Bateman (R-Somerset, Hunterdon, Mercer and Middlesex). "Horticultural Therapy is a time proven practice dating back centuries that's helped countless people from children to seniors to veterans to those with special needs," he added. [View the bill.](#)



Jump Starting Spring Planting Pansy Seeds and Geranium Plugs: March is a great time for clients to participate and engage in seed starting of pansies, one of the first spring annual flowers to bloom when its still cold, and planting geranium plugs into flower peat pots. Both activities are designed for wide range of participant abilities, physically and cognitively, inspire seasonal connections, learning and success in planting and nurturing plants, and anticipation of the growth of seeds and spring to come. (Photo courtesy of Laura DePrado)

10 Things you can do to connect with nature safely, or bring nature to someone else:

Plants have unique qualities as they respond to any caregiver — plants do not judge. They do not discriminate and they are universally appealing.

1. Create a fresh flower arrangement and place where you can see them
2. Look through seed catalogs
3. Start herbs for your kitchen window sill
4. Take a walk through an arboretum or park
5. Decorate a flower pot
6. Visit a local greenhouse
7. Start plants from seed
8. Make a pine cone or wreath bird feeder. Place seeds in coffee filter. Brush pine cone with peanut butter. Roll over the seeds. Hang outside, bird activity is guaranteed to keep them busy and you occupied watching them and inspires stewardship in caring for nature.
9. Cut stems from flowering shrubs and trees outside. Bring them indoors, place in water, keeping it fresh and force the blooms
10. Visit a local store and explore all of the different seed packets, and starting kits available.

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