

Gardening and Mental Health

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Managing Your Mental Health with a Regular Dose of Gardening

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April is a great time to be thinking about gardening. As days become longer and the sun warms the soil, one is drawn to the outdoors to consider, "what can I grow?"

Whether it's planning your yard or container garden, sowing seeds, or even weeding, spending time outside on gardening tasks benefits mental health.

Researchers reviewed 22 case studies on the health and well-being benefits of gardening. They found a number of benefits that either reduced mental health challenges or increased mental health and wellbeing. Gardening may reduce depression and anxiety symptoms, stress, mood disturbance, and even body mass index (BMI). Other benefits include increased quality of life, sense of community, physical activity levels, and cognitive function.

It is easy to imagine that it takes a long time to experience the fruits of gardening labor, however some benefits occur as soon as after one day's work or even after repeat short-term activity in the garden. Some studies surveyed participants before a gardening event and right after. Benefits that were reported included a reduction in depression and anxiety symptoms. It is unknown how long this lasted, however other studies found that repeated short-term activity in a garden has increasing effects on

health over time. Daily gardening may reduce stress and BMI, increases general health, as well as life satisfaction.

Long-term gardening was found to improve depression severity, life satisfaction, and cognitive functioning that continued and were present at a three-month follow-up.

How are these benefits possible?

- Nature and the outdoors - spending time outside and in nature has been found to have health benefits
- The physical nature of gardening indirectly provides both physical and psychological health benefits
- Between online gardening groups and community gardens, gardening provides opportunities to socialize and interact with others
- The food produced in gardens provides healthy eating options

Ideas for continuing or taking up gardening

- Start a home or container garden
- Learn about the different local growing seasons
 - You'd be surprised how the garden season can be extended by what you choose to grow and when
- Research community gardens in your area
- Make it a family and/or community affair
- Even a day's worth of gardening is beneficial, volunteer to help a neighbor or at a community/food pantry garden

A great resource for all things gardening is gardening.usu.edu. Happy gardening.

References

Soga, M., Gaston, K.J., Yamaura, Y. (2016). Gardening is beneficial for health: A

meta-analysis. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 5, 92-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.007>