

SAMPLE

Scope and Nature of Horticultural Therapy

Lesson Aim

Describe the scope and nature of horticultural therapy.

INTRODUCTION

We need plants for our survival as a species and for the survival of the planet. Plants keep our air useable by replenishing the oxygen we breathe and by filtering out undesirable particles. Without plants, temperatures would rise higher and fall lower. These fluctuations would make the earth erode faster, plants would cease to grow and eventually we wouldn't have anything to eat. And importantly, the world without plants would lose its fundamental beauty.

Human life cannot exist and thrive without plants - they are integral to human survival.

WHY HORTICULTURAL THERAPY?

Horticultural therapy (also known as 'social and therapeutic horticulture') uses the activities associated with horticulture such as gardening, plant propagation, plant care, visits to natural environments and gardens and parks etc. in personal development; to engender a feeling of well-being, improve physical health and encourage social interaction.

Humans instinctively relate to plants – the origin of this affinity has been attributed to our evolutionary journey as a species; we have relied on plants to provide us with medicine and food since the beginning of our evolution. Plants have been cultivated by man for centuries to provide food for farm animals, food for ourselves, and a wide range of other products, from building materials to oils and fibre. Plants are part of our psyche; from birth we are exposed to plants – so subconsciously we expect plants to be a part of our lives.

Plants also provide us with beauty, relaxation and exercise. Most people would prefer to look at a garden rather than bare space. Recent research suggests that gardens and parks are integral to human mental health; spending time within a natural environment was found to lower mental fatigue and dissipate aggressive tendencies. Social interaction and participation, community gardens (for example) help encourage social connectedness and a sense of community pride; bonded communities are also safer to live in.

Involvement with plants and time spent in gardens has also been used for many years as a viable part of aged care, particularly for patients with dementia and for patients convalescing in hospitals or in care. A pleasant view of a landscape and / or garden has proved to significantly reduce the recovery time for patients lucky enough to have a landscape of plants and greenery to look at each day.

Who Uses Horticultural Therapy?

Horticultural therapy is used for people with a wide range of cognitive, physical and social skills, including those people:

- Suffering from stroke
- Suffering from heart disease
- With visual impairments

- With dementia
- With learning difficulties
- With physical disabilities (including amputees)
- With underdeveloped social skills
- Long term unemployed people
- Disengaged teenagers
- In substance abuse recovery
- Recovering from illness
- Coming to terms with grief
- Adjusting after personal difficulties in their lives
- With terminal illness
- Rehabilitating after a period in hospital
- With physical restrictions, such as older people
- Children – in general.

Gardening is both one of the most popular leisure time pursuits, as well as a significant commercial industry:

- It offers the participant a wide range of both physical and psychological benefits.
- It allows people with mobility limitations (at almost all levels), an opportunity to participate in something – even someone who can do little more than drop a seed into some soil and watch it grow, can be involved in gardening.
- It is a dynamic activity; dealing with living things means that what you are working with is constantly changing - even if the participant is limited in the involvement they can offer.
- It offers “meaningful” and “creative” activities to people who have had their capacity to be creative or have meaning in life reduced.
- It can be used to exercise and strengthen muscles in any part of the body. A skilled physiotherapist can prescribe horticultural activities that may be used to reactivate and strengthen damaged tissues, improve mobility and to slow down deterioration caused through degenerative disease.
- Gardens connect us with nature and others; it can give us a sense of purpose and achievement, lessen feelings of isolation, improve our attitudes to others and engender a feeling of community inclusion. All this improves our mental health.
- It can help engender team building skills in the long term unemployed (of any age) or for disengaged, disaffected or underprivileged youth. The skills that they learn in a gardening program can be transferred to other areas of life; learning new skills that require nurturing and day to day caretaking can enhance self-esteem, build trust (in a team setting), encourage feelings of self-worth and open up employment opportunities. It can also provide participants with a feeling of ownership, particularly when participating in a community-based program such as the establishment of public spaces e.g. public parks or gardens. This is beneficial for the community as a whole, as public spaces that have been implemented through community jobs (or other type of program), instil a feeling of community pride in participants who otherwise may not have been socially engaged – they (the public spaces) are subsequently less likely to suffer from vandalism too.
- It can promote intergenerational communication and activities i.e. programs that include both older people and children.
- It can promote intercommunication with people from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds (and from both genders); communication enhances cultural awareness, encourages empathy for others and creates friendships. Communication through gardening does not need to necessarily use a lot of words, so people with different languages can still communicate through nature.

Where can we Use Horticultural Therapy Programs?

Participants in a horticultural therapy program are often referred by their medical practitioner i.e. doctor, social worker or other care professional – programs can be simple or complex, ranging from weekly gardening sessions through to full educational programs.

What activities are appropriate?

- Propagation – run by community re-vegetation groups, local government nurseries, supported employees within a work centre (in the past known as sheltered workshops).
- Tree planting – offered through re-vegetation programs often run by volunteer organisations or groups and sometimes also through government funded organisations.
- Community projects (such as parks and garden, re-vegetation) – upgrading existing facilities or establishing new ones. These are often government funded and part of an unemployed program to improve skills, provide education and enhance employment opportunities. Planting out trees for rehabilitation of indigenous vegetation.
- Garden maintenance – some community-based programs offer supervised garden maintenance (participants may be themselves disabled or unemployed, on a community-based work order as part of a drug rehabilitation program) to older people or physically disabled, to enable them to remain in their own homes and still also have a garden. This has the possibility of leading into paid employment if the opportunity arises and the participant has proven themselves to be good workers.
- Hydroponics – ideal for patients with limited mobility. It is also ideal for patients that cannot be exposed to bacteria (found in soils) or where bacteria may be a concern. The medium and solutions can be prepared by using sterilized components. This may also become a money-making venture for a person who cannot work in a commercial environment, but may be able to sell plants at a local market or similar.
- The productive garden; growing, vegetables herbs, cut flowers, perfumed plants and fruit – this can include a wide range of people with various physical and social skills, through to isolated individuals.
- Commercial nurseries sometimes employ people with disabilities (especially more people orientated council owned nurseries). For example, someone who may have little or no sight may still be able to work a normal day and receive a normal pay and so contribute to the local community as a wage earner. They mat pot up all day once they are set up with small potted plants on one side, potting mix in front of them and trays to put the potted-up plants on the other side.

Programs can be held at:

- Community houses/centres – they are often funded to run programs for the unemployed, people with a learning difficulty or those with difficulties socially and educationally, garden beds can be raised for people with physical disabilities.
- Community gardens - community gardens are also used as general community social centres for like-minded people to share their skills and have social interaction. Community garden are often established in city centres, in public housing areas and in many suburban areas with tiny gardens (or no gardens). This is particularly useful in getting all the neighbours together, talking to each other as they work in the community gardens. These may be a local footpath or otherwise wasted area that the local council permits the locals use to grow plants e.g. vegetables, flowers, trees etc.
- Older person care facilities – gardening activities tailored to suit the ability of the individual, allows older people in care situations to explore and contribute to their surrounding environment. It can give people a sense of purpose and achievement, as well as improve psychological health and cognitive ability.
- Hospitals and hospices – some hospitals have developed sensory gardens for their patients; research has found that gardens aid healing or provide peaceful pursuits or experiences for the terminally ill.

- Nursery or garden centre – many nurseries and garden centres run short (1-2 hour) information sessions for their clients to raise awareness of products but also to raise plant knowledge and encourage positive gardening experiences.
- Schools and kindergartens – there are numerous school-based horticultural programs today. Many schools have productive gardens where students learn to tend and also to cook vegetables.
- Work-centres (sheltered workshops) – these employ workers with learning disabilities; work encourages a feeling of inclusion and self-esteem and a sense of purpose - whilst also providing the participants with a small income.
- Prisons – horticultural therapy programs in prisons have been long-established. They range from informal programs through to structured educational and practical programs. Farming has also been a long-standing industry within prisons. The type of program will depend on the level of security at the prison, and can go a long way to giving prisoners something to focus on and become involved in. Prisoners may be involved in growing supplementary foods, such as herbs and spices that can be used in cooking in the prison kitchen.
- Mental health services – horticultural therapy is often used within mental health services part of rehabilitation programmes and to provide a patient with structure in their daily routines.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING HORTICULTURAL THERAPY?

There are many benefits to be gained from horticultural therapy. These benefits are both physical and psychological.

General Benefits

Everyone can participate in horticultural therapy.

The horticultural therapist can individualise the work they do with a person, according to their abilities, so activities in horticultural therapy should be accessible for all.

For example, work areas can be made more accessible for people who have difficulties with their back or bending, so that they do not have to bend over work areas. Work areas can be lowered so people in wheelchairs can use them. They can also be lowered so that children can work on benches and so on.

The location where horticultural therapy is carried out can also be individualised. For example, the area could be controlled so that children or vulnerable adults do not have access to dangerous plants or put plants in their mouths. Gardens can be made accessible for people with wheelchairs, mobility problems, sight difficulties and so on.

Physical Benefits

Horticultural therapy can help people to:

- Improve their fine motor skills. We have fine and gross motor skills. Gross motor skills involve our larger muscle groups, such as when we dig, run or jump. Fine motor skills involve the use of our smaller bones and muscles, as we would in handling secateurs, sowing seeds, writing and so on.
- Increase muscular strength and muscle tone – being involved in gardening can help a person to increase their muscular strength. Even if they are not able to use some of their muscles, for example, if they are unable to use their legs, it can increase their muscle strength and tone in other areas, such as their arms, shoulders etc.
- Increase range of motion – having to move around, dig, prune, sow seeds and so on can help increase the range of motion a person has.
- Improve coordination and balance – being involved in gardening and horticultural therapy can help a person to improve their coordination and balance. Imagine digging, this requires the use of arms and legs, so requires a good range of coordination and balance. If a person cannot use their legs or arms, then the limbs that they do use will require increased strength and tone and also balance and coordination.

Therefore, horticultural therapy can increase a person's physical health.

Psychological Benefits

Horticultural therapy also has psychological benefits:

- It can help increase a person's self-esteem. For example, for a person who does not feel they are good at things, perhaps they have disabilities or learning disabilities, being able to be involved in gardening and horticulture, and do it well, can increase their self-esteem. This often leads to the person gaining better anger control and so improves their chance of a job or even better job. It could also help them to control their drug and or alcohol addiction.
- It can help increase their independence. It can help a person to learn new tasks, to work on their own, to learn more about plants and gardening. It can also help with their independence if they are able to transfer these skills to other environments and their own home. For example, growing plants and vegetables in their own home.
- It can also increase the observation skills a person uses. They must become aware of how plants grow, how seeds should be planted and so on.
- Horticultural therapy can also allow a person to make choices. With some psychological conditions, such as some learning disabilities, a person may not have very much control over their own life, so being involved in horticultural therapy enables them to make choices and state their independence more than they have possibly in the past.
- Horticultural therapy can increase a person's problem-solving skills – when to plant certain crops, how, how deep, what type of soil, what do they do in less than ideal situations and so on? It can also help them to consider more about their own abilities. People can show great initiative. What if they find digging hard? Or planting seeds hard? The person and the horticultural therapist can look at ways in which they can become more involved, so aiding their problem-solving skills also.
- It can also increase a person's creativity, help them to think of how they do things, how they plant a garden, where is the best place to plant a particular flower, what would look best and so on.
- Gardening and horticulture can also be a place where a person can let out their emotions or stress or anger. Exercise can be a good release of anger and emotion and there is obviously exercise involved in gardening. Many people find gardening calming, and it can be invigorating to be in the fresh air. Also, thinking about the plants and soil and what you are doing can be a good distraction from a stressful situation. This is particularly true for someone in prison for many years who cannot see any family for a long time or infrequently with little or no physical contact.
- Horticultural therapy can also have social benefits, allowing the person to interact socially with others, which can also increase their self-esteem, social skills and speech and language skills.
- By showing a commitment to living things, a person is taking responsibility for their work, the garden and also to working with others as part of a team or group.
- It can also help a person to deal with success and failure. A person may have many failures in their life, but gardening can help them to find ways to overcome failures. Because a plant does not flower one year, or a vegetable crop does not grow as well as planned, this can be used to help the person to look at what they did (problem solving again) and how things could be improved. Was it the wrong soil? The wrong location? Was the weather too cold for the plants to survive? What could they do about that?
- It enables a person to commune with nature and to feel the benefits of doing so.
- It also allows the person to be inspired by others, to learn more about nature and their environment. This could easily lead to the person being motivated to do some study and get a job in Horticulture

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BE A HORTICULTURAL THERAPIST?

Horticultural therapists use horticultural activities and environments to positively influence human well-being, emotions, health and behaviour. People helped by Horticultural Therapists may include those who have physical disabilities, mental health problems and learning difficulties, those recovering from major injuries or illnesses, and older people. Programmes can also be developed for the rehabilitation of offenders or those suffering from drug or alcohol abuse.

Horticultural therapists often work in conjunction or liaison with other professionals such as psychologists and social workers.

To be a horticultural therapist you need:

- Enthusiasm for and a keen interest in horticulture, and preferably a qualification
- Patience, tolerance and understanding
- The ability to relate positively and respectfully to all kinds of people, particularly the groups you are working with
- The ability to encourage and motivate
- The ability to teach various skills
- The ability to make the most of limited budgets and local restrictions. For example, any ammonium-based fertiliser is banned in all prisons as they can be used to make explosives.
- Awareness of health and safety issues
- To be able to communicate and work with health professionals

Most programmes developed by horticultural therapists (often in conjunction with a range of health professionals) are tailored to the needs of individual clients; programme aims might include:

- Developing confidence, self-esteem, practical or social skills
- Encouraging social inclusion
- Learning or re-learning basic skills including numeracy and literacy
- Providing sensory stimuli
- Providing supportive outdoor activity and exercise to restore strength and mobility after an accident or illness
- Provision of tranquil, restorative environments

Horticultural therapists provide support for clients and demonstrate skills as a part of the process of encouraging them to achieve their objectives. Horticultural therapists will also provide ongoing monitoring of client's progress. Sometimes, horticultural therapists will provide additional support to clients who themselves study for horticultural qualifications.

Staff and volunteer management, sourcing funding, and developing project proposals may also be part of a horticultural therapist's remit.

Typical Jobs or Career Paths

Specific qualifications in horticultural therapy are relatively new. Most horticultural therapists have started their careers by gaining skills and experience in another area, for example in horticulture or in professions such as social work, occupational therapy, nursing or teaching. Those who started out in horticulture must then develop their social care skills and knowledge; those who started in caring professions must then work on their horticultural skills and knowledge.

The additional experience required, whichever discipline was the starting point, can be obtained via several routes, such as:

- Studying short courses such as this and undertaking voluntary work at a social and therapeutic horticulture project.

- Studying longer courses and obtaining a qualification in social and therapeutic horticulture, although such courses are only available at very few colleges.

There are a few college-based courses suitable for those who have yet to attain any qualifications; admission to the courses will be based on commitment and suitability of the candidate.

A limited number of courses at university level are available for study and/or training in Horticultural Therapy. Entry requirements will vary depending on the nature of the course.

Career Options

Jobs in horticultural therapy are often not widely advertised. Jobs for horticultural therapists may be advertised under other job titles – perhaps Project Worker or Horticultural Trainer.

As discussed earlier, some examples of where a horticultural therapist might work include day services/community-based projects, residential care establishments, rehabilitation units, hospitals, prisons and other detention centres, charitable and voluntary organisations, schools and specialist colleges. Some may be voluntary jobs that may later lead to paid work or just people who want to be involved in the local community or charity

Remuneration and Advancement Opportunities

Working hours vary and may include weekends and evenings. Part-time hours may be available. Salaries will vary between employers and will also depend if you are working in private practice or for a government organisation. Figures vary from country to country and the role will slightly differ from country to country.

Professional Bodies

Membership of professional bodies is useful to encourage networking and to keep you up to date with current trends. Some will require an annual fee to join, whilst others will require evidence of your educational attainment and experience. Some will offer reduced fees for students. Possible organisations will include horticultural, counselling, social and psychological professional bodies, depending on the level of training in each discipline.

Career Risks

There are risks associated with every career. Working with the disadvantaged, disabled or mentally ill can be stressful and demanding. Also, there may be situations where the client can display challenging and violent behaviour. However, you would be trained to deal with those sorts of situations and would often receive supervisory support to deal with any emotional or stressful difficulties you may face.

You may also be supported by staff who are trained in these areas, for example, when working with physically and or mentally disabled school children you would usually have a Teacher's Assistant with you while that particular group were under your care. This person would be there to help you but also to help keep the group under control in case they (or some of the group) became disruptive and even violent due to their poor attention control.

LIABILITY

You need Professional Indemnity Insurance if you hold yourself out to be a professional and provide advice or designs to customers or clients. This is irrespective of whether you charge a fee or not.

What is Professional Indemnity Insurance?

Professional Indemnity Insurance protects you and your business for liability arising out of act, errors or omissions in the provision of the professional services. Professional Indemnity will cover the legal costs of investigating, defending or settling a claim under the policy.

Why takeout Professional Indemnity Insurance Cover?

The financial cost of investigating, defending and settling a Professional Indemnity matter can be enormous. In addition to the financial costs of defending a matter, the insurer and legal advisers will guide you through the process and ensure the matter is dealt with in the most effective manner.

What is Public Liability Insurance?

Public Liability insurance protects you and your business from liability arising out of an occurrence causing bodily injury or property damage in connection with your business activities. Public Liability insurance covers your legal liability to compensate a third party who has suffered bodily injury or property damage arising out of the occurrence.

Example: A person trips over gardening equipment and breaks their leg in the fall. If it was foreseeable that the garden equipment would cause a person to injure themselves, then you or your employer would be liable to compensate the injured person. A Public Liability policy would respond to the matter.

Negligence

Negligence is one of the most commonly litigated torts. A 'tort' is simply a civil "wrong". Courts will look at such things as, how any equipment is installed, how it is maintained, how it is used, and whether proper consideration was given to the range of people who are likely to use the facility and/or equipment. If you are dealing with the public in any capacity as an employer or a provider (for example if you are running programs in the community or for individuals), you are liable to damages in the same way as an ordinary individual. You are also liable for negligent omissions, being the failure to act by employees and agents. This responsibility in law of a council or similar body is called vicarious liability.

The employer will be vicariously liable in three circumstances:

- Where it is proved that there is a master/servant relationship between the employer and the employee.
- The servant, that is the employee, was acting in the course and the scope of their duties as an employee.
- The employee was not in breach of any statutory duty.

In general, any liability arises where a duty to exercise reasonable care is owed by one person to another. Anyone exercising that duty should know that a failure to do so will result in loss or damage to another person. When a claim for negligence is made it is up to the plaintiff to prove (establish) on what is known as the "balance of probabilities" (that it was more likely than not) five points:

- The first is that there is a duty of care owed by the defendant (e.g. you as an educator or facilitator in a horticultural therapy program) to the plaintiff.
- This establishes a requirement to conform to a certain standard of conduct for the protection of others against unreasonable risks.
- The third point which the plaintiff must prove is that the defendant breached that duty of care, at the appropriate standard of conduct, (by failing to take reasonable steps to avoid risk, injury or damage occurring.
- The fourth point which the plaintiff needs to prove is that they have suffered material injury, loss or damage as a result of the breach of duty to take reasonable care.
- The fifth point is that the damage or harm sustained was not too far removed from the original breach of duty - that is, it was not too "remote" from the failure to take care.

In case of a claim against a local council (running a HT program), for example for personal injury, damage or loss associated with the land or structure occupied by a council, the court will consider such matters as:

- The type of premises in question.
- The type and extent of the danger which might arise from the state or condition of the premises.
- How the claimant became exposed to the danger?

- The age of the claimant and the liability of the claimant to appreciate the dangers of the premises.
- Whether and to what extent the occupier (in this case council) was aware of the danger and/or the presence of the claimant on the premises.
- What steps were taken to eliminate, reduce or warn of the danger?
- Whether (and to what extent) it was reasonable to expect the occupier to take measures to eliminate, reduce or warn against danger; and "any matter that the court thinks relevant".

SET TASK

Set Task 1

Explore places where horticulture is used for therapy in your region (or the nearest region to you).

- Search for hospitals, work centres (sheltered workshops) etc.
- Disability groups
- Retirement villages/older people peoples' homes
- Community centres and schools

Determine if any such places offer horticultural activities - what they are/how they take place.

Set Task 2

Using the internet and/or by contacting professional bodies e.g. Horticultural Therapy Associations (in your area) determine what type of professional indemnity and public liability insurance is available for and required by the Horticultural Therapist in a private practice.

