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**Horticultural Therapy**

**By Thomas Leo Ogren**

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Horticultural Therapy

Thomas Ogren

The idea of using gardens and plants as "tools" for therapy is growing fast these days. Makes perfect sense, too. There is a great deal of evidence that working in gardens is wonderful for our mental health.

The relation between our mental health and our physical health is a close one. If we feel good about ourselves, about our families, our work, our friends, often our bodies will feel stronger too. Just being in a beautiful garden can make

many of us feel better. Doing small chores in the garden, deadheading roses, pulling weeds, planting some bulbs, fertilizing, all of these things have the ability to make us feel good.

In the Persian language the words "garden" and "heaven" are one and the same. In our own lives so often we spend most of our time rushing here

and rushing there. We spend way too much time stuck in front of computers, TV sets, stuck in rush hour traffic, doing things that may be necessary, but things that aren't much fun, much less satisfying.

But working in the garden, that's different, especially for those of us who really do love to garden. I recently came on some research data that suggests that the more tuned into gardening a person is, the more nurturing, creative, and

compassionate that person will be. Again, this makes sense too. In the garden we are free to experiment. In the garden what we do actually does make a difference, a huge difference. Unlike so many things, the more effort we put into our gardens, the better they are.

What is the link between gardening and empathy for our fellow man? Could it be that gardening brings us closer to nature? That by getting in

touch with Mother Nature, we are ourselves enriched? Probably so. But then too, there's no doubt that the type of people drawn to gardening in the first place, may already have in them an extra dose of creativity and compassion.

I used to work in a prison for juveniles. The CYA it was called, the California Youth Authority. I started from scratch the program there and over the years the program grew, the gardens expanded, I learned

## Horticultural Therapy

new things and so did  
my wayward students.

Most of my "boys" in the CYA were gang members from the Los Angeles area. Typically they were "in" for armed robbery, muggings, murder. Most of them, although they ranged in age from fifteen to twenty-five, most could barely read, and none had done any gardening.

I designed our gardens to be therapeutic. We built a big brick barbecue so we could cook things we grew. We grew fruit trees, hundreds of them, so we'd have fresh fruit to eat. We put up bird feeders so we could attract and see birds in the garden. We put up birdbaths, we made wind chimes, and we planted huge gardens of vegetables and flowers.

In our gardens we grew things organically. I taught them to value frogs, toads, lizards, snakes as welcome additions to the garden. We made huge piles of compost. About the only form of punishment

we used was, "turning the compost heap."

We always had a radio to play some music to listen to while we worked.

Deep, profound changes happened to many of these hardened criminals while working in the garden.

As they learned to hybridize roses they lost

their desire to rob liquor stores. As they grew tomatoes big as your fist and watermelons big as beach balls, they became proud of their accomplishments. The more they learned about plants, the less they were interested in crime.

Many of these boys learned how to read, to do math, to write, and learned it all there in the gardens, in the greenhouses.

I worked in the CYA for twelve years. People in authority sometimes claimed that I bribed my "wards" and that I must be doing something illegal. They couldn't understand how it was that these hoodlums could learn the scientific names of hundreds of plants, that they actually learned to love to read, to love to garden. But I didn't bribe the boys; I just set up a garden with a healing atmosphere and then let it work its wonders.

The right garden is a magical place. Plants are not judgmental. You take good care of them and they thrive. In the garden our minds are free to wander, to daydream, to relax. Good things happen in good gardens.

Why talk about horticultural therapy in a book devoted largely to allergy avoidance? The answer is simple. Gardening of itself can be very therapeutic, however, if the garden is filled with plants that cause allergies, well, the

gardening experience won't be that good. It is no fun to be sneezing and even less fun to have attacks of skin rashes or asthma. By making our gardens allergy-free we can avoid these negatives. The physical work done in gardens is

also good for us, burning calories, making our muscles stronger. In the right garden the air is cleaner, too, refreshing our lungs as we work.

If it makes sense to have a therapeutic garden be allergy-free, it also makes sense that gardening is food for the soul, and the happier we feel about life, quite often, the better will be our health.

### The Fen Shui Garden.

The more people you talk to about Fen Shui and gardening, the more opinions on it you get. Ms. Robin Wood, a very talented landscape architect once told me, "Fen Shui gardening is really just good landscape design."

And to a point, I would agree with her. In many ways the ancient Chinese philosophy of Fen Shui, also called Feng Shui, is all about creating harmony. In a true Fen Shui garden the focus is on the atmosphere. A garden is created

that encourages meditation, relaxation, close connections to Nature.

A good Fen Shui garden does not ignore any of our senses. There are fragrant flowers to smell, wind chimes, the sounds of water, and the songs

of birds to please our ears, shade from the hot sun, protection from the wind, places just to sit and think, contrasting surfaces to feel, beauty to please our eye, and perhaps even some fruit or vegetable for our tongue to taste.

A true Fen Shui garden is not strictly formal, overly clipped, too tidy and sanitary, all drawn with squares and rectangles. Shrubs don't need to be square nor do all trees need to resemble each other.

A quiet restrained informality is

encouraged. Love, peace, understanding, and wisdom reign in a true Fen Shui garden.

In many ways during all my years at the Youth Authority, although I didn't know it at the time, I was instinctively trying to develop a Fen Shui garden. Surrounded by guards, gangs, and concertina razor wire, I aspired to create an

inner sanctum, a natural place for me and my students to remove ourselves from all the bad vibes so

very close by.

I am not a Fen Shui expert by any means and certainly do not claim to be, but I have read a great deal about it, listened to numerous talks given by so-called experts, and I have long been interested and involved in garden design. I think that Fen Shui does indeed have much to offer and that it is well worth exploring. However, I often notice a certain snobbishness surrounding the subject. One expert writes that none of the others know what they're talking

about, especially the Western writers and speakers. I've met some Fen Shui designers and writers who were cold, impersonal and rude, none of which jives with true Fen Shui in my mind. I sometimes encounter a similar snobbishness with people who refuse to grow any plants not native to their own little local area.

My feeling about all these snobby attitudes in gardening is this: Elitism doesn't belong in the garden. Plants aren't critical, let's not be that way ourselves. Many people, far wiser than I, have long known that the more we learn about something, the more we realize how little we know. Harold Young, the wonderful senior editor of Pacific Coast Nurseryman Magazine once wrote me in an email, "I used to think I knew a lot of plants."

I know just what he means.

Tom Ogren loves fishing, hiking, boxing, baseball, gardening, his family and friends. He is author of 5 published books and hundreds of articles. His website is [www.allergyfree-gardening.com](http://www.allergyfree-gardening.com)

### **The Practice Of The Therapy Profession**

**By Dave Lloyd**

Therapy is a profession that has increased in the awareness of the general population as we've become a culture more focused on self-care and taking care of our body, mind, and soul more

## Horticultural Therapy

consistently. There are many professions that fall under the title of therapy. The most common is that of psychotherapy which encompasses grief therapy, group therapy, couples therapy, cognitive therapy, and family therapy. Individuals who offer services in these types of therapy typically are Counselors, Social Workers, or Psychologists with graduate degrees. The primary focus is on helping individuals, couples, and groups improve their quality of life through gain a better understanding of their emotional and mental health. Typically, clients visit with these professionals on a weekly basis and may meet for a short-term to resolve the immediate need or over a longer period of time to get to deeper issues limiting someone's enjoyment of life. Play therapy is a variant of psychotherapy that focuses on working with children or those with emotional trauma. Through the use of play techniques, the therapist aims to help in resolving whatever issue may be keeping the person stuck. Techniques here include acting, drawing, thought-provoking games, taking pictures, storytelling, and combining different elements like stories and drawing. The intent is to use these methods as a metaphor for assisting the child in discovering a truth or understanding about themselves.

Massage therapy and physical therapy are other professions more focused on the physical health of those who are seeking proactive or reparative health, respectively. Massage therapy is usually performed on a weekly basis – or occasionally if in a resort, salon, or spa area. Physical therapy is a restorative healing profession, typically affiliated with a hospital or outpatient clinic. Increased movement, mobility, or a decrease in pain are the typical objectives of someone seeking physical therapy.

Through the use of various forms of therapy, individuals can increase their quality of life emotional, mentally, and physically.

Dave Lloyd has created an online guide to understanding and choosing a mental health, massage, or physical therapy professional at



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