

SPRING 2025

# Cultivating Healing

AHTA MAGAZINE

## How We Work With Youth

*Reflections from the AHTA Community*

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### ALSO FEATURING

Celebrating National  
Horticultural Therapy  
Week 2025

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Mike Gibson: Creating  
Beauty and Connection  
Through the Art of Topiary

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THP PROFILE

**Deb  
Wolf**  
THP

READ ON  
PAGE 8

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## 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.



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SPRING 2025

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### COVER PHOTO

Rich Matteo, HTR, smelling scented geraniums  
with Kha'yen, a visually impaired student at the  
Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia.

PHOTO BY KATHRYN P. HEMSLEY





EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Linda Brown-Kuhn

# Editor's Words

**T**he spring issue seems like the perfect time to unfurl the new name for this publication: AHTA Magazine Cultivating Healing. This wonderfully fitting title was the overwhelming winner based on a vote open to AHTA members of ten potential names dreamed up by the magazine work team.

The path to this name change led me to AHTA's first magazine, published in 2012, following seven years of newsletters. As you can see, it was called AHTA News until 2013, when it became AHTA News Magazine. It wasn't until 2016, when the "News" part was dropped, leaving AHTA Magazine.

As I followed this progression in the magazine archives on our website, I saw mountains of informative articles and a treasure trove of photos showing horticultural therapy (HT) in action. This made me think of all the volunteers over the years who have given their time and



*AHTA's first magazine, published in 2012, initially called "AHTA News."*  
PHOTO BY ???

talents to move the field of HT forward.

Lesley Fleming, for instance, was the first editor-in-chief of the magazine in 2012. She is still contributing in major ways as shown on page 14 with the Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database, called THAD, that she brought to fruition.

It is through the efforts of those before us that we stand where we are now, in the midst of positive changes with more on the way. It's a great time to get involved and to make a difference. Any member can join a work team, a terrific place to

start. Peruse the [work teams](#) and find one that fits your interests. Then email [info@ahta.org](mailto:info@ahta.org) for next steps. We're always looking for more people on the magazine work team!

Wishing you a wonderful spring in this time of change.

**Linda**



## COVER STORY

# How We Work with Youth

*Reflections from the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) Community*

WRITTEN BY

Kelly Warnick, HTR & Andrew Zeiger, M.D.

**P**rofessionals across various sectors of society are increasingly concerned about the challenging times young people are facing. The modern world — shaped by extensive digital engagement, fast-paced routines, indoor-centric leisure and work, climate unpredictability, and a rapidly changing economy — has led to a dramatic rise in anxiety, depression, physical health challenges, social isolation, and difficulty maintaining focus.

The AHTA community understands the powerful role of horticulture and plant-rich spaces as therapeutic for fostering wellness in our youth. Many have been on the frontlines—both nationally and internationally -- of promoting holistic wellness for youth of different ages. This article highlights three AHTA members from varied backgrounds for their inspirational work in nurturing youth well-being and providing emerging generations with important life skills to fuel their futures.



## SPOTLIGHT ONE

# Bob Scarfo, BLA, MLA, Ph.D.

AHTA Member

As a practicing landscape architect in Spokane, Washington, Scarfo has dedicated a significant portion of his career to working with youth. As a now retired Associate Professor at Washington State University, he initiated a collaboration with On Track Academy, a choice option school for high school juniors and seniors in the Spokane public school district. He continues to lead this partnership, supporting students through innovative educational opportunities.

Currently, Scarfo and his On Track Academy students are creating a forested environment, called “Meet Us at the Trees,” that will serve as an outdoor learning classroom for the Academy. At the very start of the design process, Scarfo asked his students to fully immerse in the plant-rich backdrop of the future outdoor classroom, paying attention to what comes up for them as they experience the natural surroundings of the site. Scarfo explained the rationale for this, citing John Simonds, an icon in the field of landscape architecture: “We design *experiences*, not places, spaces, or things,” he says. “The spaces, places, and things grow out of the experiences.”<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with this, Scarfo prompted his students with reflective questions that would help them form a narrative about the forested site experience, such as: “What is going on in your minds as you approach the forested



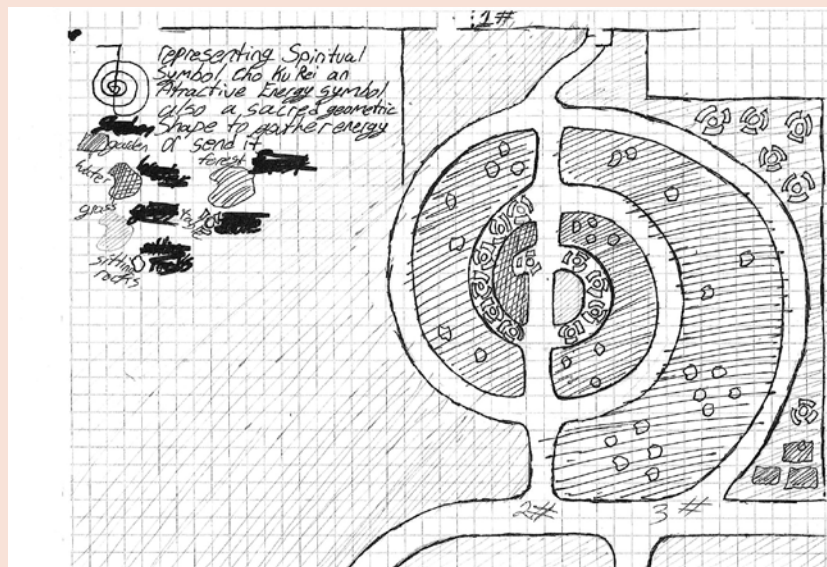
Autumn Anderson (foreground) and Adrian Brian discussed the meditative philosophy they used to develop the circular design seen here.

PHOTO BY BOB SCARFO

environment? What observations stand out? How can those impactful observations shape the direction of the ‘Meet Us at the Trees’ design?” One student sensed the energy and diversity of the forested environment, ultimately drawing up a concept plan for the project that incorporated this important aspect. Other students focused on different sensory aspects.

“We all read the landscapes we experience,” Scarfo said. When we take the time to understand the experiential narratives of the populations we design for, their stories naturally shape the design concept from the start, creating a more effective therapeutic landscape. This ensures that the individuals served – and their unique ways of perceiving and appreciating plant-rich environments – remain central to the important work of designing therapeutic green spaces.

Through the design of this forested environment classroom, Scarfo engages his students in compassionate and thoughtfully designed learning experiences that encourage them to create, build, connect, experiment and iterate, equipping them with essential life skills for the future. All of this takes place, while the students simultaneously gain the health benefits of outdoor learning, direct interaction with plants, sense of community, and immersion in an energy-restoring, plant-inspired environment.



Adrian Brian and Autumn Anderson's early design ideas that did contribute to the final Forested Classroom design.

PHOTO BY BOB SCARFO

<sup>1</sup> Simonds, J.O. (1961). *Landscape architecture: A manual of site planning and design* (p. 225). New York: McGraw-Hill.

## SPOTLIGHT TWO

**Katie Ryzhikov, OTR/L, HTR***AHTA Member*

**R**yzhikov specializes in working with children and adolescents whose activities of daily living are disrupted due to developmental, physical, cognitive, sensorimotor, or socioemotional concerns. Ryzhikov's expertise and commitment to using horticultural therapy (HT) and therapeutic horticulture (TH) to nurture young lives was particularly impactful when she had the opportunity to create a program for refugees, aged 13-17 years, in Texas.

The migration journey can take a significant physical and emotional toll, especially on children. Migrants often encounter stressful, crisis-provoking, or traumatic events during their journey. Estimates suggest that 80 percent of migrants experience anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Importantly, the support individuals receive during, and in the immediate aftermath of a crisis often plays a crucial role in shaping its long-term impact on their lives. "Knowing that there is a strong relationship between creative expression and healing, we saw an opportunity to use creative, trauma-informed ways to deliver therapy to these at-risk youth," Ryzhikov explained.

The goal was to address key elements of immediate-to-midterm crisis intervention: promote safety, calm, self-efficacy, connectedness, and hope. If a child was identified with a significant health concern upon arrival or showed signs of poor mental well-being during their stay, they could opt in to the TH program.

*Self portrait.*

PHOTO BY KATARINA MORGAN

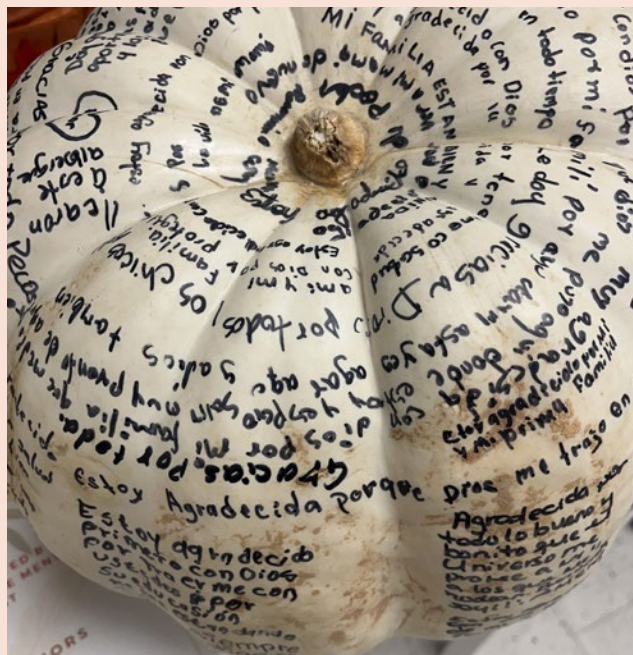
*Gratitude pumpkin written by the kids at Thanksgiving.*

PHOTO BY KATARINA MORGAN

The TH sessions occurred outdoors around the garden beds or inside a room filled with plants. The sessions provided youth with an engaging horticultural experience, offering moments of soft fascination and effortless attention, allowing the children to shift focus from their typical routine. The sessions were often creative, frequently encouraging the children to plant and nurture species native to their home country. This was deeply meaningful and beneficial to them for connection, identity, sense of community, and the act of planting new roots.

The TH program achieved its intended goals - fostering in youth a sense of healing, hope, empowerment, calm, self-expression, and a deeper connection to both cultural roots and their new home.

*Woven roots activity - symbolizing setting down new roots.*

PHOTO BY ELLA HAYSLETT



## SPOTLIGHT THREE

**Rich Matteo, HTR***AHTA Member*

**A**lthough today you can find Matteo in a state-of-the-art greenhouse, leading an HT program at a school for visually impaired children (aged 3-22 years) near Philadelphia, his journey started when he was a schoolteacher expecting his first child. He was teaching history and English while overseeing the school's garden club across the campus' expansive site. He loved "creating space for kids in [my] classroom to come, talk, smell plants, and be comfortable." Once he knew he was an expecting father, he thought hard about the career future he wanted. His research brought him to HT.

Matteo completed the HT professional registration process over four to five years while he was working full time. He completed his internship at Bryn Mawr Rehab during two consecutive summers prior to jumping into an HT career. His first HT job is the one he still holds today at the Overbrook School for the Blind. It was 2018 and the school had just completed a new greenhouse after years of fundraising. Though the school had a long-standing gardening program, when Matteo was hired to oversee



*Making potpourri with student Nick.*  
PHOTO BY KATHRYN P. HEMSLEY

the school's HT program, he was handed the keys to an empty greenhouse.

Today, Matteo uses plant-based activities to aid students' therapeutic, wellness, and vocational goals. Matteo describes working with three visually impaired students during tomato-picking season, creating a little assembly line under a tomato bush. "[I] guide the kid's hand to the tomato; he pops it off the vine and hands it to the next kid. They love it. They can't tell if what they're doing is right or wrong. I just guide them in the process," he said. For older students preparing to graduate soon, Matteo leads vocational sessions such as completing tasks off a written checklist or selling garden products at campus events. While each day varies greatly based on the school's schedule, a typical day includes time for maintenance of the half dozen garden sites on campus, coordination meetings with other educators/staff, four or five structured sessions one-on-one or with small groups, and open house free time where students can drop in.

Leading a school-based HT program is one of many ways a person can have a career in HT working with youth. Many of the youth Matteo works with are medically complex, which gives Matteo great meaning in his work: "The beauty of what we do is that we take them away from their routine and give them something that they can take ownership of."



*Atavia assembling a pinecone wreath.*  
PHOTO BY KATHRYN P. HEMSLEY

More spotlights on our hard-working member-base will continue to be offered in various media forms throughout the year as part of the AHTA 'Growing Impact' Campaign: Advancing Youth Wellness Through Horticulture. Our goal is to share expertise, work together, and take action to cultivate a healthier, more mindful future for our youth.



## THP PROFILE

# Deb Wolf

## THP

*Interviewed by Linda Brown-Kuhn*



**Tell us about your background and education. Have you always worked in therapeutic horticulture?**

Most of my working career I worked as a bookkeeper/administrative secretary. When I turned 50, I decided it was time to pursue my passion for helping others. In 2001, while still working, I went back to college to finish my degree. In 2008, I graduated from Regis University, in Denver, Colorado, with a B.S. in Applied Psychology. Shortly after graduating, I began the certificate program through the Horticultural Therapy Institute (HTI) in Denver. In 2011, I received a certificate in Horticultural Therapy (HT) and the title of Therapeutic Horticultural Specialist.

Fast forward to 2024, I am now working at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville UT Gardens as a Horticultural Therapy Program Assistant. When the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) offered the therapeutic horticulture practitioner (THP) designation I felt this was a good way to let other professionals I work with know that the TH services I provide are more than just gardening. I also chose this route over a registered horticultural therapist (HTR) due to the expense of taking plant classes, and my age.

**How did you get your start in therapeutic horticulture?**

While working on obtaining my certificate at HTI, I learned that two local counselors in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, had

just begun a vocational work-ready skills program, called Community Cultivation for high schoolers and young adults living with a disability. They were looking for volunteers, so I jumped at the opportunity. Once I received my certificate, I was hired as Community Cultivation's Therapeutic Horticultural Specialist. I then spent the next four years helping to prepare youth and young adults with disabilities ages 15-25, for work in the real world. Using TH, I taught them the social and professional skills they would need to be appropriate and successful in their future jobs.

**How did you combine your interests within the therapeutic horticulture field?**

Living in Colorado, I spent a lot of time hiking, snowshoeing, and camping, which resulted in my love of plants and the peace of nature. As far back as I can remember I have always loved to create things, help others, and spend time in nature. What better way to combine my three major interests into a job than to become a THP? Not only does it provide others with happiness, but it does for me as well.

**What has been your experience in developing a career in TH?**

I have been extremely fortunate to have found TH programs that were already in progress or established, allowing me to feel comfortable moving into them without the hurdles of starting something on my own. In 2018, I moved to a small



*Sow 2 Grow participant Ike and Deb, THP, transplanting a begonia into the Grounding Garden.*  
PHOTO BY DERRICK STOWELL

town in North Carolina where some colleagues and I began setting up a TH program. Unfortunately, not everyone was invested in getting it off the ground, so it never materialized. Realizing who I am and how difficult it can be to start a new program, I decided that getting involved with an established program was the best fit for me. In 2022, I contacted Dr. Derrick Stowell at the University of Tennessee UT Gardens about a TH position. I began as a volunteer, worked part-time, and in 2023, was hired full time as a Horticultural Therapy Program Assistant/Program Development. As Dr. Stowell's assistant, I have continued working and developing TH programs for residents at senior facilities, behavioral



health programs, and assisting with our interns. In 2023, along with Dr. Stowell, I developed and implemented a summer vocational work-ready skills program for those 13 years through high school living with disabilities, called Sow 2 Grow – a program that continues to grow.

**Are you conducting any research in therapeutic horticulture? If so, can you tell us what your research focus is?**

The UT Gardens conducts a variety of research related to HT, TH, and garden education. This research is led by Dr. Stowell. I currently do not conduct research; however, we utilize evidence-based practices as we create and develop our TH programs.

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

In developing any TH programming, I determine the type of program I want to develop, the population I will be serving, their needs, and my overall goals. The resources that I continue to use come from what I learned at HTI and from Dr. Stowell, for whom I currently work. Other resources include past experiences working with a particular population and type of program, the Therapeutic Horticulture Activities



*Sow 2 Grow participants harvesting the fruits of their labor.*  
PHOTO BY DERRICK STOWELL

Database (THAD – see page 14), gardening and plant experience, horticultural therapy books and websites, associations that pertain to the population I'm working with, various symposiums, American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) conferences I attended, webinars, gardening/house plant books, Google, and my co-workers.

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

Dr. Stowell created the HT/TH program at the University of Tennessee Gardens in 2012. Since that time the program has grown from working with assisted living and memory care to offering programs to a variety of populations including veterans, teens with disabilities, and behavioral health programs.

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

My favorite plants are holiday cacti: Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. I love seeing the surprises on the residents' faces at various senior facilities when I educate them on the differences between the holiday cacti. Many of them only know of the Thanksgiving cactus which is often advertised as a Christmas cactus.

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

The UT Gardens accepts HT and TH interns. We also work with Recreational Therapy interns.

**Do you have personal perspectives to share with present or future therapeutic horticulturists?**

If you love working with people and plants this is a great field to enter. Determine whether you are the type to start a program from scratch or whether you prefer to work with an established TH program. Be patient, flexible, and don't be afraid to work with various populations as you may find out you like working with them after all. Volunteering with a program you are interested in working with can sometimes lead to a paid position. Take as many plant classes as possible.



*Residents at Sherrill Hills Senior Living making an open terrarium.*  
PHOTO BY DEB WOLF



MARCH 16-22, 2025

# Celebrating National Horticultural Therapy Week

*Coordinated by Linda Brown-Kuhn*

Every spring, the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) gears up for National Horticultural Therapy Week by hosting special events and activities that increase awareness of horticultural therapy (HT) and showcase the healing work that we do. Here's a sampling of how some local and regional groups marked the occasion.



*Participants at the Wellness Fair celebrate Horticultural Therapy Week, representing CHTN, mental health practitioners, and Master Gardeners.*

PHOTO BY JULIE BRODY PHOTOGRAPHY

## Redwood City, California

Members of the California Horticultural Therapy Network (CHTN) organized The Heal Your Plants, Heal Yourself wellness fair, held on Saturday, March 22nd, in Redwood City, California. Hosted at Little Green A Plant Bar, a charming café offering both coffee and plants for sale, the fair provided a welcoming space for community members to learn, connect, and grow. The event featured interactive horticultural therapy activities led by Ciri Malamud, HTR, which delighted and inspired participants. Attendees enjoyed the opportunity to consult with Master Gardeners Megan Goulden, THP, and Denece Dodson, who shared their expertise on how to heal struggling houseplants. Visitors asked questions about therapy,



mental well-being, and self-care with April Ellis LCSW, HTR, who has a nearby outpatient therapy clinic. CHTN member and author, Rohini Deshpande, HTR, PhD, sold copies of her recently published HT book.

As the first event of its kind for CHTN, the wellness fair successfully celebrated Horticultural Therapy Week while also marking the launch of CHTN's new, vibrant website: [www.californiahorticulturaltherapy.com](http://www.californiahorticulturaltherapy.com). The overwhelming positive response ensures that this gathering was just the beginning, paving the way for future events that continue to explore the powerful connections between plants and personal well-being.



Three women immerse themselves in a soothing horticultural therapy session with fragrant lavender.  
PHOTO BY JULIE BRODY PHOTOGRAPHY

## Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Horticultural Therapy Week coincided with Creative Arts Therapy Week at The Behavioral Wellness Center at Girard (Be Well) in Philadelphia, PA, offering a unique opportunity to showcase the diverse therapeutic modalities within the Creative Arts Therapy (CAT) Department. Be Well is a comprehensive behavioral health facility providing services including acute psychiatric care, substance use recovery services, an outpatient mental health clinic, and a primary care health clinic.

In addition to the regularly scheduled therapy groups for clients, CAT staff hosted daily lunchtime activities, inviting staff and guests to engage in experiential demonstrations of various creative therapies. On the day dedicated to horticultural therapy (HT), Tina Kocol, the lead of the HT program, guided participants through hands-on activities such as mixing soil, propagating houseplants, and planting seeds. Attendees not only learned about the importance of healthy soil but also gained confidence in caring for their new plants.

The week-long collaboration highlighted the essential role of creative arts therapies within the facility. The event fostered interdisciplinary teamwork and reinforced the power of integrating various therapeutic approaches to support holistic healing.



The mobile herb garden.  
PHOTO BY TINA KOCOL



## Somerset, New Jersey

**H**appy Horticultural Therapy Week! Gardening isn't just about plants – it's about healing, growth and connection. Robert Wood Johnson, Somerset's Steeplechase Cancer Center, hosts a monthly "Horticulture Workshop" for cancer patients and their caregivers. Led by Laura DePrado, B.S., HTR., the program provides uplifting, fun, multisensory and engaging activities throughout the seasons for attendees.

This month, the HT team at the Steeplechase Cancer Center accepted a certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from Congressman Kean's office to commemorate Horticultural Therapy Week and to recognize the holistic, patient-focused approach to care. ([Read an article Laura DePrado wrote about HT Week](#)).

The New Jersey Senate and General Assembly Commemorated 10 years of NJ Horticultural Therapy Week, March 16-22, presenting a Joint Resolution, to Laura DePrado, CEO and horticultural therapy practitioner, Final Touch, Plantscaping, LLC, of Branchburg, and the Somerset County Commissioners also recognized, at their March 11th meeting.



Sharing the joy of planting with cancer patients and their caregivers.  
PHOTO BY ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL STAFF



Presenting the Resolution is Assemblyman John DiMaio on behalf of Senator Steinhardt and Eric Peterson, D23, and Senator Zwicker, Assemblywoman Drulis, and Assemblyman Freiman, D16, with Commissioner Melonie Marano, presenting the Proclamation to DePrado.

Shown Left and Right, Ryan Eppler, Middle Earth, program facilitator, Diann Robinson, Executive Director Adult Day Center of Somerset County, Commissioner Doug Singletary, Liz Thompson, NJ Farm Bureau, Commissioner Paul Drake, and Chris Edwards, CEO, Somerset County Business Partnership. Absent from photo, Lori Jenssen, Executive Director, New Jersey Nursery Landscape Association.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOMERSET COUNTY PIO, NJ



## Bronx, New York

**E**very HT Week, the Mid-Atlantic Horticultural Therapy Network (MAHTN) collaborates with the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) to host a networking event for students, or anyone interested in horticultural therapy (HT) and therapeutic horticulture (TH). This year's hugely successful event featured inspiring speakers who shared insights into their programs, with some even offering exciting internship opportunities. It was a valuable opportunity to connect, learn, and explore new possibilities in the field.

Thank you to all the following speakers for sharing

MAHTN-NYBG HT Week Networking Event.  
PHOTOS BY LORI SHERMAN





# Save the Date!

## AHTA 2025 Conference Goes Virtual

WRITTEN BY




April Ellis, LCSW, HTR

**T**he American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) is excited to announce that the 2025 Annual Conference will be held virtually from **October 9–11, 2025!** This global event will bring together professionals, educators, students, and advocates to explore the latest advancements in horticultural therapy (HT) and therapeutic horticulture (TH).

Don't miss this opportunity to connect, learn, and grow with the global horticultural therapy community. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more details!

For questions or suggestions, contact [info@ahta.org](mailto:info@ahta.org).





### WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR?

-  **Consultation Groups (Communities of Practice):** Engage in peer-led discussions tailored to specific fields, such as healthcare, education, and elder care.
-  **Spotlight on HT/TH Programs:** Discover innovative programs making an impact worldwide.
-  **Educational Programs Showcase:** Learn about academic institutions offering horticultural therapy coursework and degrees.

### WHY ATTEND?

This year's conference will feature engaging presentations, networking opportunities, and inspiring keynote speakers who are leaders in the field. Attendees will gain valuable insights into best practices, research developments, and the expanding role of horticultural therapy in diverse settings.

### WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

-  Horticultural therapists and allied health professionals
-  Educators, students, and researchers in HT/TH
-  Program facilitators and industry leaders
-  Anyone passionate about the healing power of plants!



# Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database



GRAPHIC BY ALEX LOPEZ

WRITTEN BY

**Lesley Fleming, HTR & Elizabeth (Leah) Diehl, RLA, HTM**

**T**herapeutic Horticulture Activities Database, (THAD), is a collaborative project providing a free online database of therapeutic horticulture activities. It was initiated in 2023 by Diane Relf, and the THAD Working Group which includes the Florida Horticulture for Health Network, Nova Scotia Horticulture for Health Network, California Horticultural Therapy Network, Mid Atlantic Horticultural Therapy Network, the Carolinas Horticultural Therapy Network, and the University of Florida Certificate in Horticultural Therapy.

This database was created acknowledging activities are an integral component of horticultural therapy (HT) and therapeutic horticulture (TH) programs. One key piece - intentional connections to plants are an essential element. In HT/TH programs, plant-based activities are designed and structured to emphasize identified goals, objectives, and therapeutic benefits based on the needs of the clients.

Most high-quality activities can be adapted or modified to serve different client groups successfully. The activities found in THAD

have been developed or adapted by HT professionals and are presented in compliance with standards of practice from the American Horticultural Therapy Association (2025). Although they are formatted for use by horticultural therapy practitioners, the activities can be adapted and implemented by a broad range of practitioners to suit the needs of both those delivering and benefitting from the activities.

THAD uses three primary categories to present and organize activities: *Activities*, *Goals* and *Populations*. Each primary category contains related sub-categories (see the chart on the next page).

Therapeutic goals are suggested in multiple health domains for each activity. Though there may be a number of therapeutic goals identified, typically there would be one or two used in the delivery of the TH intervention.

THAD activities include a description of the activity, therapeutic goals, step by step process for delivery, materials list, safety considerations, applications for populations and author/photographer credit.





Lavender misting spray atomizer.  
PHOTO BY K. BRECHNER

THAD includes wide-ranging TH activities like air drying leafy herbs, [building and planting a pallet garden](#), propagating herbs by division, repotting plants, [harvesting herbs grown for roots/rhizomes and bulbs](#), making herbal oils, freezing herbs, [handmade paper](#), and a field trip to a community garden.

THAD was launched in January 2024, has more than 225 TH activities with more being added each month. THAD can be accessed via [this link](#).



#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Lesley Fleming, HTR**, has led the THAD initiative, orchestrating the collaborative project including five HT networks and 80 contributors. She leads the Florida and Nova Scotia Horticulture for Health Networks, publishes two quarterly e-pubs, and writes extensively on issues in the profession.

**Leah Diehl, HTM**, is Director of Therapeutic Horticulture at the University of Florida and a faculty member of the Environmental Horticulture Department. She runs therapeutic horticulture programming, manages research studies, and leads the Certificate in Horticultural Therapy.

## DATABASE ORGANIZED BY THESE CATAGORIES

### ACTIVITIES

*Planting*  
*Propagation*  
*Plant Care/Maintenance*  
*Harvesting*  
*Herbs*  
*Food/Cooking*  
*Design*  
*Creative Expression/Arts*

### GOALS

*Cognitive/Intellectual*  
*Physical*  
*Psychological/Emotional*  
*Sensory*  
*Social*

### POPULATIONS

*All Populations*  
*Children/Youth*  
*Physical Disabilities*  
*Mental Health*  
*Rehabilitation*  
*Food Insecure*  
*Veterans/Military*  
*Seniors/Dementia*  
*Medical Conditions*  
*Rehabilitation*  
*Trauma Survivors*  
*Other Specialized Populations*

about their programs and their love of HT/TH!

- **Stephanie Bourke**, TH Intern from Frelinghuysen Arboretum
- **Rachelle Kritzer Filipek Ph.D.**, TH Intern from T.H.R.I.V.E. @ NYBG
- **Jane O'Brien**, TH Program Director from J-Atep Flower Farm CSA
- **Maggie Riche**, Program Director for Plant-Grow-Give @ The Mercy Home
- **Fred Ellman**, HT, Program Director from Blossom Respite Cafe and Garden

- **Mikkele Lawless**, HT, CDP, MCMG, Program Director from Earth's Embrace at Parker Health Group

A big thank you to all who attended, **Phyllis D'Amico & Anne Meore** from NYBG, and the **MAHTN Board Members**.

**Save the date for next year's MAHTN-NYBG HT Week Event: March 22, 2026.**



# What is Certification?

WRITTEN BY

**Matthew D. Turner, Ph.D. ICE-CCP**  
Executive Director of AHTA

**C**ertification is a formal recognition that an individual has met established professional standards in a specific field. It demonstrates a commitment to excellence, competency, and ethical practice. In horticultural therapy, certification validates an individual's expertise in using plants and nature-based interventions to promote health and well-being. It assures employers, clients, and the public that certified professionals have the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to practice effectively and ethically.

## Understanding Certification vs. Certificates

It is important to distinguish between professional certification and certificates of completion. The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) recognizes that educational seminars, workshops, and webinars may provide a certificate of completion, which add valuable professional education. These do not, however, equate to professional certification. A certificate from a short-term educational program signifies participation in a learning experience but does not indicate assessment of competency or adherence to professional standards. Simply calling a certificate a "certification" does not make it a true certification—it must involve a formal process of evaluation, including testing, experience verification, and adherence to ethical guidelines. True certification requires a comprehensive assessment of knowledge, skills, and professional practice to ensure competency in the field.

## AHTA's Horticultural Therapist – Board Certified (HT-BC) Credential

The American Horticultural Therapy Association is launching the Horticultural Therapist – Board Certified (HT-BC) credential in 2026. This certification will set a new professional standard, ensuring that horticultural therapists meet rigorous competency and ethical requirements.

## Built on a Job Task Analysis

The HT-BC certification is being developed based on a Job Task Analysis (JTA), a research-driven process that identifies the critical knowledge, skills, and abilities required for competent practice. Conducting a JTA ensures that the certification reflects real-world responsibilities and aligns with industry needs. This method is widely recognized as the gold standard for developing valid and legally defensible certifications.

## Why This Matters

- **Ensures Relevance** – The certification is based on the actual tasks horticultural therapists perform in professional settings, making it highly applicable and meaningful.
- **Supports Professional Growth** – By defining key competencies, it provides a roadmap for skill development and career advancement.
- **Enhances Credibility** – Employers, healthcare institutions, and regulatory bodies can trust that certified individuals meet established professional standards.

The HT-BC credential will strengthen the field of horticultural therapy, ensuring that certified professionals are well-equipped to deliver high-quality, research-based therapeutic interventions.



## WHY CERTIFICATION MATTERS FOR HORTICULTURAL THERAPISTS

**Horticultural therapy is a growing field that bridges healthcare, social services, and horticulture to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being. As the profession gains recognition, certification provides several key benefits:**

### 1. Professional Credibility

Certification establishes horticultural therapists as qualified professionals with verified expertise. It distinguishes them from those without formal training, enhancing trust among employers, healthcare providers, and clients.

### 2. Standardization of Practice

A certification program ensures that horticultural therapists adhere to best practices and ethical guidelines. This helps maintain high-quality care and consistent outcomes across different therapeutic settings.

### 3. Demonstrating Expertise and Skill Development

Certification provides a structured way to showcase your knowledge and abilities in horticultural therapy. The certification process also encourages ongoing skill development, helping you refine your techniques, stay informed on best practices, and integrate new research into your work. By earning certification, you signal to employers, colleagues, and clients that you are committed to professional growth and excellence in the field.

### 4. Increased Public and Industry Recognition

As certification becomes the industry standard, it raises awareness of horticultural therapy as a credible and evidence-based profession. It also helps build a stronger professional community that advocates for the field.

### 5. Continuing Education and Growth

A certification process often includes ongoing education requirements, ensuring that professionals stay current with the latest research, techniques, and advancements in horticultural therapy.



# Mike Gibson

*Creating Beauty and Connections  
Through the Art of Topiary*

*Mike with one of his  
topiary creations.*  
PHOTO BY FORMAT AGENCY

WRITTEN BY  
**Karin A. Bailey**

**M**ike Gibson is an award-winning topiary and property artist, a South Carolina Certified Landscape Professional, and the owner of Gibson Works, LLC located in Columbia, South Carolina. He also holds a Therapeutic Horticulture Certificate of Mastery from the NC State Extension - North Carolina Botanical Garden Therapeutic Horticulture Program. Also known as “Gibby-Siz,” Gibson uses his ambidextrous, Edward Scissorhands-skills to create unique illusion topiary art.

At age seven, Gibson began his journey growing up in Youngstown, Ohio. With support from his multi-faceted and talented beautician mother and his award-winning artist father, an enterprising Gibson was cutting hair and landscaping by age ten. He created designs and sculpted them into the hair of clients while he also provided landscape services in his community. In time, his designs would move from classical to more abstract.

Gibson's father introduced him to the work of a man named Pearl Fryar, a world-



*Topiary therapy workshop in progress.*  
PHOTO BY MICHAEL P. GIBSON

renowned African-American topiary artist. Gibson immediately identified with Fryar and realized that they shared the same desire to create beautiful and meaningful spaces. Gibson would later meet and forge a relationship with Fryar, and this connection would have a tremendous impact on Gibson's life and career.

While fulfilling a mission to create 330 topiaries, Gibson would earn several awards and distinctions. In 2021, HGTV reached out to him, and he would later become a contestant on the show *Clipped*, featuring Martha Stewart as a host and judge of a

topiary competition. Gibson would eventually move, with his family, to Columbia, South Carolina. He would serve one year as the Topiary Artist-in-Residence at Pearl Fryar's famous topiary garden in Bishopville, South Carolina, and help restore his ailing friend's massive collection of living art.

For the past three years, Gibson has been beautifying Columbia, creating over 600 topiaries across the country. After winning the Sowing Excellence Award from the American Public Garden Association,





*Topiary therapy workshop.*  
PHOTO BY MICHAEL P. GIBSON

Gibson has set the goal of partnering with Columbia Parks and Recreation and building a topiary space where experts will come to share their knowledge of nature. It

will also be a place where youth can learn topiary and connect with nature, and where all can be inspired to help improve their communities. The topiary workshops will focus on patience, reducing stress, and

finding a sense of accomplishment. Gibson wants to combine everything that he has learned to help others and positively change communities. Other goals for Gibson include developing a topiary certificate program and becoming an author. He strives to continue his journey to beautify the world, discover his life's purpose, and share the art of topiary.

Through topiary, Gibson conveys a message to today's youth that they have options to succeed in this world and that they can accomplish their dreams. He strives to cultivate those aspirations and grow the practice of topiary because he believes that more topiary equals more peaceful and loving spaces in the world.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Karin A. Bailey** is a member of the AHTA Magazine Work Team and a graduate of the Horticultural Therapy Institute. She resides with her family in Franklin, TN.

## Mike's Topiary Tips

According to Gibson, anyone can be a topiary artist. Topiary is the pruning of shrubs into any shape, and the practice is empowering, transformative, and should be included across all horticultural therapy (HT), therapeutic horticulture (TH), and garden activities. Therapeutic benefits of topiary include increasing levels of creativity, stress reduction, and it can serve as a catalyst for healing. The following are some practical tips to bring topiary into HT/TH practices.

- Reaching out to a botanical garden and forming a partnership (and vice versa) is a good way to attract a diverse group of topiary workshop participants.
- Twelve is an ideal number of participants for a two-hour topiary workshop.
- Two participants can share a table with ample space between them.
- Chairs should be provided at each table.
- The experience of the participants is heightened when workshops are held outdoors, and it is important to have a shaded workspace and ideal temperatures.
- For indoor workshops, participants should face windows so they have an outside view to enhance productivity.
- Durable, disposable gloves, and ergonomic tools, such as bypass pruners, topiary snips, and household scissors, are provided for each participant.
- Safety goggles are required, and safety instructions and policies should be delivered before and during the activity.
- Small tabletop shrubs, around two feet in height, are recommended for topiary, and examples of appropriate shrubs include lemon cypress, rosemary, lavender, and any kind of fragrant shrub.
- A demonstration of the activity should be offered.
- Teach the cutting of simple spirals, and then let participants make their own designs.
- Participants take home their topiary creations.



# Work, Place, Folk

## What Patrick Geddes Can Teach Us Today about Community Gardening



WRITTEN BY

**Brendan Yukins, LSW**

"Think globally, act locally" is a slogan many of us have seen on a bumper sticker. From community gardens to recycling programs, the slogan instructs us to solve issues facing our planet through local, community actions. What fewer people know about is the author of this philosophy, Patrick Geddes (Meller, 1973). Patrick Geddes was a city planner and sociologist who pioneered an evolutionary view of cities. He worked from the late 19th century into the Neotechnic Age. He coined the term "conurbation" to describe the fusion of many towns and a large city into one metropolitan area (Geddes, 1904). From his lookout tower in Edinburgh, he lectured on how Roman ruins, Medieval buildings, British colonial townhouses,

and Industrial factories coexisted in that same urban landscape. Geddes was part of a burgeoning sociologist class of academics who cared about the wellbeing of the average working family. He developed the Civic Survey for capturing the natural patterns of human energy (the patterns of movement and activity of large groups of people). Using this tool, he advised on the new plans of cities around the globe, including Edinburgh, London, Tel Aviv, Bombay, and Bengal. Using the framework "Work-Place-Folk," Geddes strove to maintain dignified living conditions for people in low-income housing by respecting their patterns of commerce (Work), the geographic features of the land and their interaction it (Place), and the cultural heritage and rituals particular to their communities (Folk) (Geddes, 1915).

Geddes himself practiced his theory. He moved his family into the slums of Edinburgh and set about restoring the Old City (Defries, 1927). Geddes constructed Edinburgh's first six community gardens in 1909. These gardens provided the children in the low-income community access to green space and fresh produce. Horticultural therapists today can thank Geddes for using community gardening as a public health strategy (Cockburn Association, 2025; Meller, 1973). Even today, we can refine our practice by drawing upon Geddes' rich legacy.

When planning a community garden, how are all three categories of "Work-Place-Folk" respected in the design? I will use my own community garden in Chicago, Illinois as the example. At Chase Park

Community Garden, we represent a mix of the three neighborhoods we sit among: Uptown, Ravenswood, and Andersonville. My neighbors include members of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants from Mexico, Colombia, and Gambia, refugees from Iraq and Venezuela, and 3rd-generation Chicagoans of African American, Swedish, Irish, and Italian descent. We grow foods that remind us of home, herbs that we bring from across wide oceans. We have a windchime made of industrial metal bits. One original Honey Locust trees still stands in the park's corner. During the Victorian Era, her feathery canopy shaded the crowds who came to watch the Leland Giants play. The Leland Giants were one of the original African American baseball teams in the American Negro Leagues. We take clippings from the old tree and raise bonsai, preserving in our own way the history of the community.

If you want to use Geddes' framework in your own garden, here are some questions to guide you (Geddes, 1915): How have people historically made a living where this garden is? What different cultures have inhabited this land, from Native tribes to contemporary immigrant waves? What are the traditions and rituals of the community every year? Then, see how you can incorporate these answers into your garden. If you are in a farming community, would you like to plant corn? If you celebrate Dia de Los Muertos, maybe grow marigolds. Artifacts such as old bricks and wagon wheels can be used in the architecture of the space. If members come from picnicking cultures,

# High-Quality HT Education for Over 20 Years

WRITTEN BY

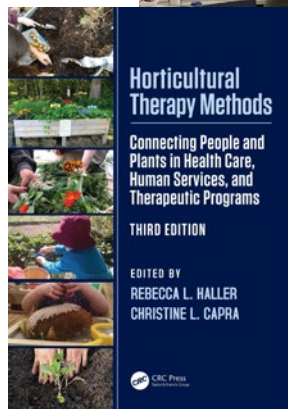
**Christine Capra**

**T**he Horticultural Therapy Institute (HTI) continues its over 20-year mission as a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to provide high quality horticultural therapy (HT) education. Not only does the Institute offer an accredited certificate program, but the team has also written and edited the leading textbooks in the field. The third edition of the **Horticultural Therapy Methods** book is slated to be released at the end of April!

Since 2002, we have served more than 1,500 students with current and relevant instructional techniques, as well as advancements in systems that connect students with practitioners and programs around the world. Serving the diverse student base and seeing the contributions they make to the field continues to reward the entire team at HTI. One student recently said, "This certificate contributed greatly to my continuously growing validation and inspiration to be part of this amazing work!"

Since its inception, face-to-face learning has been the cornerstone of HTI's educational model. With that in mind, we will offer the Fundamentals of HT class this fall at the Anchor Center for Blind Children in Denver, Colorado. HTI deeply values face-to-face learning as the best way to prepare students for work in the connected and nature-based human service field of HT. In-person classes offer the student opportunities for direct communication, collaboration, active engagement, and experiential learning.

Even with that, we understand that in



*New 3rd edition of Horticultural Therapy Methods.*  
PHOTO BY RUTLEDGE PRESS



*HTI Director, Rebecca Haller teaching.*  
PHOTO BY CHRISTINE CAPRA

person is not always a viable option for all students. Online classes at HTI offer a unique format that includes synchronous instruction

in a model that provides full immersion in the subject matter for three to four eight-hour days. This model offers continuity and real-time class discussions and experiences. Students who opt for online learning are encouraged to attend at least one of the classes in person to build community with fellow classmates and connect with our distinctive teaching team.

According to a student in a face-to-face class, "I was able to connect deeply with the people around me. Over zoom you can have conversations and get to know people, but in a much less natural way. There is something so different about being physically present with people and sharing a space together."

As the institute moves into the next years of educational offerings, maintaining those deep connections is paramount. The faculty and staff look forward to continuing the journey of quality HT education and giving students the tools to impact the lives of

those in their own communities. HTI seeks to build on the many achievements as well as consider possibilities for broadening and/or deepening the work we already do. Stay tuned for developments.

New certificate classes begin this fall with three sections of Fundamentals of Horticultural Therapy. For more information go to [www.htinstitute.org](http://www.htinstitute.org) or for information on the 3rd edition of Horticultural Therapy Methods: Connecting People and Plants in Health Care, Human Services and Therapeutic Programs, go to [Routledge Taylor & Francis Group](http://RoutledgeTaylor&FrancisGroup.com).



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Christine Capra** co-founded the Horticultural Therapy Institute in 2003 with Rebecca Haller, HTM. She is the program manager at the Institute and has served as co-editor of *Horticultural Therapy Methods: Connecting People and Plants in Health Care, Human Services, and Therapeutic Programs* and *The Profession and Practice of Horticultural Therapy*. She has served on numerous work teams for the AHTA.



## ACTIVITY

# Plantain Salve

## Transforming “Weeds” into Wellness



LEFT: Broadleaf Plantain, long used in skin poultices for its anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties. [More on how to ID this plant.](#) RIGHT: Plantain Salve. PHOTOS BY SARAH TANKE

WRITTEN BY  
**Sarah Tanke**

**W**hat makes a plant a “weed”? Is it simply because it grows where we don’t want it, or because it challenges the tidy boundaries we impose on nature? Broadleaf plantain is often dismissed as a nuisance, sprouting uninvited in gardens and sidewalk cracks. But what if we took the time to see it differently—not as a problem, but as a part of our community with gifts to share?

This humble plant holds a deeper lesson for us. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer reflects on plantain as a metaphor for those of us whose ancestors arrived on this land as colonizers. Like plantain, our roots are not Indigenous, but we have the capacity to “naturalize”—to find harmony and purpose in the ecosystems we now call home.

In this activity, we’ll take a closer look at this misunderstood “weed” and transform it into a soothing salve for bug bites and scrapes. Along the way, we’ll reflect on how every plant—and every person—has a role to play when we approach the world with curiosity, care, and respect.

### Therapeutic Benefits

This activity provides diverse therapeutic benefits by blending practical skills with deeper reflection. Participants will strengthen physical abilities and fine motor skills through salve preparation. Emotional growth is fostered by reflecting on personal roles in the community, inspired by the plantain’s metaphor. Sensory engagement through smell, sight, and touch, combined with collaborative social interaction, creates a well-rounded and supportive therapeutic experience.

## MATERIALS

- 12 dried plantain leaves (gather from an area you know is not sprayed or treated)
- 8 oz olive oil (or coconut/ grapeseed oil for sensitive skin)
- 2 large 64 oz mason jars
- 1 oz (3 tbsp) beeswax pastilles
- Cheesecloth or strainer
- Large pot and hot plate
- Oven mitts
- Large pan/ baking sheet
- Wooden spoon
- Large measuring cup with a spout
- 12-15 clean tins or jars for salve
- Labels

## PREPARATION

If you're doing this activity in one session, you'll need to prep the infused oil ahead of time. Start by washing and drying the plantain leaves for 1-2 weeks. Then place the dried leaves in a large jar with olive oil and let them infuse in a sunny spot for an additional two weeks.

## STEP-BY-STEP

1. Begin by introducing the group to broadleaf plantain. Share its historical uses and discuss how plantain can offer valuable lessons to us regarding our relationship to place by reading page 213 of Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*. If this is a single session, explain the preparation that has gone into creating the infusion.
2. Place a pot with a few inches of water on the hot plate to begin warming. Meanwhile, have participants strain the infused oil through a cheesecloth into another empty mason jar, leaving the plantain leaves behind. Add 3 tablespoons of beeswax pastilles to the jar with the strained oil.
3. Have participants prepare the tins by taking the lids off and lining them up on a baking sheet (to make cleanup easier in case of spills).
4. Once the water is boiling, place the jar of oil and beeswax in the pot to create a double boiler. Using oven mitts for safety, hold onto the top of the jar and stir the mixture with a wooden spoon until the beeswax melts completely.
5. Once combined, carefully remove the jar from the pot and pour the mixture into a spouted measuring cup. Participants can then take turns filling the tins about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full. (If there is concern surrounding safety or hand stability, the facilitator can pour the warm oil into the tins instead).
6. Let the salve cool and set for 1-2 hours (or until the next session).

## NOTES:

Please make appropriate safety accommodations depending on your group. This activity was designed and implemented with a group of adults with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI).

Before using the salve on cuts or scrapes, test it on a small area of skin to ensure no allergic reactions.



plant trees strategically to provide shade. My Iraqi neighbors hold regular picnics under the shade of two oak trees on the east side of our garden. When my neighbor waves me over to pour me tea with honey, and offers me a little rose cookie, I think of Patrick Geddes with a smile. At the heart of this framework are the relationships we gardeners make with each other. Those continue to grow long after we pass through this land.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Brendan Yukins** is a licensed clinical social worker in Chicago, Illinois. He has gardened at Chase Park Community Garden for 10 years, including serving as president for 8 of those years. He is a board member of the American Horticultural Therapy Association and a published poet.

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Buzz Sting Bite

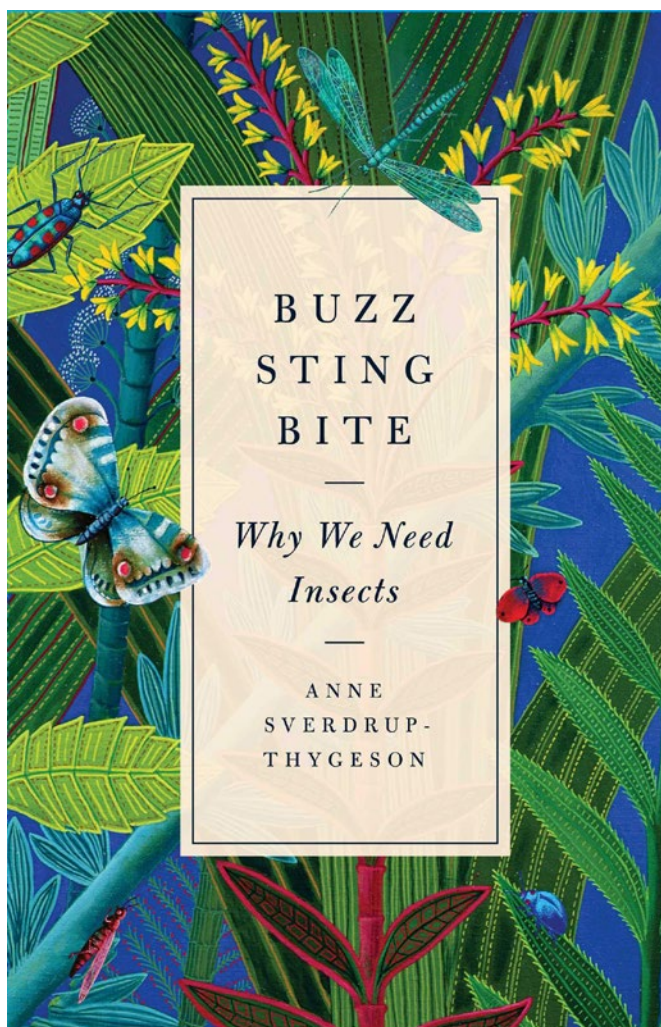
## Why We Need Insects

By Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson

REVIEWED BY  
Donna Hunt

Insects, yuck! But when you read *Buzz Sting Bite- Why We Need Insects*, by Anne Sverdrup Thygeson, you will never look at insects the same way again. The author tells such entertaining stories about our insect friends that you will not notice you are being educated in "Insects 101". Thygeson expertly integrates unique "bug" facts into well-written and often mind-blowing stories that you can't put down. There is no doubt you will be sharing at least one anecdote with family and friends or at the water cooler with strangers. These fascinating tidbits make great icebreakers, too. Why not ask if anyone knows how many drosophilists (those who study the lowly fruit fly) have won Nobel prizes (the answer is now nine) or how cockroaches become zombies.

This review is not complete until you know more about the zombie cockroach. The emerald cockroach wasps like their meals real fresh, in other words alive. The wasp dive bombs an unsuspecting cockroach and injects a neurochemical into the brain. The wasp then leads the



cockroach by the antenna back to the chamber where an egg is placed into the body and the larva feeds off the living organs, eventually emerging from the host. Gruesome, but true.

You will learn why chocoholics owe gratitude to the Chocolate Midge. You may consider adding the wasps who cause galls on oak trees to your 4th of July celebrations, since this gall is where the ink used to sign the Declaration of Independence was derived.

Dr. Thygeson is a professor of Conservation Biology at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. She is also a scientific advisor at the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research. With her expertise you take what she says to the bank, the beetle bank, that is! Read

this book, you won't be disappointed.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Donna Hunt** is the manager of Hope Gardens on Robins Air Force Base in Georgia and Chair of the AHTA accreditation review committee. She also a Master Gardener with the Houston County extension office which is part of the University of Georgia. Go Dawgs!







# Cultivating Healing

AHTA MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

## July 14, 2025

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

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