

**Using Plant Based Therapies to Promote  
Health and Well-being  
in an Aging Population**

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## **What does it mean to live well?**

**“Success is waking up in the morning, whoever you are, wherever you are, however old or young, and bounding out of bed because there’s something out there that you love to do, that you believe in, that you’re good at, something that’s bigger than you are and you can hardly wait to get at it again today.”**

**-Author unknown**



the  
GARDEN  
of HOPE  
EST. 2004

# Why gardening works



- It's accessible to everyone
- Plants respond equally to all of us
- Benefits body, mind and spirit
- Life lessons happen in the garden
- We are drawn to nature

# Gardening benefits our bodies in many ways



- Exercises all muscle groups
- Maintain, increase strength
- Flexibility
- Balance
- More blood and oxygen to the brain – improves cognitive capacity
- Greater stamina
- Fresh air, vitamin D
- Healthy appetite, healthy food

# Mental exercises through gardening



- Attention to detail
- Learning about world around us
- Curiosity
- Mindfulness
- Creativity
- Living in the moment, the here and now
- Challenging the brain serves as protection against age-related mental decline

# Social/Emotional benefits of garden activities



- Lowers stress
- Improved self esteem from meaningful “work”
- Socialization
- Good conversation can happen
- Keeps mind young and playful
- New experiences in a non-threatening environment



# A spiritual experience



- Must have hope to garden
- Discoveries in the garden
- Being awed by nature
- Feeling open to what life brings
- Connecting to something bigger than ourselves
- Finding peace
- Understanding, accepting the cycle of life in all of nature

# Adapting the garden to the gardener



# Importance of reducing stress

## Douglas Schar Dump Your Stress in the Compost Pile

- 50 symptoms of stress
- Physical: weather, injuries
- Psychological – most powerful source is our own mind
- Fears, worries lead to negative thoughts, depression
- Lack of motivation, no zest for life
- As the body fails us, and we lose control, fear rises
- Problem is not that bad things happen, but what we make of them, what goes on in our mind
- The mind reacts to events – we do have a choice of how we react

# Ecotherapy and human well-being

Current term for nature's healing powers

Restores natural balance between inner and outer man through a physical connection with nature.

Active participants: higher levels of overall satisfaction with life- fewer colds and bouts of the flu, better able to adapt to stress without being overwhelmed

Passive participants: suffer less from mental and mood disorders, students score better when there are windows open to greenery



# Getting exercise in a green environment

Results of a study by Mind, a British mental health charity, in a report entitled “Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health”

- 71% reported decreased levels of depression and felt less tense
- 90% had increased self esteem
- 88% reported improved mood
- 71% felt less fatigue
- 53% felt more vigorous



NO PETS  
NO SMOKING

# Shinrin-yoku, forest bathing in Japan

Taking in the forest atmosphere provides relaxation and reduces stress

- Academic field of study in Japan, forest medicine
- Lowers heart rate, blood pressure, levels of cortisol, boosts immune system, increases anti-cancer proteins
- Compared urban and forest settings – huge difference in cortisol just from gazing on forest scenery for 20 minutes
- Studying color, smells, sounds in the forest
- 40 areas designated as forest therapy sites – goal is 100
- Breathing classes, aromatherapy, guided walks, free check-ups



# Nature views important in health care settings

- Roger Ulrich, PhD. Texas A&M University
- Has published widely in design and scientific journals
- Researcher in evidence-based healthcare design
- Results: less pain medication, shorter hospital stays, better compliance with medical staff, nursing needs when patient has view of nature from hospital window
- Sacred Heart Hospital, Eugene, Oregon





# Some personal stories



# In conclusion,

Connecting to the rhythm and beauty of nature helps us as we age to:

- Maintain purpose, vitality and dignity
- Embrace change
- Be trusting and hopeful
- Accept losses, forgive, let go
- Live in the present
- Feel compassion for self and others – we soften
- Feel gratitude