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Gardening and stress management

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Abstract

Plants and greenery are beneficial for both our mental and physical health. Health of an individual not only depends on the social and the economic factors but also on the environmental factors. The area of green care is necessary for our holistic wellbeing. This kind of care involves exposure to plants and gardening as a therapy. Several researches have revealed that mental as well as psychological health can improve either by observing nature or by even observing images of it. By improving the surrounding of the patients their conditions can be improved. As proposed by Florence Nightingale, therapeutic gardening not only improves the psychological wellbeing of the patients but also of the therapists and the staffs. Gardens around prisons have a long history of improving the lives of the prisoners and offering training towards employment in the horticulture industry. People with disabilities, have also listed gardening as their hobby. Keeping this back drop in mind the paper will try to find out the positive impact of gardening on stress management therefore helping the health professionals to encourage people to make use of green space and to work in gardens, to make the local authorities increase open spaces and number of trees, thus also helping to counteract air pollution and climate change.

Keywords: Gardening, stress management, wellbeing, mindfulness, cortisol

1. Introduction

Planting a beautiful garden can be a great way to relieve stress. Whether you have a small patio to decorate or a vast amount of space to tend, the act of making your particular stretch of nature into a haven can be a stress reliever in itself, and the garden that you create can bring you even more peace.

Just getting out in the sunlight can actually improve your mood. This is part of why seasonal affective disorder affects some people during winter months when there is less sunlight. Sunlight also provides an influx of vitamin D, and the fresh air that goes with it is good for your health. Getting outdoors to work with your garden is a great excuse to get more of this good stuff.

Being in touch with nature and the great outdoors can help you feel more removed from the stressors of daily life. With the amount of time we spend indoors (at work, watching t.v., etc), many people feel an urge to connect with nature that goes unfulfilled. While you may not have the time to go camping or take a nature hike each day, having your piece of nature right outside your back door can help you feel some of this connection.

Getting started might seem a little intimidating, but finding a few good books or magazines on gardening can give you lots of information and ideas to work with.

Once we have started, we should find that the act of creating a garden can bring us peace, and the garden itself can bring us joy.

In one study, subjects were asked to perform a stressful task and then asked to either perform 30 minutes of gardening in their allotment gardens or 30 minutes of reading. While both groups experienced a decrease in stress, the gardeners experienced a significantly greater decline in stress (as measured by salivary cortisol, a stress hormone), as well as a full restoration of positive mood; the readers actually experienced a further decline in mood. Therefore gardening clearly had a positive impact on stress as well as mood and isn't always thought of as the go-to stress relief activity that reading is, and perhaps it deserves a little more attention as a stress relief option. There are several benefits to gardening that can minimize stress. Here are a few reasons that gardening is a fantastic stress reliever. The beauty of nature is a great stress reliever in itself.

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Just think of how many times relaxation has been connected with pictures of stunning landscapes or recordings of nature's sounds. Having your own bit of beauty available as a place for meditation, contemplation, and relaxation can provide quite a bit of relief from stress. It's all part of making your home a haven from stress.

2. Benefits of gardening

Studies show that gardening can improve your physical and emotional well-being and has social benefits as well. Whether it's a few plants in the windowsill, containers on a deck, beds and borders in the yard or a vegetable plot, gardens big and small can reap big benefits for you and your family. Here's what gardens can do for you:

2.1 Gardening reduces stress and improves mental health

According to the Mayo Clinic, chronic stress is hard on your body and contributes to anxiety, depression and disease, such as heart disease and diabetes. That's why finding healthy ways to cope and take care of your mind and body are so important. Sow some seeds, do a little watering, cut a bouquet or pull weeds and you'll soon find that time has flown and cares that were pressing in on you earlier have receded into the distance. Working in the garden reduces cortisol levels (a chemical your body produces in response to stress) Just sitting in a garden helps, too. More and more hospitals are adding gardens to their facilities to help patients heal faster and prevent burn out for staff member.

2.2 Gardening boosts your immune system

Getting dirty would help us be healthier. It turns out that being exposed to friendly soil microbes on a regular basis boosts our immune system, cuts our risk of inflammatory disease and reduces stress.

2.3 Gardening is great exercise and prevents disease

Think of all the things it takes to create and maintain a garden-getting up and down, walking, stretching, moving heavy bags of mulch or soil – it can be quite a workout. Regular maintenance, such as weeding or raking, can burn as much as 300 calories in an hour. it's a whole-body workout. Physically active people are a lot less likely to develop diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer. One study found that gardening could lower the risk of dementia by 36%. And staying active in the garden has never been easier with lots of tools that make gardening easier on the body and more accessible.

2.4 Gardening helps your kids eat better

Kids that work side by side with their parents to grow vegetables are more likely to eat them. And that habit is maintained even as adults.

3. Stress

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline.

4. Stress Management

Stress management is a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's level of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of and for the motive of improving everyday functioning. Stress

produces numerous physical and mental symptoms which vary according to each individual's situational factors. These can include a decline in physical health as well as depression. The process of stress management is named as one of the keys to a happy and successful life in modern society. Life often delivers numerous demands that can be difficult to handle, but stress management provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being.

4.1 Stress prevention and resilience

Although many techniques have traditionally been developed to deal with the consequences of stress, considerable research has also been conducted on the prevention of stress, a subject closely related to psychological resilience-building. A number of self-help approaches to stress-prevention and resilience-building have been developed, drawing mainly on the theory and practice of cognitive - behavioural therapy.

5. Mental Focus and Mindfulness

The idea behind mindfulness is simplicity itself – simply *be*. Picture the scene; you're in your garden, the sun is shining gently upon your face, there's a gentle breeze blowing around you, you close your eyes and open them to be greeted by the beautiful sights of what you have created... sounds pretty appealing, right? It's a moment to simply exist, and concentrate on your breathing. Feel that tension in your shoulders slip away as though it was never there in the first place. Stop to smell the flowers, to coin a phrase.

Naturally, sitting still and doing nothing is not for everybody – we can still embrace mindfulness by being physically active in the garden. As we have mentioned, it's all about living for the moment, and you can do just that while planting, weeding, mowing the lawn. You'll probably never struggle to find something to do in the garden, and while you're concentrating on the task at hand all unwelcome, stressful thoughts will be banished from your mind. This is the reason why a well-tended and beloved garden can hugely benefit your mental health.

6. Psychology behind Gardening and Stress Management

Nature helps us better cope with life's challenges. One study showed that engaging with a garden distracts us from our worries and stops us from obsessing about our problems. Over 12 weeks, participants saw an improvement in the severity of their depression during and immediately after the gardening study, and three months later, they still reported significant improvements.

Cortisol is a hormone released by the body when we're experiencing stress. When the levels remain elevated in our bodies, it can increase our risk of depression, mental illness, impaired immune function, weight gain, heart disease and so much more. Incredibly, spending time in nature can help keep things under control.

Japanese researchers discovered that spending 30 minutes in the woods could not only lower cortisol levels, but could also improve heart rates and blood pressure. Similarly, another study showed that after 30 minutes of gardening, participants' cortisol levels dropped and their moods were boosted by the activity.

7. Basics of Gardening as a Stress Reliever

7.1 Keep it Simple

If you've never gardened before, you might feel overwhelmed by the prospect of starting a new hobby. The key is to start small and keep it simple. You don't have to tear up your

whole backyard and plant a farm — be realistic about the time and effort you're willing to put into it. The last thing you want is to be stressed out about your stress-relieving garden!

7.2 Unplug and Dig In

When you step out to your garden, leave the world behind. Thirty minutes from now, everything will be right where you left it. You'll devote more than enough hours to texting, emails and social media throughout the rest of your day. When it's time to weed, plant and till, allow yourself to slow down and disconnect.

Interestingly, studies have shown that multitasking decreases efficiency and that excessive mobile phone use can disrupt sleep and actually increase feelings of stress and depression.

7.3 Stress-Reducing Designs

There's nothing wrong with keeping things small, but this is an opportunity to get creative. Use your imagination when choosing plants and a color palette and let it be a reflection of what you love to see.

7.4 Live in the Moment

There's so much to see and do in a garden. Rather than dwelling on the challenges you're facing or the lengthy to-do list waiting for you, give yourself permission to live in the moment. Notice the birds chirping, the gentle breeze and aromatic scent of soil and vegetation.

Practice mindfulness, a stress-relieving technique, by becoming fully captivated with what's happening in your garden. Notice the ants scurrying to find shelter, note the colour of the blossoms and contemplate the texture of the earth on your fingers. Be fascinated by all the small things that are happening right before your eyes. It's life-changing.

7.5 Get Down and Dirty

Even if you've never had a green thumb, give it a try. Set aside 30 minutes, start small and get involved in gardening.

7.6 Relaxation

Spending time in the garden can be hugely relaxing. It is our duty to embrace our green thumb and enjoy some time in the garden, reaping all of the health benefits for our body and mind in the process.

8. Conclusion

Therefore, gardening can be done to improve many aspects of mental health, focus, and concentration. It improves mood. Gardening can make you feel more peaceful and content. Focusing your attention on the immediate tasks and details of gardening can reduce negative thoughts and feelings and can make you feel better in the moment. Just spending time around plants eases stress for many people. It boosts self-esteem. Self-esteem is how much you value and feel positively about yourself. Helping a plant grow is a big feat. When you see your work pay off with healthy plants, your sense of pride gets a boost. Gardening improves attention span. Gardening can change how well you pay full attention to a single activity. If you struggle with staying focused on tasks, conversations, or topics in your daily life, gardening can help you learn to concentrate on what's right in front of you without getting distracted. Studies show that outdoor activities can reduce similar symptoms of ADHD. It provides exercise. Things like weeding, digging, and raking are a good exercise. Regular exercise reduces anxiety, depression, and other mental issues, and can help prevent dementia. If you

don't like going to the gym, gardening can be an enjoyable way to still get these benefits. It also encourages social bonds. Gardening with others at a community garden or other group setting takes teamwork to achieve shared goals. Being part of a larger group can benefit your mental health by increasing your social connections and your support system. Therefore, we can say that gardening has numerous benefits on our mind and body. It can truly be considered to relieve stress and be considered as an essential tool of stress management.

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