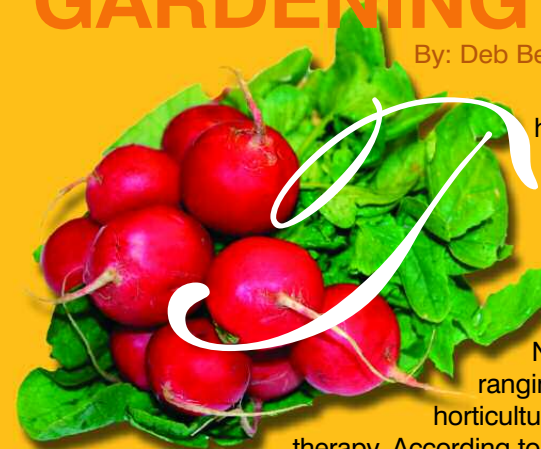




*Horticultural Therapy utilizes plants and horticultural activities to improve the social, educational, psychological and physical adjustment of persons, thus nurturing the body, mind and spirit while improving their quality of life.*

## GARDENING FOR *All* ABILITIES

By: Deb Bergmann



The therapeutic benefits of peaceful garden environments have been understood since ancient times. In the 19th century, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and considered to be the "Father of American Psychiatry," reported that garden settings held curative effects for people with mental illness.

Rehabilitative care of hospitalized war veterans in the 1940's and 1950's greatly expanded the practice of garden, or horticultural, therapy. Now recognized worldwide as a practical and viable treatment with wide-ranging benefits for people in therapeutic, vocational and wellness programs, horticultural therapy is the simple act of participating in gardening activities as therapy. According to the Florida Chapter of the American Horticultural Therapy Association, "Horticultural Therapy is a process utilizing plants and horticultural activities to improve the social, educational, psychological and physical adjustment of persons, thus nurturing the body, mind and spirit while improving their quality of life."

Why is gardening so beneficial? It provides an outlet for the stress we feel in our everyday lives, particularly for those who are adjusting to a major life change. It provides a level of confidence, a sense of purpose and hope. Gardening can also offer social interaction. There are many physical benefits as well, such as exercise for both gross and fine motor skills, and conditioning, retaining, or strengthening muscles. Participating in an active pastime can also lower blood pressure, improve circulation and respiration, and exercise arthritic joints.

Those of us who enjoy gardening have experienced such benefits firsthand. Whether it's a few pots filled with colorful flowers or a raised garden packed with ripe vegetables, we feel a sense of accomplishment and pride. →



This is especially true for people with disabilities who participate in gardening activities. Fortunately, gardening is an activity that can be tailored to accommodate just about everyone, regardless of age, physical or mental ability or location. Even if you have never sown a seed or potted a plant before, it's never too late to get started. Many options are available to you depending on your needs, abilities and location. Before taking on this fulfilling pastime, here are a few things to consider: size, accessibility, tools, and safety.

**SIZE** - For those just starting out or who do not have a lot of space, a smaller garden will be easier to manage; yet still offer the same benefits.

**ACCESSIBILITY** - Make sure you situate your garden where you can access it. If you are a wheelchair user, sidewalks and gates will need to be wide enough for you to pass. For those with a walker or cane, an even, non-slippery surface will help. Ramps and handrails may also be necessary

in some situations. Once in the garden area, a bench may work well to provide a place to rest.

**TOOLS** - Choosing the right tools and learning to use them in the correct way will make garden work easier and more enjoyable. Many tools are available or can be created to assist with your gardening activities. For hanging baskets, pulley systems can be used to lower the basket for watering. Soaker hoses can be placed throughout planting beds and cords can be tied to small tools, making them easier to pick up if dropped. Many types of garden tools are available for purchase and should be examined for your particular need such as lightweight tools or ones with extended handles.

**SAFETY** - As with most recreational activities, safety is very important and certain precautions should be taken. Over-exertion and over-exposure to the sun should be avoided.

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Once you have decided to take on this pastime, many different types of gardens are available to you. Some examples include, raised beds, container planting, table planters, elevated beds, window boxes, miniature gardens and hanging baskets. Many books and websites are now available to help you get started, or you can contact your local chapter of the American Horticultural Therapy Association (visit [www.ahat.org](http://www.ahat.org)).

For those who wish to enjoy the beauty and benefits of gardening, but aren't ready to pull out the gloves, many accessible botanical gardens are available for you to visit and enjoy.



### Plant Therapy?

By Bill Query

I was born on a farm, but moved to the city when I was eight years old. About four years ago, my neighbor was working in her yard and she asked me why my yard was so bare. I thought about it and decided I would get a plant, just to be like everyone else. I bought two climbing roses and planted one on each side of my porch. In about a month, they began to bloom. As people complimented my success, I just brushed it off. Then, one Sunday as I watched television, I heard a preacher talk about miracles. I was still alive after my accident, which was a miracle. But, miracles don't happen every day. I went outside later to find a fresh new rose. I examined it and saw the softness, sheer beauty and technology of its design. I realized that miracles do happen every day—maybe we just don't notice them! These flowers bring me an inner peace with myself and with God. That sounds like therapy to me!



### Walton West to Begin Horticultural Therapy Program

The Walton West Community Re-Entry program works with individuals who have been diagnosed with an acute neurological disorder such as a stroke or brain injury. Walton West Director, Scott Russell, is excited to announce the addition of a new horticultural therapy program. According to Mr. Russell, "The new program is estimated to benefit 20-30 Walton West clients annually with the possibility of benefiting other clients in the community and the Walton Continuum." The new program will also allow Walton West clients to provide plants for Walton Rehabilitation inpatient clients and families at reasonable prices. Proceeds of the sales will be used to provide a financial incentive for clients to participate in the program and improve their ability to develop the financial skills necessary for independent living.



### Harison Heights Garden Club

By Saddle Bosomean

Last year I started a patio garden, but it got too big for my patio, so I moved it to the area in front of my apartment. I went into the hospital for two months and my neighbors took care of the garden while I was away. I was growing cherry tomatoes, peppers and herbs at that time. This year I decided to plant flowers instead. Then I spoke with Beth Miller, Director of the Harison Heights Facility, to see if I could start a gardening club with some of the other residents. I began looking at books on gardening. I also lined up someone familiar with gardening to come visit us monthly to give us pointers and tips on gardening. The club now has nine members and wonderful plants to show. ♣



## Where to Visit:

#### Atlanta Botanical Gardens

1345 Piedmont Avenue NE  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
404-876-5859

#### Augusta Golf & Gardens

One Eleventh Street  
Augusta, GA 30901  
706-724-4443

#### Magnolia Plantations and Gardens

3550 Ashley River Road  
Charleston, SC 29414  
800-367-3517