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'Eyes are smiling': It's horticultural therapy week

Written by
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This week, March 15 to 21, is national Horticultural Therapy Week. It 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 see 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 U.S. to pass a resolution designating the third week of March as horticultural therapy week established by Congress in spring 2006.

"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 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.

To view the bill, [click here.](#)

What is horticultural therapy?



Planting pansy seeds and geranium plugs. - (LAURA DEPRADO)

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 and physical benefits with year-round application indoors and outdoors in schools, senior and community centers, adult daycare, 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 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.

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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"Horticultural therapy puts into practice what those of us in the green industry already know, plants do improve peoples' lives," said Dominick Mondri, executive director of the 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.



Douglas H. Fisher, Secretary of Agriculture visits Project Grow with Laura DePrado, HTR, Final Touch Plantscaping. Douglas H. Fisher, Secretary of Agriculture visits Project Grow with Laura DePrado, HTR, Final Touch Plantscaping. - (Courtesy of the N.J. Department of Agriculture)

The Resolutions Committee of the State Board of Agriculture for the third year, presented and voted for Horticultural Therapy Resolution at the N.J. Agriculture Convention, February 2015 in Atlantic City. The Resolutions Committee is comprised of more than 100 delegate organizations that decide on the areas of agriculture and horticultural importance for the State of New Jersey, and helps set the direction for the Department of Agriculture in the coming year. The resolution is available on the departments' website [here](#).

Douglas H. Fisher New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture, visited horticultural therapy programs in south and central New Jersey, including my program at the Adult Day Center of Somerset County along with Senator Bateman, NJDA Assistant Secretary Alfred Murray, N.J. Nursery and Landscape Association, Dominick Mondì, Executive Director, and Jack Otterbein, Senior Director and member of the Somerset County Board of Agriculture. Secretary Fisher spoke at the 42nd Annual Conference of the American Horticultural Therapy Association to nearly 200 Horticultural Therapists, educators and interns from the U.S. France, Japan, Canada and British Columbia. "Horticultural therapy provides growth opportunities and community connections for New Jersey's horticultural producers. Growing and working in a garden provides many positives for individuals, from physical activity to learning where our food comes from, said Fisher"

Activities in N.J. have resulted in the AHTA to showcase Horticultural Therapy at the State Capitol this week. 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 degrees in, and horticultural education programs, [click here](#). To learn about the history and practical application of horticultural therapy view co-authored Fact Sheet, [click this link](#), "Enabling Gardens: The Practical Side of Horticultural Therapy".

"Horticultural therapy has tremendous support by policy makers in N.J.; the legislators, with special thanks to Senator Bateman and Assemblywoman Donna Simon for sponsoring the Joint Resolutions, the Resolutions Committee of the N.J. Agricultural Convention, N.J. Department of Agriculture, N.J. Board of Agriculture, N.J. Farm Bureau, New Jersey

Nursery and Landscape Association, American Society of Landscape Architects N.J. Chapter. On behalf of the AHTA and N.J. Registered Horticultural Therapists, including Rutgers NJAES Agents, Professor Joel Flagler, RCE Bergen County, and Madeline Flahive-DiNardo, RCE Union County, and Laura DePrado, thank you for your support and helping to formally raise awareness about the profession and professionals who make a difference in peoples' lives every day across N.J.," MaryAnne McMillan, AHTA President. "Thank you to the Freeholder Boards of Bergen, Hunterdon and Somerset Counties for issuing proclamations in recognition of the week."

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.
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.

Laura DePrado, registered horticultural therapist, HTR, B.S. and HT certificate, author, journalist and owner of Final Touch Landscaping, LLC, Branchburg, Somerset County, specializing in connecting people and plants through customized activities and programs for children, young adults through seniors using plants year round in adult day, sub acute, longterm, rehabilitative and in-home care for groups and individuals to impact social, physical, and psychological well-being.

Programs stimulate the senses, while inspiring success on some level in human health and well-being. DePrado is the 2013 recipient of the American Horticultural Therapy Associations' Alice Burlingame Humanitarian Award a national presenter, columnist, co author of published Rutgers Fact Sheet "Enabling Gardens: The Practical Side of Horticultural Therapy," and multi-award recipient both nationally and locally. Her work is featured in the 2015 NJ Agriculture Magazine and she has underwritten Horticultural Therapy Resolutions at The N.J. Agriculture Convention of 2013, 2014 and 2015 an legislation designating the third week of March as Horticultural Therapy Week in N.J. DePrado's effort have resulted in the first legislative body, The Senate, to pass a bill.

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