

SUMMER 2025

Cultivating Healing

AHTA MAGAZINE

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Munroe Meyer Institute

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Tools for Everybody:

Co-Creating Adaptive Garden Tools That Work for All

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HTR PROFILE

Greg Stivland

OTR/L, HTR

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Kate Irvine, Matthew Janson, MaryAnne

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DESIGNED BY

Scott Horne, Visual Designer

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**American
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ADVANCING THE PRACTICE OF HORTICULTURE AS THERAPY

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635 W Sahara Ave., #711, Las Vegas, NV 89117
702-886-1546 | info@ahta.org

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COVER PHOTO

Munroe-Meyer Institute group members are so proud of their beautiful and bountiful harvest from the garden.

PHOTO BY NICOLE GIRON



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Linda Brown-Kuhn

Editor's Words

Happy summer, everybody! I hope that your growing season has been bountiful in many different ways.

If you consider the most important tools of our trade, after plants, garden tools would probably come next. They allow us and the people we work with to sow, plant, care for, cultivate, harvest, and enjoy all the flowers, herbs and vegetables we and Mother Nature produce. But providing tools for everyone that work with the differences in people's bodies and minds can be difficult and sometimes costly.

The feature story on page 4 tells of an innovative interactive adaptive tool display at the North Carolina Botanical Garden who partnered with BeAM, a network of design and fabrication makerspaces at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This hands-on exhibit lets visitors try out prototyped garden tools and give input. Whether or not you attend the exhibit, you'll be able to access a list of budget-friendly DIY tool

adaptations with step-by-step directions. And we invite you to share your tool modifications on the American Horticultural Therapy Association's (AHTA) social media so we can all benefit from this growing pool of knowledge.

We checked in with some of the international colleagues who will be presenting at the upcoming virtual AHTA Annual Conference 2025, held October 9-11. We asked how cultural and environmental influences affect their horticultural therapy practices. See their responses on page 16. Then on page 14, the legendary Teresia Hazen reported about a spring seminar in Sweden, where she and the also legendary Roger Ulrich gave presentations. It's a big world but we're a small community and we can all learn from each other.

My wish is that you continue to embrace the miracle of growth in plants and our people during these long summer days.

Linda



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Tools for Everybody



Adaptive tool display prototype at the North Carolina Botanical Garden.

Co-Creating Adaptive Garden Tools That Work for All Hands

Adaptive tool display prototype at the North Carolina Botanical Garden.
PHOTO BY SARAH TANKE

WRITTEN BY

Sarah Tanke, HTR

Interim Therapeutic Horticulture Program Manager,
North Carolina Botanical Garden

In our profession, “adaptive tools” are often discussed as something designed primarily for older adults or people with disabilities. But the reality is, all gardeners need to adapt, over time, across ability, and through the various stages of life. Whether it’s due to arthritis,

chronic illness, a temporary injury, fatigue, low vision, or shifting mobility, our relationships with tools evolve as our bodies and needs evolve.

Here at the North Carolina Botanical Garden (NCBG), we’ve been asking: *What if accessible tools weren’t framed as special accommodations? What if we designed with differences in mind from the start?*



Student staff member working on the 3D printer at BeAM.
PHOTO BY ANNA ENGELKE

Reimagining Access Through Collaboration

To explore this question, we have partnered with BeAM, a network of design and fabrication makerspaces at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Together, we're developing an interactive adaptive tool display: a hands-on exhibit where visitors can test out a variety of prototyped garden tools, provide feedback, and contribute to the next phase of design.

Each tool in the display includes a scannable QR code that links to detailed information, including where similar items can be purchased, how it works, and easy do-it-yourself methods for adapting similar tools at home. The collection features a variety of options designed to support different physical needs and gardening styles, such as:

- Hand tools with upright or enlarged grips to reduce wrist and hand strain
- Extended handles for those who garden from a seated position
- Visually contrasting tools to support individuals with low vision

This initiative is rooted in the belief that adaptation is not about compensating for a deficit; it's about honoring the diverse ways we all move, feel, and engage with the world.



It's about honoring the diverse ways we all move, feel, and engage with the world.

Co-Design and Community Input

What makes this project particularly meaningful is its emphasis on co-creation. Rather than assuming what people need, we're creating a space for individuals to try, reflect, and shape the outcomes alongside us.

DIY #1

Add-On Handle Option

MATERIALS

- PVC Snap-On Saddle T-Connector (sized to fit around tool handle)
- Male threaded adaptor
- PVC pipe fit to adaptor size
- Plastic foam pipe insulation / pool noodle
- PVC pipe cutter

B



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Determine the size of the handle for the tool you would like to adapt.
2. Find the appropriate snap-on t-connector to fit that size handle at hardware store.
3. Attach the male threaded adaptor to the t-connector and insert your pre-cut PVC pipe (or use your PVC pipe cutter to cut the pipe to the size that feels appropriate for your hand).
4. Cut your foam pipe insulation to the length of your PVC pipe handle.
5. Snap onto your tool!

C



NOTE:

If your snap-on connector is the same exact size as your tool, it may be difficult to remove the handle once it is on. Be sure you are adding the adapter to your own personal tool and that you are ok with it being there semi-permanently.

A) Add-on handle attached to tool.
B) DIY add-on handle materials.
C) Add-on handle made with PVC pipe.
PHOTOS BY SARAH TANKE



Visitors to the garden can test tools in real time and leave feedback about what worked for them and what didn't. This feedback can then be used to help us refine and improve the designs through an iterative process. We're also actively building relationships with occupational therapy students, caregivers, and horticultural therapy practitioners to bring a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences into the development process.

Accessible Doesn't Have to Mean Expensive

A common misconception is that making something accessible means investing in expensive or specialized equipment. Our goal is to challenge that narrative by highlighting low-cost, do-it-yourself adaptations that are approachable and replicable.

By using simple materials, such as foam tubing or PVC, many existing tools can be modified to reduce pain, increase reach, or support different kinds of grip and posture. Through demystifying the process and offering open-source guides, we hope to empower other practitioners, caregivers, and gardeners themselves to make meaningful modifications in their own contexts.



Offering a variety of tool types demonstrates ...that different needs aren't "special" or problems to solve, but natural parts of being human.

Tools as Invitations to Belonging

In the garden, the tools we offer send messages. They signal who is welcome, who is expected, and who the space was designed for. In our field, those messages matter, especially when working with individuals who may already feel excluded, overlooked, or unseen in other areas of life.

When tools are intentionally selected or created to support a wider range of users across mobility, strength, cognition, neurodivergence, and energy levels, they don't just improve function, they communicate care, dignity, and respect. Offering a variety of tool types demonstrates that there are many valid ways to participate and that different needs aren't "special" or problems to solve, but natural parts of being human.

This approach reflects a broader mindset shift: from accommodating individual needs as they arise, to designing environments where those needs are anticipated from the beginning. In therapeutic settings, where participants may be navigating trauma, illness, disability, marginalization, or medicalization, having

access to a tool that fits your hand - without needing to ask - is more than a matter of comfort. It's a quiet, powerful affirmation: *this space was made with you in mind.*



Seed ruler.

PHOTO BY SARAH TANKE

DIY #2

Seed Planting Ruler

A TH/HT professional might use a seed planting ruler to make gardening tasks more accessible, structured, and supportive for participants.

The ruler provides clear visual spacing and allows for consistent planting using a simple tool like a pencil. This can help reduce confusion, support fine motor skills, and make it easier for participants of all ability levels to engage successfully and independently in planting activities.

MATERIALS

- 1 wooden yardstick OR ruler
- Drill with 7/16" (11 mm) bit (or 1/2" if using thicker pencils or want extra wiggle room)
- Pencil (standard #2 or similar)
- Sandpaper (for smoothing holes)
- Optional: Permanent marker or paint pen, paint, wood stain, and weather-safe sealant

[INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE →](#)

What This Means for the Field

As therapeutic horticulture (TH) and horticultural therapy (HT) professionals, we have an important opportunity (and responsibility) to embed inclusive design into all aspects of our work. This includes not only the spaces we create and the programs we facilitate, but the tools we offer and the assumptions we make about who those tools are for.

This project is one example of what's possible when we reframe accessibility as a shared priority rather than a specialized concern. It also invites broader reflection and collaboration across the field:

- In what ways can TH/HT professionals build ongoing feedback loops with participants to ensure tools and environments reflect evolving needs?
- Can we collaborate with tool manufacturers to expand the definition of what's considered "standard" equipment?
- What would it look like for community gardens to incorporate adaptive tool lending libraries?

By advocating for tools that are more accessible, we're not only improving functionality. We're also affirming dignity, honoring choice, and reinforcing a sense of belonging for all who enter the garden.

We Invite You to Join Us

If you're local to Chapel Hill, we warmly invite you to visit the adaptive tool display at NCBG, test a tool, and leave your thoughts.

And if you're elsewhere, consider creating your own version. Connect with a local makerspace, occupational therapy program, or high school shop class. Talk with your participants about what would support their comfort and engagement. Share what you learn with the broader TH/HT community, because we are more effective, more creative, and more equitable when we design together.

For resources on DIY tool adaptations and updates on the display, visit <https://ncbg.unc.edu/engagement/therapeutic-horticulture/adaptive-tools/>



Build the Toolbox with Us

Have you used or created adaptive tools that made gardening more accessible or joyful?

We want to hear from you! Share your favorite adaptations—whether homemade, purchased, or creatively improvised—on social media. Be sure to tag AHTA:

[@americanhorttherapy](https://twitter.com/americanhorttherapy) and use the hashtag [#AdaptiveTools](https://twitter.com/AdaptiveTools).

Your contributions can help grow a community-sourced toolbox that reflects the real-world brilliance of gardeners everywhere.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mark Spacing (if you are not already using a ruler that measures inch by inch)

Use your measuring tape and pencil to mark spacing intervals along the length (every 1", or at common seed spacings like 1", 3", 6", 12", etc.).

2. Drill Full Pencil Holes

At the spacing marks you want to use for planting, drill all the way through using a 7/16" or 1/2" drill bit. Make sure the pencil can go through cleanly without force. If needed, lightly sand the inside edges of each hole to remove splinters or roughness.

3. Label Your Spacing

Next to each hole, label common plant spacing types or draw small vegetable icons:

1" – carrots / 12" – tomatoes (you can decorate this part to suit kids or adults)!

4. Decorate & Seal (Optional)

Personalize with paint, your name, garden theme, etc. If you store the ruler outside, coat it with waterproof wood sealant or Mod Podge Outdoor to protect it.

5. Use in the Garden

Lay the ruler flat on your garden bed. Push your pencil straight through the hole into the soil to the desired depth.

You can mark the pencil with depth lines (e.g., 1/2", 1", 2") using a marker so you know how deep you're planting. If you want extra precision for planting depth, add a rubber band or O-ring to the pencil to act as a depth stop.



HTR PROFILE

Greg Stivland

OTR/L, HTR

Interviewed by Linda Brown-Kuhn



PHOTO BY GREG STIVLAND



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

I started out as an occupational therapist (OT) after graduating from East Carolina University in 1993. After completing my OT internship, I worked for a privately owned pediatric speech and occupational therapy clinic that specialized in therapy using a sensory integrative approach. During my 18 years at this clinic, I developed my skills for evaluating and treating children both in the clinic and in a school-based setting. I got to work with a wide variety of clients with diagnosis including autism, Down syndrome, fragile X, sensory processing disorders, deaf/hard of hearing, and cerebral palsy, to name a few. I also became interested in how healthcare businesses are run and completed a master's in business and health administration in 1996.

In 2012, after leaving the private practice setting and working full-time for a public school system in Moore County, NC, I couldn't help but notice that right behind one of the classrooms where I worked with high school age students with a variety of developmental disabilities, there were 20 raised beds that had been installed but were full of weeds. I asked the teacher if she would be interested in having her students start tending these abandoned beds and I got a resounding, "Yes!". Being an avid gardener myself, I knew about the power of gardening without yet knowing that horticultural therapy even existed.

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

I worked with an autistic student at the high school, and I devised clever and well thought out therapy activities that I was sure would engage him. Well, that didn't really work out. He refused every activity I presented and would typically move away from the table where we were supposed to be working. I couldn't get him engaged in a meaningful/functional activity in the classroom setting at all. I took this same student who demonstrated aversive reactions to touch, bright lights, and sounds and didn't like getting his hands dirty, outside into the garden with his classmates. He watched as we weeded the beds and observed other students carrying big handfuls of weeds to a compost pile about 25 feet away. At one point I handed him a handful of weeds, he voluntarily used both hands to grasp the weeds, carried them to the compost pile, tossed them in, and then returned to get more weeds, successfully completing this cycle two more times unprompted. Purposeful, functional, meaningful occupation --- mic drop here.

After that experience I did some online research on therapy and gardening, and I came across the Horticultural Therapy Institute in Denver and immediately made plans to register for their introductory class. I also got connected with my regional horticultural therapy (HT) network (now called the Carolinas Horticultural Therapy Network) and started attending

networking events that were offered 1-2 times each year. I completed my certificate in horticultural therapy in 2022. After successfully completing additional studies in horticulture and completing my HT internship with Sally Haskett, HTR at the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill, I became a registered HTR in January 2024.

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

I grew up gardening and was fortunate enough to get to spend time on rural family farms in Minnesota during summer vacations when I was growing up. As I became older, I recognized how gardening gave me a sense of accomplishment, grounding, and also great joy. When I realized that plants and plant-based materials could be used as a therapeutic modality - I was all in! Being able to share an activity that brings you joy with clients you work with is a real gift.

As I worked over the years with children and young adults with physical and developmental disabilities, I discovered that students with disabilities are at increased risk of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and peer rejection, as well as reduced opportunities for employment after their school career. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is alarmingly high (>63% unemployed in 2022). The Exceptional

Gardeners program that I started in 2022 was specifically designed to provide opportunities, starting in elementary school, for students to start exploring and developing pre-vocational and vocational skills on a routine basis. While there are other vocations out there for students to explore, TH/HT activities provide opportunities for students to engage in and develop skills that can carry over to other settings and vocations.

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

The majority of my time is spent in my role as a school-based occupational therapist - this includes evaluating students, creating treatment plans, providing direct therapy services, documenting services, and meetings. I provide direct horticultural therapy services approximately 3-4 hours per week currently.

In addition to the direct service provision, I have also collaborated and consulted with our Outdoor Education team at the Hub Farm (a farm that is owned and operated by our school district) on issues related to accessibility on the farm and programming for students with special needs. I have provided in-service trainings to our OT staff on horticultural therapy and proposed a HT position to our school board of education.

I co-teach a class at the North Carolina Botanical Garden on adapted tools and am the Treasurer for the Carolinas Horticultural Therapy Network.

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

I'm not conducting any research but would love to participate in research if the opportunity was available.

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

I cannot speak highly enough about the regional TH/HT networks that are out there. Becoming inspired through field trips and talking to and listening to other people who are doing this work was indispensable in my learning and program development. Additional resources that I have found incredibly helpful include botanical gardens across the US that offer TH/HT services or education, the HTI Newsletter, AHTA (newsletter, magazine, journal, events), the Therapeutic Horticulture Activity Database, and events

that are hosted by other regional TH/HT networks.

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

As my final project for my HT certificate, I created a school-based program called Exceptional Gardeners. This program is an indoor horticultural therapy program for children and young adults with a variety of abilities to support social inclusion, acquisition of vocational skills, participation in meaningful occupations, and to enhance quality of life during and after their school career. The students involved in this program participate in a variety of activities including greenhouse plant propagation and plant maintenance, plant pest and disease management, plant marketing and sales, and giving back to the school community through plant donations and giveaways.

I proposed this program to the principal at an elementary school where I provide OT services and let her know that if she approved of us moving forward, I would



Flowers for tape bracelets.
PHOTO BY GREG STIVLAND



Tape bracelets.
PHOTO BY GREG STIVLAND

submit a grant proposal for the initial costs involved (around \$2,500 for 5 classes). My salary is covered through the school district, so the initial costs included one-time costs for equipment needed such as plant light shelves, potting tidies, pots/trays, watering cans, and light timers. The idea was that once we started selling plants, we could cover future program costs through plant sales and donations. After seeing the program proposal which included research supporting this type of programming, she said she loved the idea, and she would find the money to make the initial purchases needed to get the program up and running! After that success, I found out that the PTSA at the high school where I also worked was looking for proposals to fund - so I completed their form and after their review, I also received full funding to start the program at the high school in three more classrooms.

We just completed our third school year of Exceptional Gardeners programming, propagating, selling, and giving away hundreds of houseplants in our community. The second phase of the program started last year when we received a \$3,500 grant from the Durham Public Schools Foundation to establish an outdoor therapeutic garden that we began working on in 2024. The therapeutic garden provides opportunities for outdoor TH/HT programming as well as educational and social-emotional programming for students and staff. While we did not get full funding to complete the entire garden design, we are getting feedback that both staff and students are experiencing benefits from components that have been completed.

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

Favorite plants that were given to me by other HT practitioners include Vicks plant, Cuban oregano, African blue basil, golden pothos, *Tradescantia zebrina*, spider plant, coleus, and Thanksgiving cactus. Students have learned how to take cuttings from

plants and propagate them in water as well as potting mix. They have also had the opportunity to grow, harvest, and taste microgreens from seeds they grew in their classroom. "Tape bracelets" is another fun activity that allows students to handle plant material in a variety of colors, textures, and fragrances, take their bracelets home, and provides a beautiful visual on a classroom table.

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

I am hoping to start accepting interns by 2026.

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

This work is important!

While the certification and registration process is relatively new, the power of the people/plant connection is ancient and is essential to life as we know it (or know it can be). We feel this power and experience it when doing this work. There is also a growing body of research that supports the efficacy of horticultural therapy and therapeutic horticulture activities with clients in a variety of settings.

I love working with students who have been described as non-verbal, sensory defensive, and/or not able or willing to participate in small group activities and after giving them a quick demonstration, handing them a plant cutting, watching their face light up and then seeing them place the plant cutting into a jar of water. THAT is engagement in functional activities! THAT is demonstrating executive function skills including waiting your turn and following demonstrated directions!! THAT is participation in meaningful occupations!!! I haven't even



Exceptional Gardeners spider plant.
PHOTO BY GREG STIVLAND

mentioned the fine motor skills, gross motor skills, communication skills, social emotional skills, and self-regulation skills that I and my fellow allied health practitioners have been able to address during TH/HT activities. As a therapist - what more do you want? I haven't found a goal yet that can't be worked into a TH/HT activity. Horticultural therapy is a research-based intervention and there is no doubt why this profession is growing by leaps and bounds right now. People are feeling and witnessing this reconnection to the plant world, and it feels great to the clients as well as the practitioner. Sharing the research as well as your experiences and your passion for this work helps others understand and appreciate the work of the TH/HT practitioner. Understanding leads to things like administrative and financial support for programming which is required for this work to be accomplished. It is possible, it is needed, and it is important!



PROGRAM
SPOTLIGHTMunroe
Meyer Guild
Garden

Omaha, Nebraska

*Cultivating friendships,
fun and healthy eating**Herbs mixed with cooler season
crops create a feast for the senses.
PHOTO BY NICOLE GIRON*

WRITTEN BY

Nicole Giron, MPH, HTR, CTRS*Director of the Department of Recreational Therapy,
UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute*

The Munroe Meyer Institute's (MMI) Recreation Therapy Department located in Omaha, Nebraska has been engaged in teaching a "Farm to Fork" and horticultural therapy program for the past 18 years. Led by Nicole Giron, HTR, the program saw a welcome expansion with the development of a new 1,000 square foot garden space along with a state-of-the-art rehabilitation facility in 2022. For a century, the University of Nebraska Medical Center's MMI has been a world leader in transforming the lives of all individuals with disabilities and complex health care needs. The new 200,000 square-foot facility is the first of its kind in the nation and included a planning and design process that was collaborative from the start. Architects consulted clients and clinicians alike to create a well thought out and welcoming building that aims to significantly improve outcomes for a family inclusive care experience.

As many horticultural therapists may already be aware, significant health disparities exist for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they are frequently unable to access services and targeted health intervention



Register Now for the AHTA Annual Conference!

We're thrilled to announce that this year's AHTA Annual Conference is taking place in an exciting new virtual format, making it more accessible than ever to connect, learn, and grow together—no matter where you are! AND you'll have access to the presentations for a time after the conference is over so you can see every one of them!

This year's keynote speaker is none other than Richard Louv, renowned author of *Last Child in the Woods* and a powerful voice for nature-based wellness. You'll also hear from international presenters, experience new types of presentations and workshops, and connect with professionals and plant people from all over the world.



AHTA Annual Conference

*NURTURING COMMUNITY:
Planting Seeds of Our Future***October 9-11, 2025**

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Come grow with us!

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Join us online for the AHTA Virtual Conference—where fresh ideas, meaningful connections, and plant-powered inspiration are just a click away!

Oct 9-11, 2025 - Virtual Conference



Register Today





Intern, Liz Tylander, teaching elements of flower arranging.
PHOTO BY NICOLE GIRON



Thinning the carrots.
PHOTO BY NICOLE GIRON



Prepping beds for planting.
PHOTO BY NICOLE GIRON

programs. In fact, the Special Olympics reports that adult athletes are 2 times more likely to be obese compared to adults without intellectual disabilities. And people with disabilities have as many chronic health conditions at 20 years old as the general population does at 50+ years old.

With a generous gift from the Munroe Meyer Guild, funded through the annual Garden Walk which showcases various local home gardens throughout Omaha, the new barrier-free garden at MMI includes raised beds, concrete pathways, a fence, two water spigots and large garden shed that allows the program to offer essential programming to over 250 participants and their families each year. The garden is a mixture of edible plants and ornamentals with the aim to grow during three seasons, March to October, while also paying close attention to plants that provide winter interest to attract birds that live and migrate through the Papillion Creek corridor just steps from the garden. Participants learn skills needed to plant, manage, weed, and harvest various types of vegetables, herbs, and flowers, in addition to learning how to safely cut vegetables to eat or cook. Participation in the gardening program not only provides the health benefits from eating fresh fruits and vegetables, but it promotes physical activity, and supports emotional well-being, which can reinforce this healthy behavior. The garden also provides ample spots to sit and chat, and simply enjoy the multi-sensory experience garden. Staff enjoy lunch breaks in the garden and the occasional meeting can even be held there.



OUTCOMES OBSERVED SINCE OPENING IN 2022 INCLUDE:

- 🌿 In 2023 and 2024 the garden generated over 1,800 lbs. of combined produce.
- 🌿 Participants learned to plant and maintain the garden as well as learned new weekly recipes that incorporated the harvested food.
- 🌿 Produce and healthy recipes were shared with families and staff.
- 🌿 Additional produce was used in cooking classes for after school and adult skills programs.
- 🌿 And perhaps most importantly, participants developed a sense of responsibility and pride in their accomplishments.

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Travel

Learning, Sharing, and Leadership to Advance AHTA

Roger Ulrich, Helle Wijk, and Teresia Hazen.
PHOTO BY MADELEINE LILJEGREN

WRITTEN BY

Teresia Hazen, MEd, HTR, QMHP

American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) professionals across our membership are invited to take part in international educational events. I appreciate how my AHTA colleagues share these experiences, helping me to gain a broader perspective and new insights into our profession. I will share my latest professional engagement in Sweden with Outdoor and Indoor Healthcare Environments: An International Research Seminar organized by the Research Group Healthcare Environment at Gothenburg University. My participation was initiated by a physical therapy (PT) friend and PhD student, [Madeleine Liljegen](#), conference leader. I encourage AHTA colleagues to develop a multi-disciplinary network of our allied professionals. These collaborations support AHTA promotion and the sharing of learnings and successes of our workplaces.

The April meeting at Sahlgrenska University Hospital & University of Gothenburg was a full study day of the evidence base for healthcare environments. [Helle Wijk](#), Professor of Nursing, introduced the program.

Roger Ulrich, PhD, who keynoted the 2015 AHTA Portland conference, was our first speaker, sharing the fundamentals of his stress recovery theory and use of gardens in *Research on stress reducing effects of nature and gardens: Implications for PTSD therapy*. Roger continues research work with countries where millions have fled to Europe, escaping recent wars in Ukraine, the Middle East, and elsewhere. A high proportion of refugees have been exposed to trauma. Thus, PTSD is a very prevalent and serious healthcare problem. Roger was the principal investigator for the Legacy Therapeutic Garden research 2011-2020. He related how nurse and family study findings about stress inform the issues and needs around PTSD and refugees.

His presentation concluded with the following positive statement: Much quality research makes a strong case that nature spaces and gardens have realistic potential for playing a positive role, in combination with other therapies, for helping people with PTSD.

I presented *"Health and well-being: Indoor and outdoor nature interventions across the continuum of care,"* focusing on the evidence-based, nature-based environments, and programs and activities in HT and TH. My PowerPoint featured Legacy's senior services from 1991 to present, in nursing home, skilled nursing facility (SNF), dementia units, adult rehabilitation, and the [Portland Memory Garden](#) project dedicated in 2002.

Researchers followed with their projects, including the importance of forests; sound, light, and design in intensive care units (ICU); furniture in residential care; natural

All About Credentialing

Horticultural Therapist-Board Certified (HT-BC)

WHY AHTA SUPPORTS CERTIFICATION 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
2. Standardization of Practice
3. Demonstrating Expertise and Skill Development
4. Increased Public and Industry Recognition
5. Continuing Education and Growth

WRITTEN BY

Lana Dreyfuss, LPCC, LCADC, SEP, HTR,
AHTA Past President

The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) is excited to announce the upcoming launch of the Horticultural Therapist-Board Certified (HT-BC) credential, developed by the AHTA in collaboration with Revolution AMC and Professional Testing Corporation. This credential will be exam certified along with the professional eligibility requirements to sit for the exam. The first launch of the exam is set to be available in October 2026. This new certification represents a significant step forward in establishing professional standards, enhancing credibility, and advancing the field of horticultural therapy. Please visit <https://www.ahta.org/certification> for more information on the certification.

What is the AHTA Certification?

The AHTA Certification is a formal recognition that an individual has met established professional standards in horticultural therapy. It assures employers, clients, and the public that certified professionals possess the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to practice effectively and ethically. The certification process includes requirements for education, professional experience, and the successful completion of a comprehensive examination.

The exam, currently in development, is based

on six key domains identified through a large-scale Job Task Analysis involving input from the horticultural therapy community. These domains are:

1. Horticulture
2. Treatment Planning
3. Program Planning and Activity Design
4. Managing Human Resources
5. Business Practices, Safety, and Ethics
6. Professionalism and Scholarship

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Who is the Certification for?

The certification, —tentatively titled Horticultural Therapist-Board Certified (HT-BC), —is designed for individuals seeking to be recognized as credentialed horticultural therapists. It is expected that HT-BC will eventually replace the current HTR designation as the primary credential in the field.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What will happen to the HTR designation?

AHTA will stop accepting new HTR applications approximately three months before the launch of the certification exam. After that, all new applicants will apply for the HT-BC certification. Current HTRs may continue to use their designation. Those who wish to obtain the HT-BC credential may take the certification exam, but it is not mandatory.

Will this affect the THP designation?

No. The certification exam is not expected to be required for Therapeutic Horticulture Practitioner (THP) applications.

How do I know if I'm eligible to sit for the certification exam?

Eligibility requirements will include specific education and experience criteria, which will be published well in advance of the exam launch. These will align with national standards for professional certification.

Will there be study materials or prep courses for the exam?

AHTA plans to provide recommended resources, sample examination questions and some guidance on the examination. The exam will be based on what practitioners are expected to know so applicants' education and training should be the best preparation.

How long is the certification valid, and what is required for renewal?

The certification is expected to be valid for five years. To maintain certification, individuals will be required to complete continuing education and/or demonstrate ongoing professional activity, as defined in the recertification guidelines.

Cultural and Environmental Influences in Horticultural Therapy Globally

WRITTEN BY
Kamyshia Thompson

AHTA's upcoming virtual conference, *Nurturing Community: Planting the Seeds for our Future*, this October 9 – 11, includes a number of international presenters. To highlight the richness and diversity of global practices, we asked the international horticultural therapists to answer one key question. Their perspectives help illuminate how local context shapes the delivery, reception, and outcomes of horticultural therapy.

"Are there specific cultural or environmental factors in your country that influence how horticultural therapy is practiced?"

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"Because mental health stigma makes many Peruvians wary of anything labeled 'therapy,' we frame horticultural therapy as community gardening and plant-based wellbeing grounded in familiar cultural traditions. This culturally fluent approach—especially valuable in an overstretched public health system with too few mental health specialists—lets people experience therapeutic benefits in an accessible, preventive, and cost-effective way."

MANUELA DE SZYSZLO,
Peru

A

"In India—particularly in Kerala—horticultural therapy is shaped by the Indian Knowledge System, drawing from Ayurveda, Vrikshayurveda (ancient plant science), sacred groves (Devavanam), Nakshatra Vanam (zodiac-linked gardens), and practices like plant meditation and devotional gardening. These culturally rooted practices emphasize the spiritual and healing bond between humans and plants, making horticultural therapy a naturally resonant and holistic approach in our region."

GK BEELA,
India

A

"In Sweden, most of us often have a relationship with nature, as forests and lakes are numerous and often close to where we live. In our work, we notice that our participants have sometimes lost that connection with nature, but by awakening curiosity, spending time in nature, and the rehab garden, this contact is often brought back to life, which is supporting and sometimes life-changing."

BERKO KANNA,
Sweden

Be sure to [register for the conference](#) so you can hear these presenters and many more.



GRASSROOTS REVIVAL

Drought Tolerant Natives for Healing Landscapes

WRITTEN BY

Kate Irvine, THP

As the horticultural world takes a headstrong stance on ecological wellbeing and sustainability, it is only natural that those of us involved in the design, development, and use of healing gardens follow suit. Industry classics of the past have become not only irrelevant, but have been occasionally shown to outcompete their native counterparts or become problematic in the landscape such as *Miscanthus sinensis* (maiden grass), once chosen for its fluffy seedheads that make excellent additions to cut flower arrangements, but whose seeds readily self-sow and take up potential space of our native grass species. Of course, heat and drought-related conditions paired with the confidence and persistence of grazing deer make it difficult to choose worthwhile plants that won't get destroyed in touchy landscapes. While we won't ever truly be able to escape from some tried-and-true non-native ornamentals, there are plenty of wonderful substitutes to consider that benefit both our natural and human

ecosystems (that are both drought and deer-tolerant, to boot!)

Instead of aggressive mints (*Mentha sp.*), use:

Pycnanthemum virginianum, *P. tenuifolium*, *P. muticum*, or *P. incanum* (native mountain mints – Central & Eastern US). Famously difficult to control, various mint species, such as peppermint and spearmint, while edible, fragrant, and attractive, can be nuisances in smaller gardens or landscapes that beg for naturalization without being overwhelmed. *Pycnanthemum* species, our native mountain mints, are much better behaved, have foliage and flowers that can be harvested for teas, and have been discovered to be a favorite source of nectar for many native bee species.

Instead of *Vitex agnus-castus* (chasteberry), for fragrant flowers, foliage, and edible fruits use:

Comptonia peregrina (sweetfern – native of North Central & Eastern US and Eastern Canada) is an underutilized and little-known fragrant shrub, inviting over 62 different species of butterflies and moths to benefit from its fragrant, drought-tolerant flowers and foliage. Plant near a walkway or foundation

to encourage visitors to brush up against the potently aromatic foliage.

Instead of butterfly bush (*Buddleia sp.*) which is found to self-seed in disturbed landscapes, with “sterile” cultivars shown to revert within ten years of being planted, use:

Pollinator favorites with sky-high spires of flowers, such as *Spiraea tomentosa* (native of Central & Eastern US and Eastern Canada) or *Clethra alnifolia* (native to Eastern North America).

Instead of burning bush (*Euonymus sp.*) which has been shown to invade woodlands, use:

Native plants with decorative berries, short stature, and great fall color, such as *Viburnum nudum* ‘Brandywine’ (native to most of the US) or *Ilex verticillata* cultivars such as ‘Winter Red’, ‘Winter Gold’ or ‘Red Sprite’ (native to Eastern North America).

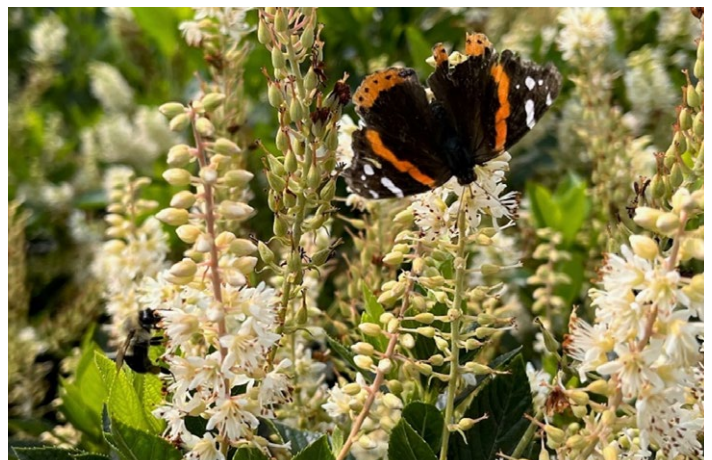
Instead of self-seeding *Pennisetum alopecuroides* (fountaingrass) or *Miscanthus sinensis* (maiden grass), use:

A native grass with whimsical seedheads, such as *Bouteloua gracilis* (blue grama grass)



Bright, silvery bracts of fragrant *Pycnanthemum muticum* flowerheads glow in the landscape all season long!

PHOTO BY KATE IRVINE



A red admiral butterfly visiting the cream-ivory floral spires of *Clethra alnifolia* ‘Sixteen Candles.’

PHOTO BY KATE IRVINE

– native to much of Central & West North America from Canada to Mexico), which erupts in eyebrow-like inflorescences in late summer that persist throughout winter and into the following growing season, or *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian grass – native to Southeastern US & Central America) which gets fluffy seedheads comparable to maiden grass in late summer.

For interesting perennial seedheads, use:

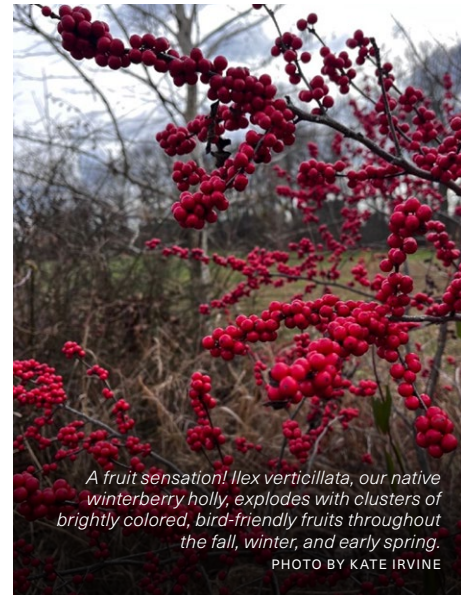
Penstemon digitalis (beardtongue – native to Central & Eastern US), *Aquilegia canadensis* (Eastern columbine – native to much of North America), and *Baptisia australis* (false indigo – native to Central & Eastern US). While their flowering phases are worthy of reverence on their own, it is the persistent and unique seedheads of both beardtongue and Eastern columbines that make them fitting companions in the sensory garden, particularly those that cater to children, who will find the shapes and ability to easily collect seed intriguing. For added fun, include *Baptisia australis*, an herbaceous perennial that returns

larger and more shrublike each year, with flowers in early spring and pea-shaped seedpods in late summer that make for wonderful rattles!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Irvine is a passionate horticulturist and artist with a love of native plants, whimsical woodlands, and medicinal herbs, and has recently been recognized as a Therapeutic Horticultural Practitioner by the AHTA. When she's not in the creative realm, she is working to establish her independently owned and operated business, *Katydid Horticultural Wellness*, based in the Greater Philadelphia region and focusing on trauma, grief, and addiction populations.



A fruit sensation! *Ilex verticillata*, our native winterberry holly, explodes with clusters of brightly colored, bird-friendly fruits throughout the fall, winter, and early spring.
PHOTO BY KATE IRVINE

Easy to grow and perfect for the children's garden, *Bouteloua gracilis* erupts in unique inflorescences resembling eyebrows or mustaches.

PHOTO BY KATE IRVINE



environments in Canadian long-term care homes; heat stress; and outdoor environments for older adults and their care workers. Discussion of health and caring science focused on this research group's shared initiative, [OUT-FIT](#). This multi-year research project explores how outdoor environments at residential care facilities, assisted living homes, and day centers can promote health and well-being for older people and support staff in their work. OUT-FIT aims to generate national-level insights into the needs and preferences of older people and staff about outdoor spaces, with national policy leading to guidelines and enhanced programming across Sweden. The team continued planning for their next gathering [ARCH26](#).

I took a personal tour of the hospital ICUs with Sepideh Olausson, Associate Professor, Critical Care Registered Nurse (CCRN). She pointed out the site where an older building is being demolished to make way for a new

ICU tower. It is interesting to note that she is collaborating with a former colleague of the Legacy Garden research team, Makalya Cordoza, CCRN researcher, now at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. These registered nurse (RN) researchers are working together on plans for new ICU towers, which will focus on incorporating nature for the benefit of both staff and patients, to be constructed at each hospital over the next decade.



Sweden's national initiative toward improving senior living communities serves as a resource informing our policy and program efforts across the US. This can impact staff wellness and better serve older adults through nature programming indoors and outdoors year-round. I look forward to Swedish AHTA members and others inviting engagement of HTRs around the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Teresia Hazen, MEd, HTR, QMHP, retired from Legacy Health in 2020. She keeps active with consulting and continues as a Legacy volunteer supporting HT interns and promotion of gardens in healthcare.

RESOURCES

The Center for Health Design. (2025, June). Impact of Aging Toolbox.

<https://www.healthdesign.org/impact-aging-toolbox>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2025, June). PTSD: National Center for PTSD. Specific Populations.

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/specific/index.asp>

ACTIVITY

Cut Flower Mandalas

WRITTEN BY
Sarah Thompson, HTR

Overview

Creating cut flower mandalas is a hands-on, sensory-focused activity that invites individuals to slow down and engage in a calming, creative process. This activity is meaningful and restorative, offering participants a sense of purpose and accomplishment. It can be adapted to meet a wide range of cognitive and physical abilities, making it a valuable addition to both individual and group sessions. With clear structure and tangible results, this activity fosters focus, self-expression, and connection.

Background: Completed mandala.
PHOTO BY SARAH THOMPSON, HTR

MATERIALS

- Pruners or scissors
- Fresh cut flowers
- Plastic plant saucers (6" recommended)
- Vermiculite or sand (vermiculite works best)
- Warm water (aids water uptake in flowers)

PREPARATION

- Create a sample mandala ahead of the session to use as a visual guide
- Fill each saucer with vermiculite or sand and smooth the surface
- Add warm water to dampen – just enough to moisten, not soak
- Cut flower stems 1-2" from bloom to base



Getting started on a flower mandala.
PHOTO BY SARAH THOMPSON, HTR

FACILITATION

1. Introduce the Flowers

Encourage participants to explore textures, colors, and scents. Invite them to share memories or associations (e.g., gardening experiences, family traditions, favorite flowers).

2. Define the Mandala

Briefly explain that a mandala is a circular design symbolizing balance, unity, and wholeness. Show your example.

3. Demonstrate the Process

Gently press the first flower into the center of the dampened media. Continue placing flowers outward in concentric circles until the surface is fully covered and the media is no longer visible.

4. Adapt for Client Needs

Tailor the session to client goals – some may enjoy quiet reflection; others may prefer social engagement.

Finished mandalas can be displayed on dining tables or shared with local restaurants or businesses to raise awareness of your program and brighten community spaces. They typically last as long as standard cut flower arrangements and can be refreshed with a small amount of water.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Thompson, HTR is a professionally registered horticultural therapist based in Boise, Idaho. She specializes in programming and facilitating plant-based interventions for older adults, including those living with dementia and cognitive decline. She is passionate about using plants as a tool to cultivate connection, purpose, and joy in therapeutic settings.

TIPS FOR SOURCING MATERIAL

Collaborate with local florists, grocery stores, or cut flower farms – many are happy to donate slightly imperfect or unsold blooms that would otherwise go to waste. These partnerships can be a great way to keep the activity cost-effective while fostering community connections.



Final touches.
PHOTO BY RACHEL GORRINGE



Sarah Thompson, HTR facilitating the cut flower mandala activity.
PHOTO BY RACHEL GORRINGE

BOOK REVIEW

Last Child in the Woods

Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder

By Richard Louv

REVIEWED BY

Matt Janson, CTRS, HTR

AHTA President

As a horticultural therapist, I approached Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* with great anticipation, and it did not disappoint. This book is a call to reconnect children with nature, offering insights that resonate deeply with the principles of horticultural therapy. Louv's narrative is readable, engaging, full of quotable moments, and his evidence-based arguments make this book a must-read for all horticultural therapists.

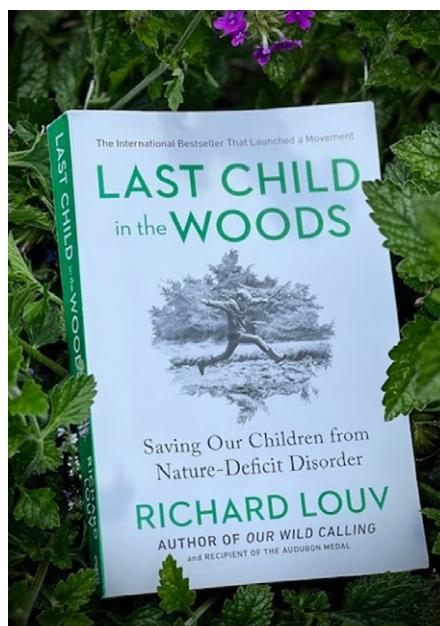


PHOTO BY KARIN BAILEY

Louv introduces the concept of “nature-deficit disorder”, a term he coined to describe the by-product of current generations removing themselves from the natural world, including diminished sensory engagement, attention difficulties, and increased rates of physical and emotional challenges like obesity, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). From a horticultural therapy perspective, this framework aligns completely with our understanding of nature as a therapeutic tool. Louv cites research showing that exposure to nature can reduce ADHD symptoms, lower stress, and enhance cognitive and emotional health. These are outcomes we see ourselves with our clients in the clinical garden setting. His emphasis on nature's restorative power reflects the core of our therapeutic practice, where guided interactions with plants and natural environments promote healing and growth.

One of the book's strengths is its ability to weave scientific evidence with immersive and relatable anecdotes. In his description of climbing a tree as a child, I felt the wind in the tree with him as he marveled at how the experience shaped him as an adult. I also remembered how much I

loved climbing trees as a child and how much my own experiences in the woods shaped me. Louv shares stories from children, his childhood, parents, and educators all recognizing the value of outdoor play, from climbing trees to building forts or just exploring local green spaces and empty lots in an urban environment. All come together to highlight that engagement with nature fosters life skills and qualities that are key goals in so many horticultural therapy programs. For practitioners, this reinforces the importance of designing engaging, sensory-rich gardens that invite exploration and spark wonder, especially when working with children.

If there's any limitation to note, it's only that the book doesn't directly explore horticultural therapy as a modality. However, that absence creates an opening, Louv has laid the groundwork, and it's up to professionals like us to apply his insights through structured, evidence-based horticultural programs. His arguments strengthen the case for funding outdoor classrooms, therapeutic gardens, and nature-based group sessions.

Overall, *Last Child in the Woods* is a powerful and inspiring resource for horticultural therapists. Louv's call for a “nature-child reunion” aligns beautifully with our mission to harness plants and nature for healing, making this book both a validation of our work and a catalyst for new ideas. Whether you're designing a therapeutic garden or advocating for nature-based programs, this book will leave you un-be-leaf-ably motivated to help children (and adults) reconnect with the natural world. I highly recommend it to anyone in our field looking to deepen their practice and inspire change.





Cultivating Healing

AHTA MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

October 17, 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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