

How Can A Horticultural Therapy Program Within VA's Treat US Veterans in Cincinnati With Symptoms of PTSD?

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Horticulture therapy refers to the practice of using gardening and plants for therapeutic benefits.

The use of gardening as means for both mental and physical wellbeing has been a prominent practice for centuries, but the actual practice used in a medical context is still a relatively new field.

U.S veterans today deal with challenges regarding their mental health.

This study researches how U.S Veterans can use Horticulture therapy as a form of complementary therapy to find ways to live with mental health ailments such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.



Horticulture Therapy

Horticulture therapy is a form of treatment that uses plants and gardening activities to improve a person's health and wellbeing, this includes a licensed horticulture therapists, and a plan with a set of goals for the therapist and



PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Top Health Issues Among Military Veterans



one in 3

troops returning home from deployment experience serious posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms



...Less than 40% seek help

Source: PTSD Foundation of America. The statistics. PTSD Foundation of America website. <http://dateline.us.org/what-is-ptsd/the-statistics>. Accessed June 22, 2016.

Why don't more veterans seek treatment?



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a mental health condition that can be developed after a person experiences a life-threatening or traumatic event.

Trauma such as natural disasters, accidents, military service, sexual assault, and more can cause the development of PTSD in a person

PTSD can have symptoms such as depression, anxiety, irritability, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance, insomnia, and more

PTSD is a diagnosis that 7% of veterans receive at some point in their lives

Operation Iraqi Freedom had 29 out of 100 veterans who were diagnosed with PTSD at some point of their life

Desert Storm had 21 out of 100 Veterans diagnosed with PTSD, and Vietnam had 10 out of 100 veterans with PTSD

"Therapeutic Horticulture as a Healing Tool for Veterans" (2020)

Cherie Eichholz

This paper is a dissertation about the history of PTSD, it's treatments, and a study on how therapeutic horticulture works in VA's!

PTSD wasn't officially mental health ailment until 1980. It had a lot of variants connected to soldiers who experienced combat- and was specifically noted to have effected Vietnam Veterans greatly



Holding Environment Theory- This theory is the theory that we need a "holding environment" that help us understand the self, and how we view our relationship with the world- I.E, a child and their mother

Eichholz proposed that therapeutic horticulture can be a "holding environment" for veterans to find themselves again

Eichholz surveyed 26 VA centers that had therapeutic horticulture programs- both active and non-active!

Response was found the veterans and staff both greatly enjoyed therapeutic horticulture and the activities and found improvement in their daily lives both physically, psychologically, and even socially!



VEGGIE

Pilot Horticulture Therapy Group

Derrick R Stowell, Gina P. Owens, and Amelia Burnett.

VEGGIE, Veterans Experiencing Growth through Garden Interactive Experiences, is a pilot horticultural therapy group that ran with the goals of understanding and learning how horticulture therapy can help veterans (review)



VEGGIE was 8 weeks long, and had 8 total participants, the classes were held two times a week, and had a different horticulture topic each week

The classes held different horticulture themes! They opened the class, had instruction, and about 40 minutes was used for horticulture activities.

Transplanting, fresh air, and seeding were noted as favorite activities! Weeding, was the least favorite

Table 1. Session content by week for pilot program.

Session 1	Garden Tour, Goal Setting, Seed Starting
Session 2	Tilling, Weeding, Preparing the Garden for Planting
Session 3	Garden Planning, Garden Design
Session 4	Compost and Fertilizer, Transplanting Seedlings
Session 5	Watering, Terrariums and Indoor Plants
Session 6	Garden Care, Herbs
Session 7	Propagation
Session 8	Pest and Diseases
Session 9	Transplanting, Tending the Garden
Session 10	Resources, Next Steps



VEGGIE participants reported enjoying the classes, wishing for longer sessions, and wanted to attend future horticulture therapy classes/groups!!



Horticulture groups that support veterans!

Organic Whole Health Group

"Connecting with plants and back into nature's arms helps us with headaches, stress, depression, loss, anxiety, and loneliness," Steciow continued. "Let your garden be your safe place. A garden helps strike a balance with nature, whether recovering from war or modern living." -Pete Steciow, *New VA Organic Garden offers healing, learning through gardening*



Operation Eco Vets

"This farm is a place where veterans who have undergone trauma can come and learn to nurture plants and create life—the antithesis of death, destruction and what they witness on the front lines," -Camile Van Sant, *Sarasota Farm Helps Veterans Heal From Trauma and Find Work*



Chicago Botanic Center

"I saw this summer how powerful gardens can be in helping people to heal and maintain wellness. Our program was effective because it created a sense of belonging and comradery, and fostered a feeling of continuing to serve, which is an important value to many vets. - Alicia Green, *Veterans Grow At Chicago Botanic Gardens*

Green Space Design For VA Hospitals

Horticulture therapy can help veterans with symptoms of PTSD such as depression, anxiety, irritability, sleepiness, and more by creating a safe space where nature can be a complementary treatment option for veterans. This takes the holding environment theory and connects horticulture therapy and veterans together.



A large and small scale sketch of what a VA green space could look like!

A green space in a VA could be used for recreation, therapy, and horticulture classrooms. They could vary in scale, environments, plants, style, and more- but safety, healing, and acceptance are a huge part!

It can contain green walls, planters, supplies for gardening,



Wheelchair Accessible Planter – Design and Build

This planter is a raised bed to allow those who use wheelchairs to garden comfortably!



The planter has a 1 foot depth, so you could plant anything that only needs less than that planting space

Same plants you can grow in this planter!



Strawberries
Fragaria × ananassa



Marigolds
Tagetes



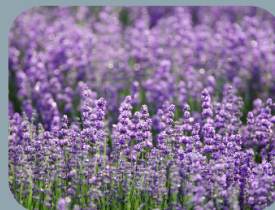
Lettuce
Lactuca sativa



African Violets
Saintpaulia ionantha



Peppers
Capsicum



Lavender
Lavandula

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Plant images from Canva.com

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