

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

AHTA

M A G A Z I N E

VOLUME 51 | ISSUE 3

In this issue



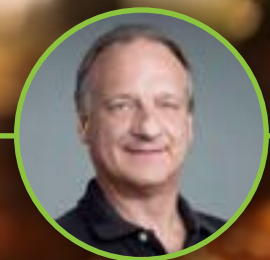
"There's Something About the Garden"
Saving Lives While Stomping Out the
Stigma Surrounding Suicide

READ ON PAGE 4 →



Program Spotlight: Happy Roots

READ ON PAGE 11 →



**HONORARY
MEMBER
PROFILE**

**Matthew
Wichrowski**

READ ON PAGE 9 →

AHTA Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

Lana Dreyfuss, LPCC, LCADC, SEP, HTR

PRESIDENT-ELECT

Matthew Janson, CTRS

TREASURER

Rebecca Francis, EdD, HTM

SECRETARY

Nicole Giron, MPH, CTRS, HTR

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Vacant

DIRECTORS AT LARGE

Linda Brown-Kuhn, HTR

April Ellis, LCSW, HTR

Donna Hunt

Charles Jordan Jr.

R Nicole Magor, M.S.

Sara Rodriguez, LMTF

Laura Rumpf, HTR

Kelly Warnick, JD

Binxia Xue, PhD, HTR

Brendan Yukins, LSW

AHTA Magazine Work Team Members

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Linda Brown-Kuhn

WORK TEAM MEMBERS

Debra Edwards, Karin Bailey, Lana Dreyfuss, Nora Curry, Laura DePrado, Nicole Giron, Ashley Honbarrier, Donna Hunt, Matthew Janson, Karen Kennedy, Ciri Malimud, MaryAnne McMillan, Sara Rodriguez, Laura Rumpf, Leigh Anne Starling, Derrick Stowell, Kelly Warnick, Andrew Zeiger

DESIGNED BY

Scott Horne, Visual Designer

AHTA Magazine

The AHTA Magazine is published three times a year by the American Horticultural Therapy Association, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. The organizational mission of AHTA is to promote and advance the profession of horticultural therapy as a therapeutic intervention and rehabilitative medium.

©American Horticultural Therapy Association
2150 N 107th St, Ste 205, Seattle, WA 98133
206-209-5296 | info@ahta.org

Contents

THE AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE

FALL 2023

Editor: Linda Brown-Kuhn, HTR

Contents

Editor's Words pg 3

Features

"There's Something About the Garden" Saving Lives While Stomping Out the Stigma Surrounding Suicide pg 4
AHTA Honorary Member Profile: Matthew Wichrowski pg 9

Promoting HT

Conference Review pg 10
Program Spotlight: Happy Roots pg 11
AHTA 2023 Annual Awards pg 14
Charles A. Lewis Award pg 16
University of Florida & Wilmot Botanical Gardens pg 17

Important Topics in our Profession

You Can Help pg 18
Kudos to Newly Credentialed HTRs! pg 19
National Horticultural Therapy Week 2024 pg 19

Resources

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Eat Your Yard Jax pg 20

BOOK REVIEW

Braiding Sweetgrass, Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer pg 21

ACTIVITY

Clay Leaf Bowl pg 22

COVER PHOTO FROM FREEPIK.COM



New Magazine Design? Yes!

If you think there's something wonderfully different about the way the magazine looks, you are right! The magazine's talented Visual Designer, Scott Horne, gave us a sophisticated, fresh redesign.

Let us know what you think of the new look on AHTA social media.

Editor's Words

Hello to you all,
I'm holding the baton that was so smoothly passed to me by Debra Edwards, a gem in the long line of editors of the AHTA Magazine. I feel the usual "new job" jitters but also gratitude mixed with excitement about becoming editor at this moment in AHTA's 50 years of existence.

I came to horticultural therapy after a career as a freelance writer specializing in health, fitness, and nature topics. Feeling restless and wanting a change, I found course listings about this field at Rutgers University. Instantly I knew this was for me. I plunged in, earned my HT certificate in 2016 and became an HTR in 2017. I've been privileged to create HT programs for Veterans in many areas (Alzheimer's, hospice care, homeless, women's sexual trauma, spinal cord injuries, substance use disorder) at two VA Medical Centers in NJ. I also work with young, homeless mothers who struggle with substance use issues. Last year, after feeling the pull of the natural world and its calming influence, I became a certified forest therapy guide.

It's been a journey of growth, taking me out of my comfort zone a lot but also allowing me to meet so many wonderful people and to share the magic of plants and nature with them. When I



PHOTO BY LAURA BILLINGHAM

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Linda
Brown-
Kuhn**

see the light of understanding, learning, doing, connecting come into their eyes, nothing compares.

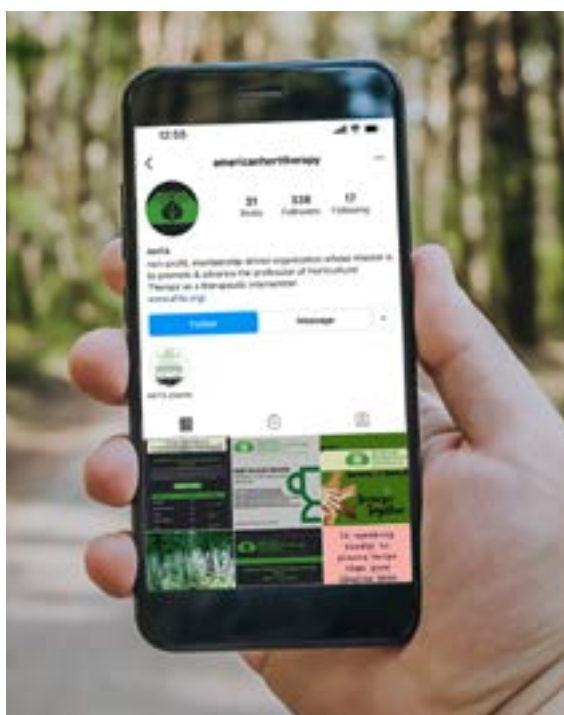
This is also a time of growth and change for AHTA where it seems to me that increasing numbers of people from a range of backgrounds are realizing the healing potential and therapeutic value of plants, gardens and nature and are getting involved.

As the HT/TH profession expands I would like this magazine to continue to be your go-to resource by showcasing ideas, successes, trends, networks, connections, and possibilities. But I need your help. Share your ideas by emailing me at lindabk11@icloud.com or better yet, join the magazine work team.

Listening to the presentations at the conference, seeing all the great work that people are doing around the world, these words popped into my head: "The sky's the limit." It really is. And all are welcome in the healing garden.

Feeling grateful,

Linda



Connect with AHTA

AHTA Social Media Outlets



Click the icons to check out the various ways to stay in touch with AHTA.



**American
Horticultural Therapy
Association.**
ADVANCING THE PRACTICE OF HORTICULTURE AS THERAPY

“There’s Something About the Garden”

Saving Lives While Stomping Out the Stigma Surrounding Suicide

BY **Brendan Yukins, LSW
& Donna Hunt**

“Suicide” is a word that evokes stigma. Feeling suicidal can get a person suspended from employment or alienated from friends and family. Many times, individuals can be heard pairing the word “suicide” with “commit,” even though worldwide human rights advocates have succeeded in decriminalizing and humanizing suicide attempts (Behere, Sathyanarayana & Mulmule, 2015). Why are discussions surrounding suicide so stigmatizing? How is society able to help individuals process suicidal thoughts when there is such constrained discourse around the topic? Could horticultural therapists play a key role in changing the trajectory of this seemingly guarded subject?

Suicide is death caused by self-injury with the intention to die as the motivation for the behavior (NIMH, 2023). In the United States, firearms are by far the most common method of suicide, accounting for more than half of all suicide deaths (CDCP, 2022). Deaths by suicide are consistently one of the leading causes of death in the country with over 49,500 people losing their lives to suicide in 2022

alone (CDC, 2022). The effects on loved ones can include depression, anger at the deceased, blame of self, anger at the medical system, shame, stigma, and a crisis of values (Wilson et al, 2010). Suicide not only ends a life, but creates a hole of anger and grief in all the other lives it touches.

COVID-19 Fuels an Increase in Mental Health Illness and Suicide Rates

When COVID-19 swept through the United States in 2019, mental health declined across the nation. Dolsen et al (2022) found inequalities among specific groups of people experiencing suicidal thoughts. Suicidal thoughts differ from actual attempts to complete suicide (CDC, 2022). Suicidal thoughts can be as passive as thinking “things would be better if I were dead,” or as active as “I want to kill myself.” Suicidal thoughts can be stabilized and controlled, starting with the perceived ability a person has to stabilize and control their life (Meddaoui et al, 2023).

For certain groups during COVID-19, such as those who are not heterosexual, are single or unpartnered, are multiracial, lost a job due to COVID-19, are younger in age, earn a lower income, and live in a town

(as opposed to rural or urban dwellers), people reported suicidal thoughts at a disproportionately higher rate than those who are heterosexual, partnered, employed, older, wealthier, hold one racial identity, and live in either densely or sparsely populated areas (Dolsen et al, 2022). Suicidal thoughts, it seems, mirror the structural inequalities that permeate our society overall.

Increased Suicide Rates Among Service Members and Their Families

Suicide rates among Americans with military service time are far outpacing rates among civilians. In 2021, 519 Service members died by suicide, according to the U.S. Department of Defense Annual Report on Suicide in the Military. The Annual Report shows that the suicide rates for Active Component Service members have gradually increased since 2011, with young, enlisted, male service members at the greatest risk. Additionally, it was found that 202 dependents died by suicide, including 133 spouses and 69 other dependents. Firearms were the primary method of suicide death for both service members and family members (US DOD, 2022). In 2020 alone, 6,146 veteran deaths were ruled suicides (US DOD, 2022).



At Robins Air Force Base (AFB) in Georgia, the Integrated Resiliency & Prevention Office is working hard to reduce suicide rates. They realize the importance of horticultural therapy and brought Hope Gardens under their umbrella of programming.

Horticultural Therapists Can Uniquely Connect With Individuals Experiencing Suicidal Thoughts

Donna Hunt, a horticultural therapy student working at HOPE Gardens on Robins AFB, has helped to put action into HOPE Gardens to reduce suicide rates. Officials at the base posed the question, "How can we address suicidal thoughts before they develop into suicidal ideation or attempts?" An important part of the answer was HOPE Gardens and the unique connection it can offer to service members who visit.

"There's something about the garden," Hunt says, "it's open to everybody, without any pressure to talk or 'perform' for a counselor." Horticultural therapy is already used as a modality to treat grief of loved ones in the wake of a completed suicide (Machado & Swank, 2019). Horticultural therapists use planted flowers or shrubs to memorialize the dead. As clients tend to the plants that represent their passed loved ones, they are able to physicalize the grief they feel internally (Machado & Swank, 2019). But what about prevention? Can gardens be used to prevent future suicides?

The Special Role Therapeutic Gardens Can Play in Stomping Out Suicide Rates

Suicidality flourishes in isolation (Dolsen et al, 2022). Interpersonal emotional regulation is essential to the fight against suicidality (Zaki & Williams, 2013). When people are able to attune and communicate with each other, they are able to handle overwhelming stress as a team. Community gardens are designed specifically to facilitate this connection between neighbors (Sapin et al, 2023). Raised plots, allotments, or parcelas are

within feet of each other, allowing people to chat together as they garden.

Brendan Yukins, a social worker in Chicago, Illinois, has witnessed the "natural fit" that gardens can be for encouraging communication and, ultimately, interpersonal emotional regulation. He recalls poignant moments that occurred in his own garden. "I found myself having the same conversations I would have with clients indoors, but on the edge of my garden bed. I even talked my neighbor down from killing herself. Her cancer had come back and she had no more savings to get her through the next round of chemo. 'Talk to a professional before you make any last decisions,' I told her. And here she is, years later, still going to brunch with me." Gardening alone may not solve suicidality, but the connections that are fostered in these plant-rich environments can save lives.

HOPE Gardens is a poignant example of how horticultural therapists can make a difference in the lives of those who

experience mental distress and suicidal thoughts. Those who experience the garden describe it as a tranquil place near the lodging at the Base where individuals feel free to talk and connect. Focused activities are regularly conducted in the garden, sometimes with case counselors and professionals circulating to connect with service individuals who do not feel comfortable approaching outside of the garden. In addition, there are signs throughout the garden, complete with QR codes, that give helpful information about what to do if an individual is experiencing, or knows someone who is experiencing, suicidal thoughts.

One particularly powerful horticultural activity conducted in HOPE Gardens this year was to symbolically "Stomp the Stigma" of suicide. Event attendees consisting of professionals and service members were directed to a specially prepared area of the garden where they stomped seed balls into the ground. Some service members even asked



Hope Garden sign with QR code for more help.
PHOTO BY DONNA HUNT



Myth busting fact about suicide in Hope Garden.
PHOTO BY DONNA HUNT



Participant stomping seed balls.
PHOTO BY DONNA HUNT

that their stomping be recorded. The event reinforced the HOPE campaign commitment to pay attention to the problem of suicide and not to keep it a secret.

Suggested Initiatives for Therapeutic Gardens Designed for Suicide Prevention

Many of the strategies initiated at Robins AFB can be applied universally to other therapeutic gardens being designed to help decrease suicide deaths:

- Ensure a plant-rich and sensory-based setting where the populations served can experience relaxation, authentic connection, and non-judgmental communication.
- Strategically place signs throughout the garden that contain information to this effect: "988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, Call or Text 988, Chat at 988lifeline.org." The national number, 988, is the mental health emergency hotline. It connects callers to crisis counselors who can triage emergency services (such as ambulance transport) if necessary.
- Conduct regular horticultural activity sessions within the garden that encourage social interaction, sense of accomplishment, stress reduction, and coping skills.
- Host events — to be attended by professionals and the populations served — that will begin to break up the stigma surrounding suicide and reflect that society cares. Having representatives from helping agencies mingling among attendees served in the garden also removes a potentially intimidating or awkward situation where attendees are expected to approach helping professionals at event tables.
- Intersperse signage throughout the walking trails of the garden that contains information on the warning signs of suicide: for instance, has the client been talking about great guilt or shame, wanting to die, feeling trapped, empty, or hopeless, showing signs of extreme sadness, agitation, or physical/emotional pain, withdrawing from

friends or family? The signage can contain a QR code that directs people to appropriate helping agencies.

Powerful Words from an Affected Service Member

Horticultural therapists can change the trajectory of the stigma surrounding suicide, while also helping to enhance and save lives. This was poignantly demonstrated when a middle-aged, single, female airman who attended the "Stomp Out the Stigma" event at Robins AFB was interviewed. On a gorgeous summer day with the camellias just starting to bloom, she opened up about her own story and

remarked: "The garden is magic. There's something about the garden. I don't know if it's the sun on your face or just being out of the Work Center, but once you're outside you can relax and bloom like a flower towards the cosmos. Nature puts your problems in perspective. Then, you may be open to ask for help."

So much progress has been made, but more needs to be done to reach as many individuals as possible.



NOTE: During the writing of this article, one of the young Airmen at Robins AFB completed suicide.

REFERENCES

- Behere PB, Sathyanarayana Rao TS, Mulmule AN. Decriminalization of attempted suicide law: Journey of Fifteen Decades. *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2015 Apr-Jun;57(2):122-4. doi: 10.4103/0019-5545.158131. PMID: 26124516; PMCID: PMC4462779.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). Atlanta, GA: National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.
- Dolsen, Emily A, Nishimi, Kristen, LeWinn, Kaja Z, Byers, Amy L, Tripp, Paige, Woodward, Eleanor, et al. (2022). Identifying correlates of suicide ideation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional analysis of 148 sociodemographic and pandemic-specific factors. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 156 186-193. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2022.10.009>
- Machado, M. M., & Swank, J. M. (2019). Therapeutic gardening: A counseling approach for bereavement from suicide. *Death Studies*, 43(10), 629-633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1509908>
- Meddaoui, Brianna, Iddiols, Bianca C & Kaufman, Erin A. (2023). The Controllability of Suicidal Thoughts (CoST) Scale: Development, factor structure, and initial validation. *Psychological Assessment*, 35(10) 880-887. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0001271>
- National Institute of Mental Health. (May, 2023). Suicide. National Institute of Health. Retrieved from https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide#part_2585
- Sapin, A., Bodenan, P., Lebeau, T., & Fleury, B. G. (2023). Allotment gardens: Psychosocial benefits and conflictual community aspects. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 33(3), 664-676. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2663>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP22-07-01-005, NSDUH Series H-57). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-nsduh-annual-national-report>.
- Wilson, Anne & Marshall, Amy. (2010). The support needs and experiences of suicidally bereaved family and friends. *Death Studies*, 34(7) 625-640. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481181003761567>
- Zaki, J., & Williams, W. C. (2013). Interpersonal emotion regulation. *Emotion*, 13(5), 803-810. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033839>
- U.S. Department of Defense. (Oct 20, 2022). Department of Defense Releases the Annual Report on Suicide in the Military: Calendar Year 2021. www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3193806/departments-of-defense-releases-the-annual-report-on-suicide-in-the-military-cwww-legion.org/news/260174/senators-plead-improved-response-veterans-suicides-after-report-reveals-hotline-failureal/

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

The behaviors listed below may be some of the signs that someone is thinking about suicide.

TALKING ABOUT:



- ▷ Wanting to die
- ▷ Great guilt or shame
- ▷ Being a burden to others

FEELING:



- ▷ Empty, hopeless, trapped, or having no reason to live
- ▷ Extremely sad, more anxious, agitated, or full of rage
- ▷ Unbearable emotional or physical pain

CHANGING BEHAVIOR, SUCH AS:



- ▷ Making a plan or researching ways to die
- ▷ Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important items, or making a will
- ▷ Taking dangerous risks such as driving extremely fast
- ▷ Displaying extreme mood swings
- ▷ Eating or sleeping more or less
- ▷ Using drugs or alcohol more often

If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
Call or text 988
Chat at 988lifeline.org

Crisis Text Line
Text “HELLO” to 741741



National Institute
of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention

NIMH Identifier No. OM 22-4316



HORTICULTURAL THERAPY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The University of Tennessee Horticultural Therapy Certificate Program is a 21-week online accelerated program. The program provides nine credit hours of horticultural therapy coursework required for professional registration.

This certificate program is accredited by the American Horticultural Therapy Association.

For more information or an application contact utgardensht@utk.edu or call 865-974-7151.

T HERBERT
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

AHTA HONORARY MEMBER PROFILE



Matthew Wichrowski

HTR

INTERVIEWED BY
Debra Edwards

Tell us about your background and education. Have you always worked in the field of horticultural therapy?

Growing up, I spent a lot of time exploring the woods and beaches on Long Island which I call home. I have always had a love of nature. As an undergrad I studied psychology and philosophy. After graduating, I began to work with autistic adults with plans for grad school in psychology. Fate intervened and I was offered an opportunity to renovate a turn of the century Lord and Burnham greenhouse and start a program with the autistic folks at the agency where I worked. Seeing the effects of nature-based activities on the residents really sold me on heading in the direction of HT. I have since gone back to school and received an MSW in 2005.

How did you get your start in horticultural therapy? When did you become a horticultural therapist?

I learned a lot from developing a program from scratch. In my early research into horticultural therapy, I found AHTA and a community of like-minded practitioners. After a few years an opportunity opened up at the Glass Garden, a well-established HT program managed by

Nancy Chambers at the time, at NYU Medical Center. I applied and have been working here for just about 30 years now. After gaining some additional experience there, I submitted my application for and received my HTR.

How did you combine your interests within the horticultural therapy profession?

HT was a perfect combination of my love of the outdoors and growing things with my interest in psychology and counseling.

What has been your experience in developing a career in HT?

I'm blessed to greatly enjoy my work and have continuously been an active learner throughout my career. I love trying new plants and keeping an eye out for new developments in areas of psychology which can inform my practice such as resiliency, positive psychology and awe. When you enjoy what you do the rest comes easy.

Are you conducting any research in horticultural therapy? Can you tell us what your research focus is?

Currently no, but I always try to have an idea or two in the works waiting for the right time and opportunity. Generally, my interests center around uses of Biophilic design and the health benefits of nature exposure. I also have studied benefits

and participation in HT activities for rehabilitation patients.

Can you describe the steps you took and the resources you utilized throughout your career to develop HT programming?

I started by learning the basics: foundations of psychology to aid in understanding what my patients were experiencing and how to build effective therapeutic relationships with those I serve. The foundations of HT are equally important. I constantly survey the literature to see what is going on all over the world in HT. This helps keep current and build new skills. Know your plants. Take advantage of sensory potential in plant materials. I like to learn about the socio-cultural aspects of the plants I utilize to make a meaningful and interesting presentation.

How did HT develop at your facility and what is the present status of this program?

The program at NYU Langone Rusk Rehabilitation is a long-standing program. For 50 years there was the Glass Garden in the old Rusk building, a wonderful setting with greenhouse, a courtyard garden and an award-winning Children's Play Garden, designed with the rehabilitation needs of children in mind. A combination of a hurricane and plans to build a new state of the art

2023 AHTA Annual Virtual Conference Review

BY **Sara Rodriguez, LMFT**
AHTA CONFERENCE CO-LEAD

The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA), was proud to see a year of efforts culminate in an outstanding virtual 2-day conference, entitled "AHTA 2023: 50 Years of Cultivating Horticultural Therapy," Friday October 20th and Saturday October 21st. While we acknowledge the human drive to connect to others and have face-to-face opportunities to do so, it cannot be denied that a virtual conference allows a level of accessibility and inclusivity that an in-person conference does not. Particularly notable this year was the acknowledgement and celebration of the AHTA's 50th anniversary! In celebrating this accomplishment, AHTA wanted to highlight where it began as an organization, where it is today, and project into the future of AHTA and horticultural therapy/therapeutic horticulture (HT/TH) as a whole.

As with any great endeavor, the AHTA 2023 conference did not happen in a vacuum, and many minds, voices, and a wealth of knowledge from various communities contributed to making the conference the success it was. AHTA's President, Lana Dreyfuss, LPCC, LCADC, SEP, HTR, welcomed the attendees and highlighted the importance of the roots of AHTA, its current standing, as well as projecting for an exciting future of the HT/TH field and AHTA. Following the opening remarks, Laura Rumpf, HTR and Conference Co-lead, introduced the keynote speaker, Dr.

Robert Zarr, MD, MPH. His presentation entitled, "Nature Rx: Prescribing nature to promote human and planetary health," focused on how nature, the garden space and our innate connection to these environments impact our health and wellness. Dr. Zarr exhibited the Park Rx program and provided examples of what a prescription may look like, as well as how to access green spaces in our communities. It was an honor to have a medical perspective from Dr. Zarr as well as hear his expertise regarding HT/TH and how nature may improve public health for all populations.

Author Marcus Bridgewater, aka Garden Marcus, educator, and motivational speaker, presented a unique perspective on how HT/TH through social media may impact individuals, highlighting the reality of social media and technology in the lives of individuals. He conceptualized social media as a vessel to teach and inspire others regarding plants and gardening. Marcus shared his wellness journey, his 'non-green thumb', and that at one point, he wanted nothing to do with the technology. Many in the audience were enlightened. Through his videos and use of metaphors in the garden, Marcus is able to reach individuals who may not otherwise have access to green spaces, making connections by paralleling our lives with the processes in the garden.

President-Elect, Matthew Janson, CTRS, kicked off day two of the conference by welcoming and introducing keynote speaker, Rebecca Haller, HTM. Rebecca directs the Horticultural Therapy Institute



in Denver, Colorado, is affiliate faculty for Colorado State University, and wrote for and co-edited two major textbooks. Rebecca focused on interconnections during her presentations. Among many fascinating points, she referenced mycelium and mycorrhizae when highlighting the importance of connections, community, and reciprocal relationships. Parallels were also drawn between the resilience of plants and the strength of individuals. Her presentation led participants to think about not only the function of the roots of their plants, but the roots in their lives and how history, culture, and heritage, in part, form who we are.

The conference generated 273 registrants from 17 countries including 81 students, who are vital to the future of HT/TH. The conference received very positive qualitative feedback through verbal comments and text placed in the Q&A box during presentations. We hope to gather additional feedback via conference surveys to continue to adapt to an ever-changing world. Like the *Socratea exorrhiza* (walking palm), adapting to change will be imperative for our survival as a therapeutic application, organization, and the overall universal goal of improving individuals' wellness, system health, and planetary healing. AHTA is honored to be a part of connecting plants and the garden space to people. We are grateful for where we were, humbled to see where we are, and excited to see where we are going. Thank you for your interest in AHTA 2023: 50 Years of Cultivating Horticultural Therapy.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Cultivating Connections

The Power of Intergenerational Horticultural Therapy in School Gardens and Senior Citizen Assisted Living



Seniors transplant veggies in assisted living garden.
PHOTO BY ASHLEY HONBARRIER

BY Ashley Honbarrier

The beauty of nature has the remarkable ability to bridge generational gaps, promote healing and foster meaningful connections between individuals of different ages and backgrounds. One innovative approach to harnessing this power is through intergenerational horticultural therapy programs that bring together schoolchildren and senior citizens in a shared gardening experience. Through North Carolina-based nonprofit, Happy Roots, we will explore the profound benefits

of such programs, how they cultivate not only beautiful gardens and support both of these generations individually, but also create strong, intergenerational bonds between the two, across the age spectrum.

The Green Classroom

School gardens have become increasingly popular over the years, serving as outdoor classrooms where students can learn science, ecology, math, social studies, vocational skills, and more through hands-on activities. However, they offer so much more than academic enrichment. These gardens provide students with an opportunity to connect with their natural

environment, promoting physical activity, environmental awareness, a sense of responsibility, and a way to use nature as a tool for, not just physical health, but mental health care as well.

The effects of COVID-19 and technology on mental health, especially for youth, have been detrimental. The pandemic led to increased social isolation, disrupted routines, and anxiety. Technology, while helpful for remote learning and staying connected, has also contributed to screen addiction, cyberbullying, and overstimulation. Overstimulation, paired with the average American diet full of processed foods, dyes, and sugar, has led to more and more youth with ADHD diagnoses. Through Happy Roots work, these children not only excel in the school garden, but also learn about health, how it affects their daily life, and how to improve... or feel better.

Happy Roots is a 501c3 nonprofit organization in Rowan County, North Carolina, providing nature-based therapeutic and educational services to enhance the wellness of the community and the environment, primarily through school gardens, community gardens, horticultural therapy, and environmental stewardship. For the past seven years, Happy Roots' hub and heart of the entire operation has been Henderson Independent School, an alternative middle and high school for at-risk youth.

One Henderson high school student noted in a survey, gardening and growing food makes her "think about what I'm putting into my body" and "gives a whole new respect for food." A popular consensus is that "the garden is my happy place" and



Students propagate houseplants to prepare for fundraiser.
PHOTO BY ASHLEY HONBARRIER



Students tend to/nurture seeds in the school greenhouse.
PHOTO BY ASHLEY HONBARRIER

is “safe” and “calming.” Through plant sales, students get to practice all aspects of business. These social interactions have helped many students to find their niche for sales and customer service.

The Healing Garden

On the other end of the age spectrum, senior citizens living in assisted care facilities often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness. Horticultural therapy, which involves therapeutic gardening activities, has been shown to have numerous physical, emotional, and cognitive benefits for seniors. It can reduce stress, improve mood, increase mobility, and enhance memory.

Through weekly garden visits and sessions with seniors at Trinity Oaks Health & Rehabilitation and Assisted Living wings, Happy Roots founder, director and aspiring horticultural therapist, Ashley Honbarrier, says she sees “miracle after miracle every day”.

At Trinity Oaks, Honbarrier worked with a man named Cliff in the Health & Rehabilitation courtyard garden. Cliff’s wife, Betsy, was close, but resided as a patient in the neighboring Memory Care wing. Cliff was distraught over Betsy’s state. She could no longer remember him or their family. Cliff said Betsy taught him everything he knew about gardening. He hoped they could garden again together and that it might bring back fond memories. Cliff started taking Betsy cut flowers and sprigs of fresh herbs like mint and rosemary. After several months of this routine, who comes out to the courtyard garden? Betsy! Betsy and Cliff have been gardening together for almost two years now. They thank the plants for bringing them back and giving them more time together.

At Trinity Oaks Senior Living Center, Honbarrier lets seniors sow the larger seeds, like pumpkin seeds that are easy for them to grasp, in trays. They know she will take them back to the school greenhouse where students will water

and take care of them until they are ready for transplant. These plants go back to Trinity Oaks gardens, school gardens, and local community gardens. The seniors are shown pictures of their plant progress, where the plants end up, and the joy it brings to so many. It creates a healthy, uplifting fellowship for seniors who are often immobile and confined to assisted living care facilities.

Intergenerational horticultural therapy programs involving school gardens and residents of assisted living facilities are shining examples of how nature can bridge generational gaps and improve the lives of participants. These programs not only yield beautiful gardens but also nurture strong intergenerational bonds that enrich the lives of everyone involved. As we continue to explore innovative ways to promote well-being and connection, such initiatives remind us of the enduring power of nature to heal, teach, and unite us all.





RUTGERS

School of Environmental
and Biological Sciences



HORTICULTURAL THERAPY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

People Growing Plants | Plants Growing People



Accessible HT Education

- Core horticultural therapy courses are offered in online and hybrid formats
- Horticultural Therapy Certificate and Minor program options



AHTA Accredited

- All certificate program courses meet AHTA education requirements for professional registration
- Minor program partially meets requirements for professional registration



Internship Supervision

- Variety of on-site and off-site supervised paid and unpaid internship site placements throughout NJ and continental US

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
HORTICULTURAL THERAPY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

2023 AHTA Annual Awards

BY **Lana Dreyfuss** LPCC, LCADC, SEP, HTR
PRESIDENT OF AHTA

Profiles contributed
by award winners.

The AHTA 2023 Annual Awards were presented at the recent virtual conference “AHTA 2023: 50 Years of Cultivating Horticultural Therapy.” I was honored to oversee the review and selection of these excellent recipients who are outstanding examples of the profession of horticultural therapy. Please take time to nominate for the 2024 AHTA Annual Awards when nominations open in February 2024!

RHEA MCCANDLISS PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AWARD

John Murphy HTR

John is a horticulturist (MS), HTR and licensed teacher in NC. He was the Director of Bullington Gardens in Hendersonville, NC for 23 years. During that time, he developed the grounds as a botanical garden, established educational programs for adults and children, and created a horticultural therapy program. In 2003, he started BOOST (Bullington Onsite Occupational Student Training), a program for high school sophomores with learning disabilities to acquire basic job skills while working on the grounds and gardens. This program continues today. Other weekly programs for middle and high school students with intellectual disabilities were added, as well as a summer day camp for teens with special needs. He planned and helped construct the Therapy Garden at Bullington as a site where programs are held. This garden is now named for him. Over the years, he has also conducted HT programs for seniors, teens struggling with mental health issues, and adults recovering from addiction. He's had an active role in the Carolinas Horticultural Therapy Network since it was started in 2012 as a loose networking group and helped to make it a nonprofit organization in 2022. He continues to serve on the CHTN Board of Directors.

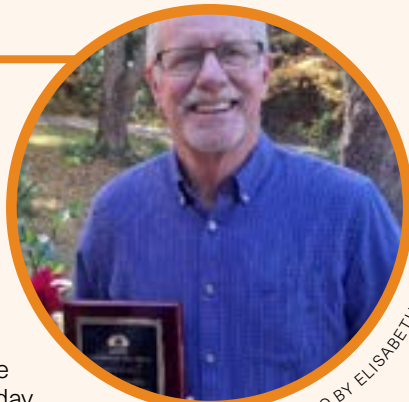


PHOTO BY ELISABETH MURPHY

JOHN WALKER COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Hope Garden Programs at Robins Air Force Base

Hope Gardens is located on Robins AFB in Central Georgia. It began as a memorial garden and due to Base security the memorial was moved to the air museum off-base. The Houston (pronounced how-stan) County Master Gardeners took on the task of renovating the neglected garden. The Garden was integrated into the Base Resilience program in 2020. In 2022 it became a therapeutic garden.



PHOTO BY NICOLE YOUNGER

Greg Purvis is the suicide prevention coordinator for the base. Nicole Younger, Donna Hunt and George Arnold are some of the Master Gardeners who help at the garden. Without them, there would be no hope.

AHTA THERAPEUTIC GARDEN DESIGN AWARD

Marie Rose Therapeutic Garden at Mary's Woods

The Healing Garden in the center of the Caritas memory care neighborhood at Mary's Woods near Portland, Oregon was thoughtfully designed with the principles of horticultural therapy in mind, providing a multisensory experience for individuals dealing with dementia or Alzheimer's. It features an ADA-accessible glider for gentle, soothing movement, aromatic plants in raised garden boxes, and a tactile mosaic wall inspired by Oregon's four distinct seasons. These elements engage all the senses, offering a secure and calming connection to nature. For families, it's a space where they can share precious moments with their loved ones, especially when words may be hard to find.

Brian Bainnson, ASLA, designed the healing garden utilizing the therapeutic garden characteristics. Melissa Bierman, MS, HTR is the Healing Garden Coordinator.



PHOTO BY STAFF MEMBER AT MARY'S WOODS

○ Melissa Bierman, MS, HTR Healing Garden Coordinator
Robina Brown, Resident and Garden Volunteer
Landscape Architect not pictured: Brian Bainnson, ASLA, Quatrefoil Inc

ANN LANE MAVROMATIS SCHOLARSHIP

Bree Stark

Bree Stark completed the certificate in horticultural therapy from the University of Florida in winter of 2022, culminating the experience with a 56-page paper that covered the history of bereavement therapies and their relationship with horticultural therapy. Based on those findings, the paper included 12 concurrent session plans for a group program focused on prolonged grief disorder (also known as complicated grief) framed on William Worden's "Tasks of Grief" model. Bree now serves as program coordinator for the HT certificate program at UF, assists with grading certificate course work, and she is the volunteer website administrator for the [Florida Horticulture for Health Network](https://www.floridahorticultureforhealthnetwork.org/).



PHOTO BY GEORGE HAMMOND

AHTA HONORARY MEMBERSHIP AWARD

Matthew Wichrowski HTR

Matthew J. Wichrowski MSW, HTR has been practicing horticultural therapy at Rusk Rehabilitation NYU-Langone Medical Center for almost 30 years and is currently Clinical Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine. He is also Editor-in-Chief of the AHTA's Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture. To read more about Matthew's journey with horticultural therapy in his own words, read his HTR Profile in this issue on page 9.

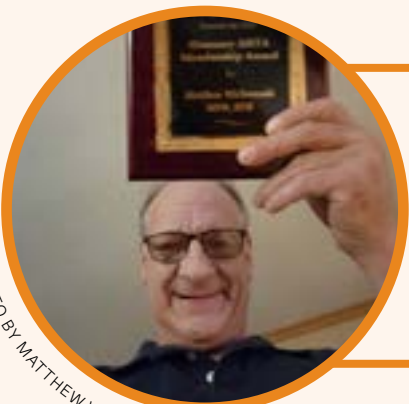


PHOTO BY MATTHEW WICHROWSKI

The 2023 Charles A. Lewis Excellence in Research Award

BY PJ Snodgrass, PhD, HTR

This year, the Charles A. Lewis Excellence in Research Award was presented to a group of authors who collaborated on a project documented in the article, "A pilot randomized controlled trial of group-based indoor gardening and art activities demonstrates therapeutic benefits to healthy women." Published online in July 2022, the study was selected based on the criteria set out for the Charles A. Lewis Excellence in Research Award. The first author, Raymond Odeh, presented the study at the AHTA Annual Conference in October. All the authors agreed to donate their monetary award to the Wilmot Botanical Garden.

Charles A. Lewis was a pioneer in the field of people-plant interaction and innovative horticultural programs in various community settings. Mr. Lewis worked as a horticulturist and

administrator and a research fellow at the Morton Arboretum. Additionally, he was a plant breeder, grower, and author. His book *Green Nature/Human Nature* presents an evolutionary basis for the human attraction to plants. He explains in his book that people-plant interactions are presented from the perspective of participatory and observational. Lewis clearly presented research about plant-human interactions and how green nature is intertwined with the human psyche.

The researchers conducted a randomly controlled pilot study that tested the hypothesis that participation in group-based indoor gardening or art-making activities for one hour, twice a week for four weeks would provide quantifiably different therapeutic benefits to a population of healthy women ages 26–49.

Collaborating on the article were Raymond Odeh, Elizabeth R. M. Diehl, Sara Jo Nixon, C. Craig Tisher, Dylan Klempner, Jill K. Sonke, Thomas A. Colquhoun, Qian Li,

Maria Espinosa, Dianela Perdomo, Kaylee Rosario, Hannah Terzi, and Charles L. Guy. The researchers represented the following institutions: Department of Environmental Horticulture, Wilmot Botanical Gardens, Department of Psychiatry, Center for Arts in Medicine, and Health Outcomes & Biomedical Informatics, all within the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.

According to the authors, "This study's significant quantitative findings unequivocally justify the continued study of both art and gardening interventions as genuine therapeutic modalities to promote better health and well-being of women that are already relatively healthy." The full text paper can be accessed at [PLoS ONE 17\(7\): e0269248](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269248).



hospital led to the loss of the garden. There are now two settings, and I stayed uptown to continue the programs I had begun. Most of Rusk rehabilitation moved to a hospital downtown that NYU had purchased. Currently there is a wide array of programming going on.

Do you have some favorite plants and activities you use in your HT programs?

I conduct my HT sessions bedside on medically complex rehabilitation and neurology units as well as on a locked psychiatric unit. Mostly my patients are urban dwellers. With this in mind, tropicals and houseplants are the main plant materials I use. I feel it is important to enable my patients to be successful,

so I offer plants with a variety of cultural requirements so that everyone can pick something that will do well in their conditions. I provide education on plant care and interesting information on socio-cultural aspects of their selection to make the experience more meaningful.

Do you accept HT Interns? How does your internship work at your facility?

We accept interns from a wide variety of backgrounds. We have two settings in Manhattan. The main campus on 34th St. has programs on medically complex/ cardiac rehabilitation, psychiatry, and neurology and pediatrics. The downtown site offers physical rehabilitation for a range of conditions as well as offsite programs in assisted living and memory

care. Although the medical environment can be challenging at times, our interns have opportunities to experience a wide variety of programming and learning opportunities.

Do you have personal perspectives to share with present or future horticultural therapists?

Know your plants. Know your people. Study and continuously learn. Deliver a professional, clinically and personally meaningful fun and enjoyable activity. It helps to enjoy one's work and be genuinely caring, as this is felt by the participants and greatly enhances the overall quality of the session.



University of Florida & Wilmot Botanical Gardens

BY **Siang Yu Tham**
THERAPEUTIC HORTICULTURE
PROGRAM MANAGER

The University of Florida (UF) offers an Undergraduate Certificate in Horticultural Therapy through the Department of Environmental Horticulture. Our online format offers flexibility to degree-seeking students and working professionals, and we have enrolled students with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences from across the nation as well as other countries including Spain, Taiwan, Singapore, South Africa, and Australia!

An HT internship is also offered onsite at Wilmot Botanical Gardens on the UF campus, where we serve diverse populations in the hospital and community. Interns can shadow and assist horticultural therapists and plan and implement therapeutic horticulture activities. Our program is conducted in an accessible greenhouse surrounded by 5 acres of gardens, which provides a comfortable and welcoming environment for participants throughout the year. Tremendous support from the community through our plant sales and grant sponsors has enabled us to serve our participants for the last 10 years – including veterans with spinal cord injury/disease and mental illness, stroke patients, cancer survivors, patients with end stage renal disease, psychiatric inpatients, individuals with chronic back pain, individuals with movement disorders, young adults with autism, persons in addiction recovery, young adults with developmental disabilities, and college students with mental health struggles.

Research, teaching, and service are integral to our therapeutic horticulture program. One of our published manuscripts received both the 2023 UF/IFAS High

Impact Publication Recognition and the 2023 Charles A. Lewis Excellence in Research Award from the American Horticultural Therapy Association.¹ Over the past year we served patient populations in collaboration with studies conducted by the Department of Gynecologic Oncology and the Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation at UF Health. This fall we received three-year funding from UF for a therapeutic horticulture program to decrease stress and mental fatigue and increase academic resilience of UF students! This builds on the success of a three-semester research study we conducted in which students reported a significant reduction in stress and anxiety and a significant improvement in academic resilience after participating in eight sessions of therapeutic horticulture. We are delighted that this funding will allow us to continue supporting students on our campus.

To promote the field of HT/TH and share its benefits and successes, we provide local, regional, national, and international lectures, workshops, and webinars. We also hold trainings for volunteers who want to help in our TH programs. Another exciting development for the therapeutic horticulture program at Wilmot Botanical Gardens that we look forward to is the outdoor working garden, which is slated to begin construction in 2024, which means there will be a greater variety of plants, activities, and opportunities for both participants and practitioners.

If you would like information on any of our program opportunities, we can be reached at CHTInfo@ifas.ufl.edu.

We hope to hear from you!



PHOTO BY SIANG YU THAM

1. Participants selecting plant material for making scented potpourri.
2. Participant smiling after saving a 'plant in distress' by repotting it.
3. Student participant proudly displaying their floral arrangement made using plants from the garden.
4. Forestry graduate students holding their potted plants after a greenhouse grounding and mindfulness session.

FOOTNOTE

- ¹ Odeh, R., Diehl, E., Nixon, S. et al. (2022). A pilot randomized controlled trial of group-based indoor gardening and art activities demonstrates therapeutic benefits to healthy women. *PLoS One* 17(7).

You *Can* Help!

We need volunteers to dig in and plant a bright future for AHTA

SUBMITTED BY

Lynn Zeltman & Erin Backus

Reviewed and updated
November 2023

Have you wondered about how you can help the profession? Are you a member looking to be a part of a team that'll make a difference? The American Horticultural Therapy Association has grown so much since its beginning to heights some people can't imagine and we only continue to grow. Join a work team or even the board to continue our efforts into making this modality recognized in the health field as a needed therapy.

The American Horticultural Therapy Association's work teams, review boards, and committees conduct the Association's essential business through the collaboration between the AHTA Board of Directors and AHTA members, work that enables the organization to thrive. The leaders and members of work teams and review boards change as the AHTA Board of Directors changes. The AHTA welcomes and encourages its members to take the next step and help plant a bright future by volunteering for one of the following:

AS A MEMBER YOU CAN JOIN THE FOLLOWING WORK TEAMS

The **AHTA Magazine Work Team** strives to keep members informed about the organization, the horticultural therapy profession, and related horticultural therapy information through soliciting, writing, and editing articles for the triannual AHTA Magazine.

The **Conference Work Team** assists in the planning and development of the AHTA Annual Conference. Work team members evaluate submissions, review programs, and assist onsite at each conference.

The **Marketing Work Team** expands the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the Association through outreach, advertising, networking, and developing fundraising endeavors.

The **Membership Work Team** is responsible for all aspects of the AHTA membership and for developing ideas and events to increase association membership.

The **Credentialing Work Team** is responsible for researching and identifying the necessary steps to pursue the professional credentialing of horticultural therapists.

The **Professional Education Work Team** facilitates communication with horticultural therapy educators, the AHTA membership, and potential students regarding academic and professional opportunities.

If you are interested in joining a work team, please contact the AHTA office at: info@ahta.org

MEMBERS CAN ALSO JOIN A REVIEW BOARD

The **Certificate Program Accreditation Review Board** supports the Association by providing an objective assessment of certificate program applications.

The **Nominations and Elections Review Board** supports the Association by providing an objective evaluation of nominee applications for the AHTA Board of Directors.

The **Professional Registration Review Board** supports the Association by providing an objective assessment of professional registration applications.

**The Association Review Board members must meet specific criteria and apply to be considered to serve as a reviewer. Review boards are not open to join and are traditionally by invitation when a position opens. If you are interested in a review board, please contact the AHTA Office for further information.*

OTHER WAYS TO HELP



[Print brochure to hand out](#)



[Submit photos to our website](#)



[Get a friend or coworker to JOIN AHTA](#)



Kudos to Newly Credentialed HTRs!

We would like to recognize and congratulate the 18 members who were recently awarded professional registration with AHTA between 10/1/2022 – 10/20/2023. Your impressive achievement advances our mission to educate others about the field while ensuring greater public awareness of, and access to, horticultural therapy.

Erica Wharton
Alexa Heilman
Matthew Janson
Rachael Incorvaia
Sara Thompson
Yin-yan Yeung
April Ellis
Melissa Norris
Erin Lovely

Garron Dorr
Sarah Elizabeth Tanke
Sarah DiLiberti
Margaret Jack
James Hatcher
Molly Fertig
Corey Simpson
Kasey Hamilton
Juniper Shay



National Horticultural Therapy Week 2024 is March 17-23

What are your plans for spreading the word?

- Contact your state and local officials to request a proclamation for National Horticultural Therapy Week (NHTW). Find resources and a sample proclamation [here](#).
- Post on our AHTA social media sites about your program success stories!
- Get involved with your [regional networking group](#).
- Host a garden party (or flower or houseplant party) to celebrate what we do and recognize local affiliated HT programs.



EDUCATION & TRAINING

Nurturing Nature and Nourishing Hearts

Eat Your Yard Jax's Mission



BY Courtney Ledwick

In a bustling world where concrete jungles often replace the beauty of nature, one nonprofit organization is sowing the seeds of change and reconnection with the Earth. Eat Your Yard Jax, nestled on the westside of Jacksonville, Florida, is more than just a farm; it's a haven where families, school groups, and individuals discover the joys of growing food, medicine, and nurturing both the land and themselves. What sets this remarkable initiative apart is its dedication to employing autistic and special needs individuals and how this practice intertwines with horticultural therapy.

The Essence of Eat Your Yard Jax

Eat Your Yard Jax is an edible plant nursery and education center, founded on the principles of sustainable agriculture and community engagement, and seeks to bridge the gap between modern society and our natural roots. With an emphasis on organic farming, permaculture, and horticultural therapy, this nonprofit farm is making waves by connecting people to the land in ways that nourish not only the body but also the soul.

Education Through Nature

One of the core missions of Eat Your Yard Jax is to educate people of all ages about the wonders of nature, particularly the



Map of the Eat Your Yard Jax Farm in Jacksonville, Florida.
MAP PROVIDED BY EAT YOUR YARD JAX

art of cultivating food and medicine. We help everyone be a part of reducing food miles by demonstrating how we can all increase our food security. The farm offers interactive tours for families and school groups by providing hands-on experiences in planting, harvesting, and understanding the life cycles of various plants. As Richard Louv so eloquently pointed out in his best seller *Last Child in the Woods*, we can save our children from "nature deficit disorder."

Horticultural Therapy: Healing Through Horticulture

Horticultural therapy is a powerful practice that utilizes gardening and plant-based activities to promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. At Eat Your Yard Jax, this therapeutic approach is at the heart of their mission. We funded a locally licensed therapist to go through University of Florida's horticultural therapy program to further this mission.

Autistic and special needs individuals working on the farm not only contribute

to its daily operations but also experience the therapeutic benefits of horticultural therapy. Engaging with the soil, nurturing plants, and witnessing the fruits of their labor can have a profound impact on individuals with special needs. It enhances their self-esteem, improves social skills, reduces anxiety, and fosters a sense of belonging and purpose. Eat Your Yard Jax's commitment to inclusivity and horticultural therapy doesn't just benefit the individuals they employ but has a ripple effect on the entire community. By showcasing the abilities and contributions of autistic and special needs individuals, the farm challenges stereotypes and promotes a more inclusive and compassionate society. As families and school groups visit the farm, they witness firsthand the power of diversity and the transformative effects of horticultural therapy. Visitors leave with a deeper understanding of the importance of embracing differences and reconnecting with the natural world.



Braiding Sweetgrass, Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants

By Robin Wall Kimmerer

REVIEW BY

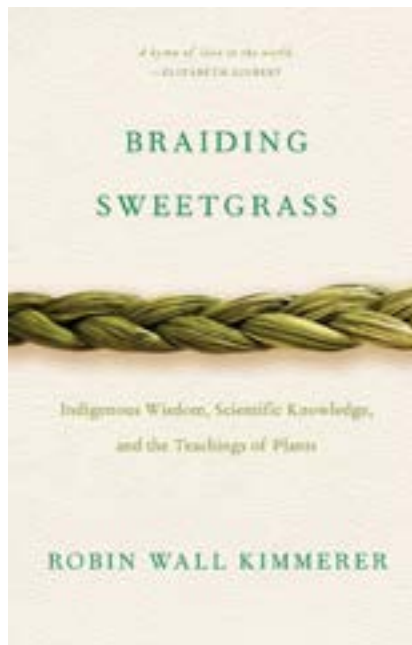
Linda Brown-Kuhn

This book should be read slowly so as not to miss a word of Kimmerer's prose that flows like a sparkling stream, enfolding the reader in moving stories. The purpose of her braid of stories is to heal our relationship with the natural world. She writes, "This braid is woven from three strands: Indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together in service to what matters most."

Through her stories, which are grouped into sections revolving around the care and use of sweetgrass, a sacred and beloved plant in many Indigenous nations, the idea of reciprocity and gratitude stand tall. Her ancestors taught that the earth has many gifts that humans may enjoy but we cannot take and take without giving back. It is our responsibility to care for and sustain these precious gifts so they can sustain us.

Kimmerer's sensory language transports the reader into scenes like this one:

"I come here to listen, to nestle in the curve of the roots in a soft hollow of pine needles, to lean my bones



against the column of white pine, to turn off the voice in my head until I can hear the voices outside it: the shhh of wind in needles, water trickling over rock, nuthatch tapping, chipmunks digging, beechnut falling, mosquito in my ear..."

She also touches on something near and dear to horticultural therapists, the garden, and of its ability to mend relationships

between people and the land. She writes, "A garden is a nursery for nurturing connection..." That is a truth that we all know.

I believe this best-selling book should be a classic for anyone in the horticultural therapy field. The book's message of returning to, respecting, and reconciling with nature is even more crucial now than it was in 2013 when the book was published. A hardcover special edition bound in stamped cloth was released in 2020 with a new introduction from the author and five color illustrations by artist Nate Christopherson.



ACTIVITY

Clay Leaf Bowl Activity

An Interview with Erika Winters, B.A.



PHOTOS BY ERIKA WINTERS

BY Karin A. Bailey

Erika Winters, horticultural therapy (HT) student and owner of Everbloom Consulting in Portland, Oregon, shares with us an affordable, seasonal activity that utilizes leaf forms to create beautiful clay bowls using quick-dry clay and watercolor or acrylic paint. As we welcome the fall and winter seasons, this activity brings nature indoors using fall leaves.

According to Erika, "Many therapeutic benefits can be derived from working with clay. Feeling the smooth texture, shaping the material, and creating meaningful items are ways to help clients with stress

reduction, improvement in mood, fine motor coordination, and range of motion." A project of this nature can be a nostalgic activity, as it may bring up past memories and experiences, such as working in the soil and past enjoyment working with clay and painting. Increases in cognitive stimulation, social, and communication skills are other benefits from engaging in this activity. As a group activity, it can provide social connections and respite from social isolation often experienced by residents of facilities. This activity can be used in settings ranging from youth to those in assisted living facilities and can be adapted for those with developmental and physical disabilities.

Simple structured leaves are usually

chosen for the activity since participants will be cutting out the clay forms. Materials can be prepared in advance so that participants can complete their bowls with as much independence as possible.

A challenge that Erika has observed is the possibility of clay bowls breaking. It is key that the horticultural therapist practice this activity beforehand and that they have a back-up plan, such as having extra bowls prepared in advance. While the activity is appropriate for most settings, it is advisable to consult with the facility in regard to their safety policies and procedures, since the patient will be handling clay, paint, aluminum foil, as well as broken clay fragments. Therapists should also practice universal precautions and sanitize shared materials.

The finished bowls are creations of nature art that can serve as containers for small items, and they can also be fashioned into ornaments. A successful outcome of this activity is when residents enjoy producing beautiful and usable items for themselves and for others using their resources and imagination with support from those trained in horticultural therapy.



ABOUT ERIKA

Erika Winters, BA, resides in Portland, OR, has been a professional gardener for twenty-five years, and has taught gardening at the University of Oregon and in high schools. She is the owner of a horticulture consulting business and also works with [Earthtones Northwest](#). Erika just completed her horticultural therapy internship through the Legacy Health program under the mentorship of Teresia M. Hazen, M.Ed., HTR, QMHP and Meghan McKiernan, BS, HTR.

PROJECT TITLE:

Clay Leaf Impression Bowls

PART ONE: MAKING BOWLS

SESSION TIME: 45-60 minutes

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SESSION: Participants will learn about the redbud tree and make leaf impressions in clay, transforming it into a bowl.

OPENING: Today we will learn about redbud trees and make leaf impression bowls. Next session we will paint them.

THERAPIST PREPARATION STEPS:

Supplies needed: quick dry clay, plastic knives, rolling pin, small bowls, ramekins, 9x9 aluminum foil sheets, cutting board, masking tape, sharpie, hand wipes, napkins. Depending on abilities of participants, have clay pre-rolled before session or have them roll out pre-sized balls of clay.

CLIENT STEPS

1. Say names and answer ice breaker questions.
2. Discuss redbud tree fun facts.
3. Watch and discuss demo steps led by facilitator.
4. Participants roll out/flatten their clay on foil.
5. Place redbud leaf center on clay.
6. Gently roll pin over clay to make leaf vein impression.
7. Grasp plastic knife and trace/cut outline of leaf.
8. Pull leaf away from cut clay and place in center of table.
9. Dip fingers in water (ramekin) and smooth out rough edges of clay.
10. Lift via the foil under clay and place in bowl.
11. Gently fold edges up to shape into bowl shape.
12. Write name on masking tape and place on bowl.
13. Clean hands and workstation.
14. Share one thing learned or enjoyed today.
15. Lead a discussion to ask participants what worked, what parts they liked or what they would change.

FUN & INTERESTING FACTS:

1. The Eastern redbud tree is native to northeastern America.
2. Discuss the variety of your redbud tree or the different types of leaves available.
3. Redbud trees bloom early (Feb-Mar); flowers are edible and taste like citrus.
4. The redbud tree is in the pea family, and helps fix nitrogen in the soil.
5. Humans have been working with clay since 9,000 B.C., and they didn't have kilns either!

Adaptations: Pre-roll out all clay. Assist with placing leaves and rolling pin. Have a few pre-imprinted clay slabs with leaf to be cut out, and some pre-imprinted and pre-cut to be shaped.

Precautions: Practice universal precautions. Sanitize shared materials between participants.

Plant Material: Redbud leaves.

SUPPLY COSTS:

Quick-Dry clay: \$12.00



PART TWO: PAINTING BOWLS

THERAPIST PREPARATION STEPS:

Supplies needed: paint brushes, watercolor paints, acrylic paints, newspaper, plastic water cups for brushes, hand wipes, napkins.

CLIENT STEPS

1. Say names and answer ice breaker question.
2. Recall and discuss redbud tree fun facts.
3. Watch and discuss demo steps led by facilitator.
4. Remove dry clay from foil.
5. Place on newspaper upside down.
6. Paint your initials on the bottom of bowl.
7. Paint the bottom of the bowl with desired color.
8. Paint the top of leaf the same color, or get creative.
9. Wait while paint is drying, discussing each other's work.
10. Use darker color paint to trace lines of leaf veins.
11. Add finishing elements as desired.
12. Leave work to dry.
13. Move masking tape with your name and place on newspaper at your station.
14. Clean hands and workstation.
15. Share one thing learned or enjoyed today.

Adaptations: Have blank leaf bowls pre-shaped and dried for participants who missed last session. Assist with painting as needed.

Plant Material: Redbud leaves.

AHTA

M A G A Z I N E

MAGAZINE SUBMISSION DATE:

March 11, 2024

We are always looking for fresh voices to be heard in the AHTA Magazine so send us your stories by submitting them [here](#).

FOLLOW US ONLINE

