

A Special Supplement to

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Home, Lawn & Garden

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Ready, set...plant

Ready for planting this long weekend? Christine Cole, manager of Tuitman's Garden Centres in Acton, has what you're looking for to make the start of this planting season spectacular—plants and accessories, ranging from shrubs, perennials and roses to garden ornaments, decor and much more. Tuitman's are open seven days a week, including this long holiday weekend.

Photo by Christina Marshall



Gardening is good for both the mind and the body

Have you ever wondered why you enjoy gardening so much? What is it about working with plants that satisfies the soul? Gardening has long been thought of as a therapeutic tool. Benjamin Rush, a pioneer in early mental health therapies, found that his patients responded positively to working in the garden. During the 18th century, a doctor in Scotland was actually thought to have cured insanity by letting his patients work on his farm. When it first opened about 100 years ago, Pontiac State Hospital in Pontiac, MI, had patients help with food production. After health officials realized the therapeutic values of such activities, the emphasis shifted to healing programs through horticulture.

Today the therapeutic value of gardening is just as valid. Experts believe there is tangible evidence that horticulture therapy can improve the physical and mental health of individuals of all ages. By routinely working with plants, an individual can attain intellectual, social, emotional and physical benefits.

There are many social benefits to horticultural therapy. Tending a plant is similar to raising a pet. They both

require regular food, water and attention to survive. This fosters a feeling of dependence in the individual, a feeling of responsibility for its care and survival. Many individuals thrive in an environment where they feel needed.

Under most circumstances, plants flourish readily; therefore, a certain degree of success is almost guaranteed. Individuals involved in plant therapy programs often experience increased pride for a project well done. Nurturing a plant from seed to fruit is an accomplishment creating satisfaction in one's own mind and even recognition from others. It generates interest and enthusiasm for the next project and promotes creativity.

The cycle of living plants also teaches acceptance of life and death as a reality for all living things, and as every gardener knows, sometimes working with plants can be an unpredictable and frustrating experience. When Mother Nature intervenes, or the desired materials or tools are not available at the desired time, an individual learns to cope with the situation and make due with what is available. Individuals can learn tolerance and develop ingenuity through these often frustrating

situations.

Physicians have said for years that gardening is good exercise—it tones muscles and strengthens the bones. A certain degree of lifting and bending is inevitable and muscles that aren't normally used are put to the test when planting or maintaining a garden. Doctors recommend frequent breaks and alternating tasks to avoid overtaxing the muscles.

With even a minimum quantity of tools and materials, a successful horticulture therapy program can be initiated. All that is physically necessary is a few planting accessories like pots and hand tools and a location to work either indoors or outdoors. By planning and planting a vegetable garden, individuals not only have the opportunity to make their own decisions about which vegetable to plant, but they will also reap the rewards of the harvest and enjoy sharing the fruits of their labour with others. Regardless of age or the special need of the individual, a horticulture therapy program, when properly designed and executed, can be of great value.

—By Doris A. Black, special

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