HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

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AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION (AHTA) AT-A-GLANCE

• A 501(c)3, changed its name to AHTA in 1987 from the National Council for Therapy and Rehabilitation Through Horticulture (established in 1973)

• “only U.S. organization committed to promoting and developing the practice of horticultural therapy (HT) as a unique and dynamic human service modality” (AHTA, 2015)

• Offerings:
  • Knowledge dissemination, publications, conferences, and promotion of education/training
  • Professional Registration
According to the AHTA, horticultural therapy (HT) is:

- “The engagement of a client in horticultural activities facilitated by a **trained therapist** to achieve specific and **documented treatment goals**.”

- “An active process which occurs in the context of an **established treatment plan** where the **process itself** is considered the therapeutic activity rather than the end product.”

Source: (AHTA, Definitions and Positions, 2012)
KEY MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HT

• Benjamin Rush (1812) “the father of horticultural therapy”
  • Recognized benefits and curative factors of gardening, farm labor, horticulture for individuals with mental illness
• 1817 Friends Hospital in PA—park-like setting
  • 1879-installed first greenhouse for therapeutic purposes
• 1896 Children’s Aid society—
  • Horticultural activities with tenement children
• 1919 Menninger Foundation Topeka, KS—
  • Horticulture as integral part of patients’ activities
• 1936 Assoc. Occupational Therapists-England
  • Horticulture as treatment for physical and psychiatric disorders

Source: (Davis, 1998, pp. 3-20)
KEY MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HT

- **WW II:**
  - Horticulture important part of therapy and rehabilitation programming
- **1951** Michigan State Hospital—
  - Horticulture program in geriatric ward
- **1953** HT programming initiated through public garden for first time
  - (Arnold Arboretum, Boston, MA)—program developed at VA
- **1972** Kansas State U-1st HT curriculum
- **1973** Formation of the National Council for Therapy and Rehabilitation through Horticulture
  - Renamed the American Horticultural Therapy Association in 1987

Source: (Davis, 1998, pp. 3-20)
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Overarching Goal of HT Programs: Enable and empower clients to achieve maximum independence and improve well-being

Table: (Haller, 1998, p. 43)
TYPES OF HT PROGRAMMING: VOCATIONAL

Focus/Goals:
- Employment
- Improving job skills

Settings:
- Public schools
- Correctional facilities
- Industry
- Sheltered workshops

Clients:
- Individuals with developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and economic disadvantages
- Legal offenders, youth at risk

HT Program at Rikers Island
Photo: Edible Manhattan (2013)
TYPES OF HT PROGRAMMING: THERAPEUTIC

- **Focus/Goals:**
  - Assist individuals in recovery from illness or injury
  - Regain or maintain functioning following accident or illness

- **Settings:**
  - Rehabilitation hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, community mental health centers, long-term residential care facilities, hospice, Alzheimer’s units

- **Clients:**
  - Aging adults, stroke survivors
  - Individuals with mental illness, chronic/terminal illness, spinal cord injuries and/or traumatic brain injuries
TYPES OF HT PROGRAMMING: SOCIAL

- **Focus/Goals:**
  - Improve the general well-being of participants through the use of gardening as a leisure activity

- **Settings:**
  - Retirement homes, community gardens, residential group homes, senior centers

- **Clients:**
  - Elderly, socially disadvantaged, homeless, and individuals with disabilities

Duke Farms Community Garden
BENEFITS OF HT PROGRAMS

Relf (1973) defines the benefits of HT in four areas:

- Intellectual/Cognitive benefits
- Social benefits
- Emotional/Psychological growth
- Physical Benefits
- Sensory Stimulation

Photo: AHTA
BENEFITS OF HT PROGRAMS: INTELLECTUAL/COGNITIVE

• Attainment of new skills
  • Learning techniques of horticulture—plant propagation, gardening
• Improved vocabulary
• Increased powers of observation
• Improved concentration
• Stimulation of memory
  • Floral scents
• Re-learn old skills

Photo: DePrado (2015)
BENEFITS OF HT PROGRAMS: SOCIAL

- Interaction within the group
  - Ex. Shared garden work
- Improve group cohesiveness
- Improve social skills
- Share experiences
- Learn cooperative skills
- Practice communicating
- Develop relationships

Share the bounty of the garden with others (Catlin, 2006, p. 38)
BENEFITS OF HT PROGRAMS: EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL

• Improved confidence and self-esteem
• Anger/aggression management
• Satisfaction of creative drives
• Improvement in quality of life
• Reduced stress
• Improved mood
• Decreased anxiety
• Sense of pride and accomplishment
  • Ex. Watching a seedling grow into a plant, growing one’s own food

Photo: Kitchen Gardeners International
**BENEFITS OF HT PROGRAMS: PHYSICAL**

- Development and improvement of basic motor skills
  - Ex. Transplanting of seedlings, propagating cuttings
- Increased outdoor activities
- Lowered heart rate
- Endurance
- Range of motion
- Strength

Source: (Catlin, 2006)

Photo: Missouri Botanical Garden
BENEFITS OF HT PROGRAM:
SENSORY STIMULATION

- Olfactory (smell)—fragrant flowers, foliage, herbs
  - Ex. lavender, scented geranium, lemon balm
- Auditory (hearing)
  - *Arundo donax* (giant reed grass),
  - *Baptisia australis* (seed capsules rattle)
- Tactile (touch)
  - Ex. *Stachys lanata* (Lamb’s Ear), succulents
- Gustatory (taste)
- Visual (sight)—showy, colorful plants, and flowers

*Baptisia australis*
UNIQUE QUALITIES OF PLANTS

- Successes with plants leads to other successes
- Non-discriminating
- Non-judgmental
- Dynamic and alive
- Universally appealing and familiar
- Stimulating to all senses
- Responsive to any caregiver
HT AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Raised beds
  - Easier to reach, more accessible, can be used for seating

- Containers
  - Accessible—can be raised, lowered, moved
  - Can be picked up and manipulated by a person with little upper body strength

- Adaptable tools and equipment
  - Kids’ tools
    - (shorter handles, lighter)
  - Ergonomic grip
  - Attachable extra handles

North Carolina Botanical Garden
PASSIVE ENJOYMENT OF HT

- Passive appreciation of garden spaces, HT activities
- Enjoyment of outdoor environment
- Awareness of one’s surroundings
- Awareness of natural forces and rhythm
- Rest from mental fatigue and worry

Photo: Lerner Garden Horticultural Therapy Area, Maine
HT ACTIVITIES

• Craft and Nature-related
  • Indoor—Holiday plant activities, sun catchers, pressing leaves and flowers
  • Outdoor—bird attractors, scarecrows
• Group Activities
• Excursions
  • Trips to botanical gardens, “collecting trips”—cones, leaves

Source: (Relf, 1973)

Leaf sun-catchers made in HT program with clients with dementia
HT ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

- **Plants-Indoors**
  - Flower arranging, propagating succulents, terrariums

- **Plants-Outdoors**
  - Flower, vegetable, and/or herb garden—weeding, watering, harvesting

- **Related Fields of Study**

Source: (Relf, 1973)

Photo source: succulentsandmore.com
**Client:** Individual with Dementia (Neurocognitive Disorder)

**Goal:** Cognitive stimulation and training

**Tasks/activities:** By participating in holiday and special occasion horticultural activities client will be oriented to season, time, and place.

- Examples of activities could include:
  - leaf pressing (fall), planting clover for St. Patrick’s Day, observing spring flowers in the garden, and observing evergreens during winter.
HT ACTIVITY EXAMPLE

- Created with veterans at the VA (on Veteran’s Day)
RUTGERS HT CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

• 29 credits
• Accredited by the AHTA through 2019
• Required courses (16)
  • Principles of Botany (3)
  • Introduction to Horticultural Therapy (3)
  • Plant Propagation (3)
  • Horticultural Therapy Techniques and Programming (3)
  • Special Problems in Plant Science (4)
• Electives (13)
  • Some examples: Abnormal psychology, plant pathology, Nursery Crop production
HORTICULTURAL THERAPY WEEK IN NEW JERSEY!

• Proclaimed as the third week in March by the Legislature of the State of New Jersey

• Increase public awareness of the importance of horticultural therapy
  • in improving the quality of life for all and
  • in increasing opportunities for each individual to experience the endless benefits of the people-plant connection.
REFERENCES


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Photos:


