

'Growing Impact' Campaign: Advancing Youth Wellness Through Horticulture



Youth Campaign Guide 2026

American Horticultural Therapy Association

partnerships@ahta.org

Our 'Growing Impact' Mission

To cultivate a healthier, more mindful future for our youth, by demonstrating the powerful role of horticulture and plant-rich spaces as therapeutic pathways for fostering:

- Connection
- Emotional well-being
- Stress reduction
- Improved physical health
- Enhanced focus and learning
- Social support and sense of belonging



The timeless bond between people and plants - encoded in human DNA - continues to deeply support holistic well-being, driving transformative growth and healthy development for individuals and communities.

State of the Union: Youth

Youth health in the United States and around the world has become an increasing concern, with alarming trends in mental health, physical well-being, cognitive focus, and disconnection. While these issues were already on the rise prior to COVID-19, the pandemic significantly amplified them, creating an even more urgent need for action.

The modern world - shaped by constant digital engagement, fast-paced routines, indoor-centric leisure and work, and climate unpredictability - has led to a dramatic rise in anxiety, depression, physical health challenges, social isolation, and difficulty maintaining focus. These concerning trends are escalating at a faster rate in younger populations than in any other age group across the lifespan.

With youth facing challenges from multiple directions, significant gaps are appearing in key developmental milestones critical for preparing youth to navigate their futures with strong skill sets, joy, and resilience.

Prioritizing holistic health in youth is crucial at this time to support their growth into empowered individuals prepared to thrive in an ever-changing world.

How AHTA Professionals Bring Together People, Horticulture, and Wellness

With over 50 years of experience, the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) embraces evidence-based practice and establishes the highest standards for professional work.

Our professional members – in both horticultural therapy (HT) and therapeutic horticulture (TH) – work with a wide range of populations and shape their programming from a significant body of scientific research showing the profound impact plants and plant-based activities can have on individual well-being - physiologically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially:

- Plants release natural compounds that boost human immune system function.
- Human engagement with beneficial bacteria in soil can increase serotonin production in the brain, reducing stress and alleviating depressive symptoms.
- Plants improve air quality by absorbing toxins and increasing oxygen levels.
- Exposure to plant rich settings provides restorative experiences, reducing mental fatigue.
- Caring for plants encourages mindfulness by engaging the senses and fostering a connection to the present moment.
- Time spent in green spaces can lower cortisol levels, heart rate, and blood pressure, promoting cardiovascular health.
- Community and shared garden spaces foster social interaction and sense of belonging, crucial for mental health.
- Experiences in plant-rich settings promote learning and academic performance.



AHTA professional members understand how to merge the therapeutic power of plants and horticulture-based interventions with leading wellness practices, creating a powerful catalyst for advancing holistic health among the individuals and communities served.

Visit ahta.org for further information.



American Horticultural Therapy Association.

ADVANCING THE PRACTICE OF HORTICULTURE AS THERAPY

AHTA Growing Impact Spotlight Series

Throughout this campaign, AHTA spotlights member-led programs making a difference on the front lines of youth wellness. Across diverse settings, we are showcasing how skillfully applied horticulture and therapeutic-based practice fuels holistic health.



Green Classrooms, Growing Minds

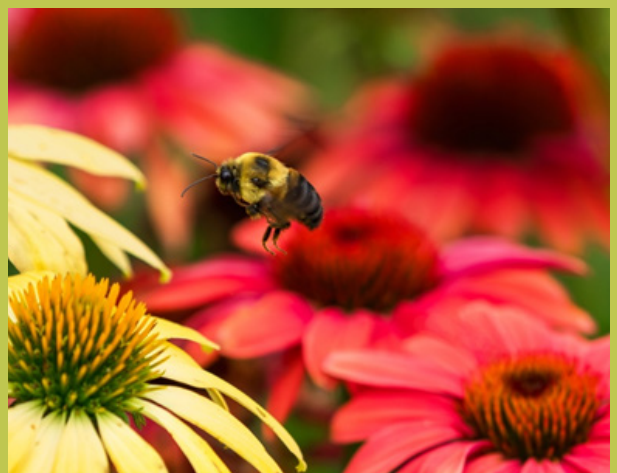
Incorporating plant-rich engagement and biophilic principles into classroom settings is gaining momentum across the nation. *Green Classrooms, Growing Minds* reimagines the traditional learning environment by integrating both indoor and outdoor plant-rich spaces that support student well-being, focus, and stress resilience.



This series demonstrates how nurturing well-being through plant and natural world engagement can fuel academic engagement, learning, and life-long success.

Serving Our Ecosystems

Empowering youth as environmental stewards through native plantings, restoration, and ecological literacy. Launched in 2025 with Veterans and youth working side-by-side, this collaboration has demonstrated strong impact, prompting other community sectors to join the movement to strengthen local ecosystems — with everyone building leadership skills, deepening environmental literacy, and embracing shared responsibility for the environments they serve.



AHTA Growing Impact Spotlight Series

Generations in Bloom

Creating intergenerational horticultural experiences where youth and older adults share experiences, grow, learn – and laugh— side-by-side. These plant-centered spaces strengthen communication, belonging, mutual respect, and meaningful connection across generations.



Fuel to Flourish

Connecting youth to nourishment and food systems through hands-on growing experiences that build health literacy and practical life skills. From seed to harvest, participants cultivate responsibility, competence, and confidence.



Resilience Lab

Exploring what it means to be resilient and how resilience connects to strong human health. Through guided plant engagement and reflective learning, youth across the country are cultivating adaptive skills, emotional steadiness, and the capacity to grow through challenge — taking cues from the many systems in nature that quietly model resilience every day.





Outcomes for Youth: Advancing Wellness Through Horticulture

Cognitive and Academic

- Active, focused learning
- Better memory retention
- Improved self-efficacy, problem-solving, and critical thinking
- Stronger academic performance

Emotional Health

- Reduced stress
- Stronger focus and attention
- Improved emotional regulation
- Increased motivation and enjoyment
- Enhanced creativity and self-expression

Social Health

- Increased socialization
- Improved communication skills and teamwork
- Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation

Physical Health

- Higher levels of physical activity and fitness
- Improved access to natural foods
- Heightened interest in nutrition



A Call to Action...

This moment urgently requires a movement toward horticulture for children. Growing up today involves developing in the contexts of two wildly different environments: the physical and digital worlds. Young people, from babies to teens, spend considerable hours every day with digital tools such as TVs, smart-phones, and anything connected to the internet. We are already aware of damaging effects of excessive screen use on active lifestyles, weight management, development and more. Technology is developing rapidly, in ways that cannot be predicted or managed. Artificial intelligence tools being created right now are shaping the concept of “work” in the modern economy. These tools will only get more immersive; predictions suggest a human-digital convergence is near.

How the digital age will impact our children is impossible to fully understand. However, I propose that we cannot wait and see. We must proactively amend society with infrastructure that supports healthy development. The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) ‘Growing Impact’ Campaign represents a firm statement to the nation and world: horticulture should be a core piece of our social and healthcare infrastructure.

It is clear that tending to nature fosters health. We have a growing understanding that humans have a profound need for time in wild, natural spaces. We suffer when we don’t get it.

Learning how to live an active lifestyle in the digital age is why horticulture should be integrated into childhood. Children face a crisis in unhealthy weight, with predictions estimating that nearly two thirds of children today are likely to have obesity by the time they are 35 years old.

Children also face rising anxiety and depression among their peers, as today’s youth face a future that is unknown and in many ways frightening. Will they have a job in an artificial intelligence-driven economy? Will they have enough money to afford to live? Will environmental disaster, a cumulative result of global environmental instability, destroy it for them before they even have a chance? Early and consistent engagement with horticulture could make a difference in our mental health. It could generate hope, healthy living, job-training opportunities, resilience, and environmental stewardship.

By sharing how horticulture promotes health, we have a chance to become leaders in the push toward a healthier future for children.

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Columbia University Irving Medical Center



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ADVANCING THE PRACTICE OF HORTICULTURE AS THERAPY

JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

AHTA 'Growing Impact' Campaign: Advancing Youth Wellness Through Horticulture



Sponsors receive recognition throughout the campaign, while making an important contribution — nationwide — to advancing youth wellness through horticulture

Bloom Sponsor \$5,000

- Recognition as a lead campaign sponsor on all promotional materials, banners, AHTA website, and educational materials related to the Youth Campaign.
- Recognition at each webinar that comprises the 'Growing Impact' Youth Wellness Webinar Series, recognition in all social media Youth Campaign Spotlight Series packages as lead sponsor, and recognition at AHTA Annual Conference.
- One full page ad in AHTA Magazine as lead sponsor of the Youth Campaign.

Sprout Sponsor \$1000

- Recognition as a sponsor on all promotional materials, banners, AHTA website, and educational materials related to the Youth Campaign.
- One half-page ad in AHTA Magazine, highlighting role as a sponsor of the campaign.
- 4 - Social media shout-outs for contributing as a sponsor to the wellness of youth, recognition in 2 social media Youth Campaign Spotlight Series packages and at AHTA Annual Conference.

Seed Sponsor \$500

- Recognition on the AHTA website, 2 social media shout-outs for campaign sponsorship, recognition in one social media Youth Campaign Spotlight Series package and at the AHTA Annual Conference as a Youth Campaign sponsor.

Ready to Sponsor? Visit us at ahta.org/growing-impact

Have a question? Contact us: partnerships@ahta.org