



Horticulture/Community Gardening - Expressive Arts Programs

Intended Audience

For all members including people living with cancer, family members and significant caregivers.

Program Description

Based on the philosophy that connecting with nature is vital to human health and well-being, this seasonal program encourages members and volunteers to take part in the work of planting the garden, the satisfaction of the harvest and the fun of working as a community. Facilitators provide basic gardening information and guidance and immeasurable delight in the beauty and growth of the garden.

Garden Coordinator – Sue Murphy. Charged with overseeing the planning, planting and maintenance of the Wellspring Calgary Community Garden, Sue engages local experts and invites members to join in the process of gardening – peaceful and deeply nourishing work. While nurturing the plants, people also feel transformed, within and without. May – August

Horticultural Therapist – Mary-Anne Robeson, BA MIR, HTR. Mary-Anne uses nature, gardening, indoor and outdoor horticulture and natural environments to promote a calming effect, meaningful activity, and a healthy balance between mind, body and spirit. She offers a variety of workshops year-round and organizes nature/garden tours, focusing throughout on the whole person and a renewed love of life.

Other related workshops include outdoor building projects such as garden mosaics and willow projects with local artists such as Michaelena Bamford and Tim Shaw.

Benefits and Impact

The restorative benefits of interacting with nature are increasingly considered essential to human health and well-being. Activities in nature support the whole person - impacting health on physical, psychological, social and spiritual levels. Numerous positive effects are well documented, from the peace and serenity that comes from connecting with the earth, to the rejuvenating effect of harvesting seeds and nurturing new life. For some, the greatest impacts of this program are education, kinship and creation. For others, hope is the greatest gift, ever-present as seeds sprout and greenery unfurls.

What to Expect at a Session

This program offers many hands-on connections to nature including indoor gardening, outdoor garden design, herb planting, harvesting and tasting. Informative workshops offer practical how-to tips on terrariums and making seasonal wreaths. Participants can expect to roll up their sleeves and dig in the dirt, retrieving immeasurable gifts of energy, purpose, balance and renewal!

Participant Comments

"This program helps deepen community and working with plants is very therapeutic and good for mental health."

"(Gardening) provides skills you can carry into your everyday life and enriches your tool kit for coping with cancer."

"I enjoyed the learning, digging in the dirt and cultivating friendships."

What the Research Says:

Findings from a longitudinal study on women with stress-related ill health reveal there is some rehabilitative affect related to experiences in a therapeutic garden. "A secure environment facilitated engagement in activities that provided feelings of enjoyment. These experiences inspired participants to add enjoyable activities in their everyday lives, contributing to occupational balance, despite worries of not be able to continue performing enjoyable activities." (Eriksson T, Westerberg Y, Jonsson H. 2011 Dec; 78(5): 273-81.)

Stress-relieving effects of gardening were hypothesized and tested in a field experiment. Thirty allotment gardeners performed a stressful Stroop task and were then randomly assigned to 30 minutes of outdoor gardening or indoor reading on their own allotment plot. Salivary cortisol levels and self-reported mood were repeatedly measured. Gardening and reading each led to decreases in cortisol during the recovery period, but decreases were significantly stronger in the gardening group. Positive mood was fully restored after gardening, but further deteriorated during reading. These findings provide the first experimental evidence that gardening can promote relief from acute stress (J Health Psychol. 2011 Jan;16(1):3-11. doi: 10.1177/1359105310365577. Epub 2010 Jun 3).

Program Frequency:

Weekly garden sessions with an expert through spring and summer
Seasonal nature horticultural workshops
2 hours per week
2-4 weeks per program
1 program per session
Winter, spring/summer, fall

Member Hours 2012: 106

Members per week (optimum): 8

Volunteer Hours: 200

Related Programs:

Community Garden: hands-on participation
Community Garden: speakers
Horticultural workshops:
Butterflies, Terrariums,
Worm Composting, Wreath-Making