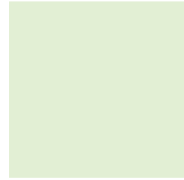
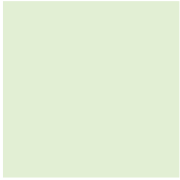


Harnessing the mood-boosting power of gardening

How can gardening improve my emotional wellbeing?





“I leave the garden
bursting with endorphins
and feeling on top of the world.”

Derek

Ever thought that gardening could change the way you feel? Ask any gardener why they enjoy gardening and time and time again they will say that it “makes them feel good”. Could you find the feel-good factor with gardening too?

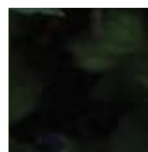
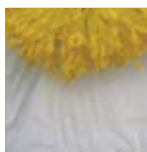
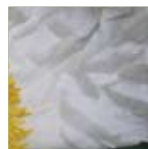
This booklet provides information for anyone interested in harnessing the benefits of gardening for emotional wellbeing. Read on to find out how gardening could help you on the path to better emotional and physical health.

Why gardening?

Our research shows that gardening can help people through a specific period of difficulty in their lives. Gardening can help you get back on top of things and restore balance when it feels like your life is veering out of control. Gardening can help you to feel happier, more confident and healthier.

Gardening can help because:

- it can be **great physical exercise** – which in turn helps to boost your mood – even though it can make you ache!
- you can **work at your own pace** and in ‘small steps’ – doing as much or as little as you like
- you can **learn new skills** – which might be useful in other areas of your life, such as volunteering or employment
- it can provide a great **opportunity to meet people** if you want it to – for example by joining a horticultural society, gardening club or allotment group
- it can offer an opportunity for **self-expression and a chance to explore your creativity**
- **nurturing** growing things can literally give you a reason to get out of bed in the morning – and the **satisfaction of knowing that you have made it happen**
- if you are finding everyday life hard to cope with, gardening outside could even help you to take **a first step out of the house.**



Could gardening really work for me?

“...the vicious circle of anxiety and negative thoughts disappears when I’ve been in the garden...”

Frances



At Thrive, we know that ‘gardening is good for you’ but we go further than that. We undertake research into the real and measurable benefits of gardening. Recent research published by Thrive showed that nearly one in three disabled people (31%) believe that gardening has ongoing health benefits, while almost one in five (19%) report that it has helped them through a period of mental or physical ill-health.ⁱ

Physical activity has been shown to be helpful in the treatment of anxiety, depressionⁱⁱ and dementiaⁱⁱⁱ. Also, the mental-health charity Mind recently studied the views of people who regularly take part in ‘green’ activities:

- 90 percent said it was the combination of nature and exercise that had the greatest effect on them
- 94 percent said that green activities had benefited their mental health, lifting depression.^{iv}

Getting started

If you are feeling down or depressed, finding the **motivation** to start something new can be difficult. Gardening with someone else – maybe at a set time and place – might help. You could also try and set yourself small goals. For example, if tackling an already overgrown garden is too much, could you start in just one area of the garden?



Here are a few ideas – which you don't even need a garden for – to help get you started:

- **Houseplants** are a cheap and easy way to experiment with growing things. Try local plant sales and car boot sales or ask a friend or neighbour for a cutting.
- Most health food shops and garden centres now sell seeds and beans for sprouting – try growing your own **beansprouts**, which will be ready for eating in as little as a week.
- **A chilli plant** will thrive on a sunny windowsill – look out for 'plug' plants in garden centres or seedlings at plant sales in the springtime.

Of course you won't get the exercise of more strenuous gardening but you'll still benefit from the pleasure of seeing something that you have nurtured grow – and you can garden inside if the weather is bad or you just don't feel up to venturing out.

Could volunteering be for me?

“...being in the garden gave me a sense of calm that I hadn't felt before. Working in the garden helped me to open up and talk about my feelings, difficulties, and hopes of getting better...”

Catherine



Volunteering at a garden project or in conservation is a great way to get involved in your local community and enjoy working outdoors. It can also be a way of meeting people and making new friends whilst having fun and getting some exercise.

You don't necessarily need specialist skills – but you might learn some! – and you may not need to make a long-term or regular commitment. Some volunteering projects offer the flexibility to just pop along for a couple of hours.

Contact Thrive to find out about gardening volunteering opportunities in your area. What have you got to lose?

Want to find out more?

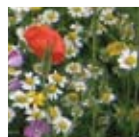
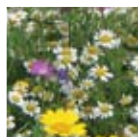
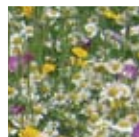
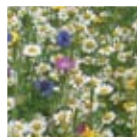
Thrive is a national charity which promotes the benefits of gardening. We have 30 years' experience of using gardening to make a real difference to people's lives. We offer information and advice to anyone who wants to harness the benefits of gardening and support health and education professionals who use gardening in their work.

Call **0118 988 5688**,
email **info@thrive.org.uk**,
see **www.thrive.org.uk** or visit
our easier-gardening website at
www.carryongardening.org.uk

Always consult your GP before making significant changes to your lifestyle, such as commencing a new exercise regime.

“I used to get bad mood swings but going into the garden and having a purpose in life has helped to reduce those.”

Gavin



Thrive is grateful for the assistance of Mind in the preparation of this booklet.

References

- i Research commissioned by Thrive from Mintel Custom Solutions, 2006.
- ii See *Up and Running? Exercise therapy and the treatment of mild or moderate depression in primary care*, Mental Health Foundation, 2005, and Burbach, F. R., 'The efficacy of physical activity interventions within mental health services: anxiety and depressive disorders', *Journal of Mental Health*, 1997, volume 6, number 6, pp. 243–67.
- iii See Leon A Simons, Judith Simons, John McCallum and Yechiel Friedlander, 'Lifestyle factors and risk of Dementia: Duddo study of the elderly' in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 2006, 184 (2), pp. 68–70, and Lindenmuth, G. F. and Mose, B. 'Improving cognitive abilities of elderly Alzheimer's patients with intensive exercise therapy' *The American Journal of Alzheimer's Care and Related Disorders and Research*, 1990, volume 5, number 1, pp. 31–33.
- iv Mind (2007), *Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health*. A study undertaken by the University of Essex involved 108 service users, who have a variety of mental health problems, completing questionnaires about their experience of ecotherapy.



using gardening to change lives

Registered address:

Thrive, The Geoffrey Udall Centre, Beech Hill, Reading RG7 2AT

T: **0118 988 5688**

E: **info@thrive.org.uk**

W: **www.thrive.org.uk** or **www.carryongardening.org.uk**

Please contact us to request a copy of this leaflet in an alternative format.

Thrive is registered in the UK as the Society for Horticultural Therapy. Thrive is a registered charity (number 277570) and a limited company (number 1415700).

© Thrive 2008. Printed on paper made using 50% recycled pulp and 50% FSC-accredited virgin fibre.