Therapeutic Gardening: A Whole Health Intervention for Veterans and Caregivers

Military, Veterans & Families: Let Us Help
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Acknowledgement and Disclosure Statements

• Dr. Miller is the Director, Therapeutic Gardening Program, established at the West Palm Beach Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System in 2005. She promotes the use of Therapeutic Gardening as a Whole Health modality to heal the body, mind, and spirit. She is the Director, Hospice and Palliative Care Program, established in 2006, and VA Chairperson of the South Florida Hospice-Veteran Partnership, established in 2007. Dr. Miller thanks the Geriatrics and Extended Care Service for supporting her innovative, caring approaches for Veterans and their caregivers.

• The views expressed in this presentation are those of the Dr. Miller and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.

• Dr. Miller has no conflicts of interest to disclose.
Objectives

Upon completion of this presentation the learner will:

1. Define Therapeutic Gardening as a Whole Health intervention
2. Discuss strategies to improve physical, mental and spiritual health using the modality of Therapeutic Gardening
3. Explore innovative ways to incorporate Therapeutic Gardening as a component of clinical practice
Therapeutic Gardening

- Therapeutic horticulture \textit{(therapeutic gardening)} is the participation in horticultural activities facilitated by a registered horticultural therapist or other professionals with training in the use of horticulture as a therapeutic modality to support program goals. Therapeutic gardening is the process through which participants enhance their well-being through active or passive involvement in plant and plant-related activities.
Before Whole Health…

• “To care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan”
• Working farms established at Salem and Bath Veterans Hospitals
• Greenhouse Programs
• Compensated Work Therapy
• Cultural Transformation of health care
Circle of Health
Whole Health

• Provides the resources to give Veterans, health care providers, and staff the freedom to create a culture in which this transformation can flourish.

• Veterans and health care providers work together to define the future of whole health.

• Starts with asking Veterans “What matters most to you”
Planting seeds...

- **Theme:** “If you build it they will come…”
- **Team Project:** Improve Veteran Centric Care: “Therapeutic Gardening Project Gold Award Winner”
- **Team:** APRN, NA, Recreation Therapist

- We asked Veterans what was important to them:
  - “I want to grow flowers and give them to my wife”
  - “I want to decorate my room and make it beautiful”
  - “I want to do activities beyond bingo”
Ideas Sprouted

• Veterans stated they wanted different recreational programs “to go beyond bingo”
• Gardening was proposed; it evoked positive memories of “Victory Gardens” and happier times of youth
• Project challenged the status quo and established the “Therapeutic Gardening Program” September 2005
Victory Gardens
We started small

• Small group activity
• Veterans, Families, and Staff participate together
• Time, talents, and plant materials donated
• Physically and mentally challenged Veterans enjoy one on one attention
• Families and Veterans say “growing plants together brings us joy”
• Rooms and windowsills decorated with green plants
• Veterans give plants as gifts to loved ones
Carl

WWII Veteran
Recently Widowed
Depressed

“Gardening helped me move past my grief after my wife died”
Tom: “I like to garden with you”
Paul
Korean War Veteran
Former Magazine Editor
“Better Homes and Gardens Magazine”

“I keep some plants and I give some away as gifts to my favorite nurses”
Gardening is good for health!

"Gardening is medicine that does not need a prescription ... and has no limit on dosage."
- Author Unknown
Harvest Celebrations

• Celebration to review annual accomplishments, plan future gardening activities

• Veterans said:
  • “I want to grow my own food and eat fresh fruits & vegetables”
  • “I want to dig outside and feel the dirt in my hands”
Benefits of Digging in the Dirt

**PLAY IN THE DIRT.**
Because life is too short to always have clean fingernails.

**Essential Functions of Soil Organisms**
- Maintenance of soil structure
- Regulation of soil hydrological processes
- Gas exchange and carbon sequestration
- Soil detoxification
- Decomposition of organic matter
- Suppression of pests, parasites, and disease
- Source of food and medicine
- Symbiotic and asymbiotic relationships with plants and their roots
- Plant growth control (positive & negative)
Family involvement

- Families built raised beds and swapped seeds and plants
- Feedback helps us grow
- Veterans still wanted more...
- We asked for help
4 empty spaces waiting...
First Garden: Lakeside

• National Cultural Transformation VA Initiatives supported CLC change to homelike

• Dr. Miller presented needs to UF/IFAS Master Gardener Program @ Mounts Botanical Garden

• Veterans, Families, Friends, Master Gardeners, Volunteers, Staff, and community gardeners provided a groundswell of support
Many hands make light work….

- Engagement of VA Leadership, Veterans, Families, and stakeholders
- Zero Budget
- Stakeholders donated design, materials, plants, supplies
- Volunteers donated labor, time, expertise
- Veterans designed gardens and pathways
- Team effort resulted in building w/c accessible pathways, planting Florida Native butterfly garden host plants, installing garden shed, building additional w/c accessible raised beds for growing tomatoes and herbs
Therapeutic Gardening Branches Out

• Therapeutic Gardening: a Whole Health intervention
• VA Fresh
• Healthy Teaching Kitchen
• Women’s Health
• Move Program
• Vegetable Farm
Cultural Transformation Events

Veterans Seed, Seedling, & Plant Xchange
In Honor of Black History Month
Tuesday, February 25th, 2014
CLC Solarium
10:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

Please remember to bring your seeds and seedlings!

For more information contact:
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Veterans and Families share joy!
Farm Work Begins
Abundant Harvests
Shared harvests help Veterans!

- Cabbage, Carrots
- Lemon grass
- Kale, Lettuce, Collards
- Bananas, Pineapples
- Coconuts
- Herbs
- Improved physical and mental health
We keep growing...

• Garden Sponsors
• Equipment Sponsors (trowels, shovels, rakes, hoses)
• Soil Sponsors
• Plant Sponsors
• Educational Event Sponsors
Garden Sponsor: Boy Scouts

- Tommy Skelly’s Grandfather and namesake Maj. T.M. Skelly, US Army Air Corp, shot down and killed in 1945 during WWII combat
- Eagle Scout Project: In honor of his Grandfather, Tommy raised funds and installed Raised Bed Pineapple Patch, Irrigation System & memorial bench engraved with his Grandfather’s name
Memorial Bench
Pineapple Festival

Veteran, Family, Staff Engagement
Plant Sponsor: Orchids
Creative Arts Competition
Therapeutic Sensory Garden
Supported by:

VISN 8 Innovative Grant Center for Excellence
American-Farms
Century Village of West Palm Beach
Florida Atlantic University-
Pine Jog Environmental Education Center
Garden Designed by Wantman Group
The Breakers Palm Beach, Inc.
West Palm Beach VA Medical Center
Friends of the VA Gardens

Dedicated September 2015
Thank You Sponsors

• Garden Clubs
• Palm Beach State College Horticulture Program
• Boy Scouts

• Professional Growers: Orchid Farmer
• Master Gardeners
• Florida Native Plant Society
As I work on the garden, the garden works on me.

- Gayla Trail
Just Being in the Garden
Gardens Evoke Spiritual Reflection

What is the difference between
I like you &
I love you

Beautifully answered by Buddha:
When you like a flower, you just pluck it. But when you love a flower, you water it daily..!
One who understand this, understands life...
Garden Visitations

IF SPEAKING KINDLY TO PLANTS HELPS THEM GROW IMAGINE WHAT SPEAKING KINDLY TO HUMANS CAN DO.
Spending Time Together
Enjoying Garden Visits
Active Garden Activities

• Water, Weed, Prune, Mulch
• Plant Seeds and Propagate
• Inspect (for bugs or diseases)
• Identify Garden Flowers
• Sensory Stroll
• Play
Plant Identification
Sensory and Cognitive Stimulation
Gardening for Mental Health
Passive Garden Activities
Think outside the flowerbox!

- Incorporate Therapeutic Gardening into clinical practice
- Adjust and adapt for COVID-19

- Restorative Programs: take a walk in the garden
- Mental Health: Group sessions/cognitive stimulation
- Mindfulness: solo/group practice in the garden
Garden Alternatives

- Restorative Ambulation
- Insomnia
- Clinical Assessments and Treatments
- COVID-19 Lockdown: no visitors
- Take a Sensory Stroll
- “Sunbathing”
- Clinical assessments and treatments performed outside in the gardens
- Family visits outside in the garden
Sensory Stroll

- **Sensory Stroll Invitations**
- When you’re outside slooowly strolling, take your time to savour the following experiences. Start with one activity and fully enjoy it. Then pick another one. Take time to be, to feel, to breath and enjoy.
- If you’re with a friend, you might take turns reading one invitation at a time to each other.
- **Let your eyes wander.** What do you want to look at more closely? The ordinary can become extraordinary when seen with fresh eyes.
- **What is your hand drawn to?** To touch a flower or leaf? Rough bark? Smooth stone? Let your hands explore. (Most plants are safe to touch but be careful to avoid stinging nettle, poison ivy, and thorns.)
- **Do you feel a breeze on your skin?** Warmth of the sun?
- **Smell the air. Smell a nearby flower or leaf.** Do the smells remind you of anything? What else might be fun to smell?
- **Close your eyes. What sounds do you hear?** Are birds singing? What direction is the sound coming from? Cup your hands behind your ears and turn towards the sound to hear even better.
- **When you’re ready, open your eyes just a little,** as if for the first time. Start by looking down to the ground in front of you and gradually take in more of your surroundings.
- **Focus on one of these at a time:** movement, colour, light and shadow, shapes, patterns of nature.
- **Slowly look up... way up to tree tops and sky.** Make yourself comfortable and watch clouds drift by. Or enjoy branches and leaves as they dance in the breeze. Any birds flitting or flying by?
- **Look down to the ground at your feet.** What treasures wait to be seen? Pick up a cone or stone and hold it for awhile. Does it have a story to tell?
- **Feel yourself as part of** the living ecosystem. You belong here.
Garden Visits
Personal Growth

Like wildflowers
You must allow yourself
to grow
in all the places
people thought
you never would.
Harvests are abundant

- Freedom North Lakeside Garden
- Freedom North Eastside Garden Thomas E. Skelly Pineapple Patch
- Liberty South Therapeutic Sensory Garden
- Valor Way Hospice Garden
- Vegetable Farm
- Friends of the VA Gardens
- Improved Veteran, Staff, and Family Health
References

• The Florida Horticulture for Health Network [www.flhhn.com] Offers a wide range of resources demonstrating the important link between horticulture and health; we believe that horticulture and nature interventions can increase quality of life for all people regardless of age, ability, or background.

• Shelagh Smith, HTR, MAEEC “Sensory Stroll Handout” www.ThriveWithNature.com

• “The Green Road” by Nature Sacred: click on link https://vimeo.com/257400358


• LandscapeforLife.org Landscape For Life™ is a collaboration between the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the United States Botanic Garden based on the principles of the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES®).