



**Flowers and plants used for Horticultural Therapy activities for children through seniors at all stages of life, abilities and social, vocational and rehabilitative and therapeutic settings. During the winter months a wide range of Horticultural Therapy activities are facilitated indoors, with or without a greenhouse. Activity examples include, but are not limited to, forcing small, medium and large bulbs, such as Amaryllis and Paper Whites, care and maintenance of houseplants, plant propagation, creating succulent gardens and terrariums, flower arranging and seed starting. Plants possess interactive qualities that involve people. Plants stimulate our sight/vision, scent, hearing, touch and taste. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)**

Consumer horticulture is the cultivation, use, and enjoyment of plants, gardens, landscapes and related horticultural items to the benefit of individuals, communities, and the environment. These activities rely on the understanding and application of the art and science of horticulture.

The percentage of U.S. households participating in consumer horticulture will increase from 70 percent in 2014 to 90 percent by 2025, according to the U.S.D.A. National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture.

“Horticultural therapy” is the new “consumer horticulture.” A phone conversation with Tom Bewick, the national program leader - horticulture, for the U.S.D.A. National Institute of Food and Agriculture Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, inspired me to write about it. Horticultural therapy techniques are employed to assist participants to learn new skills or regain those that are lost. Horticultural therapy helps improve memory, cognitive abilities, task initiation, language skills, and socialization. In physical rehabilitation, it can help strengthen muscles and improve coordination, balance, and endurance. In vocational horticultural therapy settings, people learn to work independently, problem solve, and follow directions. Horticultural therapists are professionals with specific education, training, and credentials in the use of horticultural for therapy and rehabilitation.



Thousands of Annual Primrose and Lilies, used in Horticultural Therapy programs, growing at Hionis Greenhouses and Garden Center in the Whitehouse Station section of Readington. New Jersey ranks 10th in the nation overall with \$355.7 million in horticultural sales, fifth in the nation in value of sales in the family or Individual category, sixth in Potted Herbaceous Perennial Plants, 12th in Nursery Stock Sold, eighth in Food Crops Grown Under Protection, fifth in Potted Flowering Plants for Indoor or Patio Use, third in Acres in the Open for Cut Flowers and fourth in Sales of Cut Flowers, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture's New Jersey State Statistician Bruce Eckland. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

Horticultural therapy (HT) is recognized by USDA NIFA, (as it is known).

“If you are involved with plants you are involved with consumer horticulture,” Bewick said. USDA NIFA, through federal funding and program leadership, sustains cutting-edge horticultural research, education, and extension at its partner colleges and universities, and much more.

“Abraham Lincoln had the foresight to create the Peoples Department of the USDA. USDA affects peoples’ lives every day, and we make their lives better every day,” Bewick said. “Horticultural therapy benefits peoples’ lives every day too. One of our goals is to engage the horticultural therapy community in our effort to benefit human health and well-being, and it is something we want to highlight. The National Institute of Health spent \$30 billion on the curative aspects of health. HT can help people stay well. Consumer Horticulture is a legal mandate by Congress. A strategic plan is in forward motion by USDA NIFA to address this in the form of the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture.”



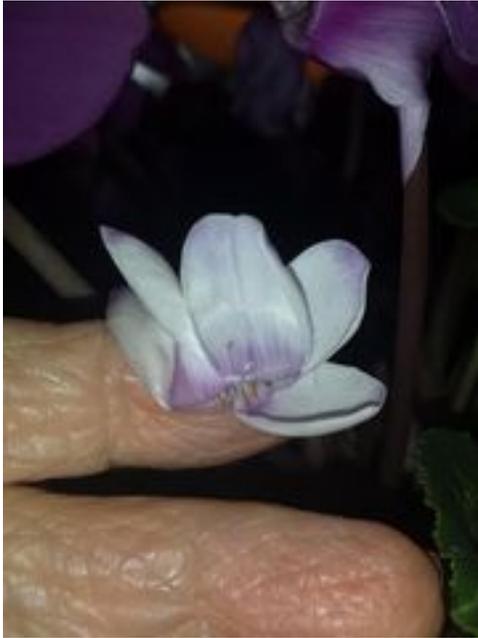
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NIFA horticultural program areas include:

- Sustainable production and postproduction handling (postharvest physiology) of fruits, nuts, vegetables, flowers, landscape crops
- Environmentally sensitive management of landscape plantings and gardens, including sports areas and parks
- Horticultural impact on human health and well-being such as social, mental, and physical horticulture therapy.

Horticultural therapy uses gardening in hospitals, recovery and rehabilitation centers, senior centers, public and private schools, adult day center, rehabilitative programs, mental health, and correctional facilities. It helps veterans, youth-at-risk, individuals with dementia, all with the goal of providing people living with physical, mental, or social limitations full and unobstructed access to therapeutic gardening activities.

Horticultural therapy also has a rich in history. In the United States Dr. Benjamin Rush, University of Pennsylvania professor of the Institute of Medicine and Clinical Practice, published findings in 1812 that patients who worked in gardens had better recovery rates from mania compared to those who had not had the same gardening experience. According to Rutgers Fact Sheet, "Enabling Gardens: The Practical Side of Horticultural Therapy," the Friends Hospital of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1879, was the first American hospital to build a greenhouse used for patient rehabilitation. When injured World War II veterans were admitted to hospitals, physicians used on-site gardens donated by garden clubs and horticultural businesses, specifically for rehabilitation therapies.



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The professional field of “HT” began in 1973. The American Horticultural Therapy Association is the only U.S. organization committed to promoting and developing the practice of [horticultural therapy](#) (HT) as a unique and dynamic human service modality. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the association advocates on behalf of the professional interests of horticultural therapy practitioners and strives to increase beneficial outcomes for participants, host facilities, researchers, and educators.

Originally formed in 1973 as the National Council for Therapy and Rehabilitation through Horticulture, the organization adopted its current name in 1987. Throughout its history, the association has sustained its [founders' vision](#) to expand and advance the practice of [horticultural therapy](#). Today, the association defines and encourages pursuit of outstanding [standards of practice](#), disseminates critical knowledge across diverse constituent audiences, and recognizes and promotes excellence in clinical, professional, educational, and research achievement. Association-accredited horticultural therapy curriculums are offered by colleges and universities around the country, including Rutgers University.



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Horticultural therapy is consumer horticulture, and it is a new crop planted in the Garden State, and pushing its way up through the fertile soil.

“The horticulture industry in New Jersey is the state’s largest agriculture sector with 42 percent gross sales. This includes nursery, sod, horticulture and floriculture,” according to New Jersey Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary Alfred Murray.

Additionally, “The New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association’s mission is to be passionate advocates for professional nursery and landscape businesses in New Jersey. Our membership consists of nursery growers, landscape professionals, retail garden centers, and greenhouse producers,” said Executive Director, Dominick Mondì. The association was organized in 1915 and is currently celebrating its 100th year. The NJNLA is a formal supporter of horticultural therapy as is the State Board of Agriculture.



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I have underwritten horticultural therapy resolutions at the New Jersey Agriculture Conventions in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Next month the delegates will vote on the 2016 “HT” Resolution at the 102nd Agricultural Convention. Gov. Chris Christie signed into law during the 2014-2015 legislative session bipartisan SJR12 (Bateman/Vitale), and AJR13 (Simon/Vainieri-Huttle), legislation designating the third week of March Horticultural Therapy Week in New Jersey beginning in 2016. New Jersey is the first legislature to designate a week to raise awareness about horticulture therapy.

My passion for this field, which was featured in “Following your Passion” column by Paul Grzella exactly three years ago, is adding water and fertilizer to grow horticultural therapy, a consumer horticulture with the USDA. To everything there is a season.

Finishing touches Thursday for the 2015 Philadelphia Flower Show at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society show opens Saturday, February 28 and runs through Sunday, March 8, 2015. Eileen Blass, USA TODAY

*Laura DePrado is a horticultural therapy practitioner. Email [laura@finaltouchplantscaping.com](mailto:laura@finaltouchplantscaping.com).*