

LEE LIMING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Horticultural Therapy

Arts and Culture for the Elderly¹

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Horticultural therapy involves visiting green spaces and joining guided group gardening activities. The guided aspect distinguishes it from gardening as a hobby. Therapy guides must be knowledgeable about plants and gardening in order to lead the structured sessions towards specific goals. For example, a goal to improve motor skills might involve simple gardening activities such as watering, weeding, trimming and potting.

In Singapore, several studies on horticultural therapy and its effects on the elderly are underway. Findings so far have indicated that senior participants experience improved psychological wellbeing, report higher life satisfaction and feel more socially connected.

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

Therapeutic Garden @ HortPark – Singapore

Launched in May 2016 by the National Parks Board (NParks) of Singapore, the Therapeutic Garden @ HortPark is the first of its kind located in a public park. It was designed in consultation with medical professionals and was based on research in environmental psychology. There are plans to develop a network of therapeutic gardens across the island through collaborations with other public agencies such as the Housing Development Board. Two potential locations for the gardens are Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park and Tiong Bahru Park.

The Garden comprises a Restorative Zone and an Activities Zone. Both zones serve to improve the mental wellbeing of all visitors, including those with dementia or who have suffered a stroke. NParks is working with the Alzheimer's Disease Association to develop and offer customised therapeutic programmes at the Garden. Other facilities provided in Hort Park are exercise equipment tailored for use by seniors.

Box 1 contains the design principles employed in the garden to make it elderly- and dementia-friendly.

Box 1: Age-Friendly Therapeutic Garden Design Principles

Restorative Zone

To provide respite and a rehabilitative environment, this zone has:

- Easily recognisable landmarks
- Seats facing different directions for a variety of views
- Plants featuring a wide range of colours, textures and scents to stimulate the senses

Therapeutic Zone

To provide a space for therapeutic activities, this zone offers:

- A specially designed gardening area with moveable raised beds
- Customised benches for potting
- Easy access to water

Source: *Design Guidelines of Therapeutic Garden @ HortPark*,

<https://www.nparks.gov.sg/news/2016/5/launch-of-therapeutic-garden-at-hortpark>, Accessed 8 December 2016.

Community in Bloom – Singapore

The 10 year old Community in Bloom programme has more than 700 gardens across the island, providing young and old amateur gardeners with pockets of green space near their homes, offices and schools.

Residents can start a community garden by approaching NParks to decide on the garden type, size and design. From this initial stage of conception, it takes a few months to complete construction. The gardening group usually funds the project themselves, though some receive financial support from town councils. Members share the harvests of fruits and vegetables. Some groups sell the produce at farmers' markets, channelling profits back to the garden.

Outside the Ang Mo Kio branch of the kindergarten, My First Skool, older residents maintain a small garden plot growing edible and flowering plants. Intergenerational exchange occurs when the school uses the space as an outdoor learning and play area for the children. Younger students aged 18 months to 3 years help to water the plants, while the older children create signs with plant names on them.

Box 2 provides details on two winning gardens at the biennial Community In Bloom Awards.

Box 2: Award-winning Community In Bloom Gardens

Community Garden @ Chinese Garden (2CG)

Located inside the Chinese Garden public attraction in Jurong, the community garden

is one of the largest of its kind in Singapore. Members usually garden in the morning or late evening, with some coming from as far as Bukit Panjang and Choa Chu Kang.

- Size: 107,639 sq ft (10,000m²)
- Initiated by: People's Association and the Active Ageing Committees, supported by JTC Corporation, which owns the land
- Members: 95% of its 150 members are in their 50s; the oldest member is 85
- Garden composition: vegetable, herb and ornamental varieties such as bonsai, a small padi field with short-grain Indian rice

Woodlands Zone 2 RC

This 10 year old garden comprises a lockable greenhouse and an open herb garden. Volunteers practise composting and make their own pesticides from garlic, chilli, and soap, which are used sparingly on the plants. Teachers and students from nearby schools visit regularly for hands-on gardening sessions.

- Size: 10,656 sq ft (990m²) divided into 8 plots, each led by a group leader managing 2-3 volunteers
- Members: 20 residents living in the neighbouring blocks; 8 are senior citizens, while the rest are in their 40s.
- Garden composition: vegetables (lettuce, kangkong, eggplant, curry and

pandan)

Source: *Green plots for young and old among Community In Bloom award winners*, <http://www.straittimes.com/lifestyle/home-design/green-plots-for-young-and-old-among-community-in-bloom-award-winners>, Accessed 12 December 2016.

Tabor Village Therapeutic Garden – Abbotsford, BC, Canada

Tabor Village is a care home that offers gardening as a therapeutic activity. Village staff lead seniors in gardening activities as part of their rehabilitative and restorative treatments, with specific goals such as physical, social and mental stimulation. Seniors are imbued with a sense of accomplishment, empowerment and purpose when they nurture the plants and see them grow. This represents a reversal of their normative role in the facility, which is one of dependence on others for care.

Participants garden on custom-made raised planter beds that can accommodate gardeners in wheelchairs. They use specialised hand-held watering wands and other tools which make gardening more accessible for seniors. Miniature shrubs and perennial flowers are planted in planter beds, herbs in the chef's garden, and tomato plants are grown, and trained to climb vertically, outside seniors' bedroom windows overlooking the garden

courtyard. A shaded patio with lounge furniture provides seniors with a place to rest and enjoy the garden after they finish gardening in the morning.

Ebenezer Horticultural Therapy – Minneapolis, MN, USA

The horticultural therapy programme is part of Ebenezer's Life Long Learning Initiative, which includes creative arts and continuing education programmes. These programmes are available to all seniors receiving care from the Ebenezer Foundation, a system which comprises nursing care homes, assisted living, memory care, senior housing and day therapy.

The horticultural programme teaches seniors how to garden through hands-on activities that are led by a horticultural therapist and held weekly or bi-weekly. Participants also go on nature outings once a month. The programme is supported by donations.

Box 3 shows a sample of the gardening activities in which seniors engage.

Box 3: Ebenezer Horticultural Therapy Programme Activities

- Creating seasonal fresh-cut floral arrangements
- Transplanting, growing and tending houseplants

- Learning about, and planting seeds to grow, the plants that are used in the therapeutic gardens
- Planting and tending the handicapped-accessible gardens on campus
- Cooking with produce and herbs from the gardens
- Reading about nature and outdoors-related topics
- Learning how to attract birds and butterflies to the gardens
- Going on garden- and nature-related outings to sites in the metro area and beyond

Source: Ebenezer Horticultural Therapy, <http://www.ebenezercare.org/horticultural-therapy.html>, Accessed 12 December 2016.

Horticulture for Seniors – Essex County, NJ, USA

Horticulture for Seniors is a programme that was started in 2002 by a group of Master Gardener volunteers who wished to share the benefits of horticultural activities with the community of seniors in Essex County. These seniors range from individuals living in the community – who are members of senior citizen associations – to assisted living residents.

The volunteers present 10 monthly programmes a year, each attended by about 20 to 30 participants. During the gardening

sessions, which have been adapted for older adults, participants are guided through basic horticultural techniques such as growing plants from seeds, making transplants of cuttings, flower arranging, recycling and composting.

Box 4 features the programme's goals.

Box 4: Horticulture for Seniors Programme Goals

- Encourage independence with step-by-step instruction
- Provide assistance when necessary
- Emphasise social interaction, sensory stimulation, manual dexterity, self-esteem, and enhanced quality of life
- Have seniors bring their completed projects home, along with informational handouts from the session

Source: Horticulture for Seniors, <https://mgsex.org/programs-for-residents/horticulture/>, Accessed 9 December 2016.

Sources:

NParks launches Singapore's first therapeutic garden in a public park to provide respite and improve mental well-being, <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/news/2016/5/launch-of-therapeutic-garden-at-hortpark>, Accessed 8 December 2016; *Healing power of communal gardening*, http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/healing-power-of-communal-gardening-gardening?&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social-media&utm_campaign=addtoany, Accessed 8 December; *Green plots for young and old among Community In Bloom award winners*,

<http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/home-design/green-plots-for-young-and-old-among-community-in-bloom-award-winners>, Accessed 12 December 2016; *Opinion: Therapeutic garden gives seniors a purpose*, <http://www.vancouversun.com/life/Opinion+Therapeutic+garden+gives+seniors+purpose/10038963/story.html>, Accessed 9 December 2016; *Ebenezer Horticultural Therapy*, <http://www.ebenzercares.org/horticultural-therapy.html>, Accessed 12 December 2016; *"Ebenezer's Horticultural Therapy" Program*, <http://www.programsforelderly.com/nursing-ebenezer-horticulture.php>, Accessed 12 December 2016; *Horticulture for Seniors*, <https://mgessex.org/programs-for-residents/horticulture/>, Accessed 9 December 2016.