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# The National Garden Bureau Presents

## *A Garden In Every Yard . . . Or Roof*

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The National Garden Bureau begins an initiative to encourage “A Garden In Every Yard...Or Roof” This slogan is our mission to convert people into gardeners to benefit the environment, our planet and our communities. No one is exempt from our green movement; even urbanites can garden on roofs.

## The Healing Garden

In the best of times flowers help us celebrate the joyous occasions in our lives—the birth of a child, a wedding, career or personal success. In more difficult times plants give us hope and inspiration to meet the challenges of life.

The role of the plants and gardens in healing is ancient. As early as 3000 B.C. the Chinese were using medicinal herbs. The Greeks built a temple for Aesclepius, their god of healing, set among mineral springs, bathing pools, and healing gardens. Green was a sacred color in ancient Egypt and represented the hope of spring that brought new vegetation and life.

In colonial America, the Quakers felt a deep attachment to nature and believed gardens were a place of creativity for the mind and body. Growing plants was a way to relax and restore the soul. One of the first programs to use plants in a therapeutic setting was established in 1879 at Philadelphia's Friends Hospital after a physician noticed that psychiatric patients working in the hospital's fields and flower gardens were calmer and that the gardens had a “curative” effect on them.

In more recent times, advances in technology and new drugs have been the focus of treatment at medical institutions. However, within the past few decades, the medical community around the world is rediscovering the healing power of gardens. Many hospitals and health care facilities are incorporating green spaces, flowerbeds and views of gardens into their surroundings and horticultural therapy programs are often an important part of a patient's course of treatment.

Healing gardens can be found in a variety of institutions including substance abuse treatment centers, outpatient clinics, long-term care facilities, hospices and retirement homes, as well as in botanic gardens and arboreta around the world. In Cleveland, Ohio the Men's Garden Club worked with homeless women in temporary housing to create The Serenity Garden, a therapeutic green space that replaced the bleak asphalt paving that had filled the back yard of the facility. The Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis, Minnesota developed their Garden of Healing to aid in the healing process of people who have suffered psychological and physical abuse. Oregon's Portland Memory Garden provides a safe and enjoyable setting that addresses the restorative power of gardens for patients with Alzheimer's.

Doctors at the Jupiter Medical Center in Florida found that cardiology patients in rehab who had a view of that facility's Jacqueline Fiske Healing Garden from their room took less pain medication and had shorter hospital stays than those patients who could not see the garden.

For an individual recovering from a serious illness such as cancer or stroke, gardens can be an important part of healing by providing hope and inspiration. Hope in Bloom is a non-profit organization in Massachusetts that installs gardens at no cost at the homes of women (and men) undergoing treatment for breast cancer. Each garden is developed specifically to the home and lifestyle of each recipient in order to give them a tranquil place to escape from the world of doctors, hospitals and sickness.

Clare Cooper Marcus, Professor Emerita in the College of Environmental Design at the University of California at Berkeley, found her garden had a strong impact on her coping and healing during several bouts with cancer. A gardener since childhood, she has always found the garden to be a comforting retreat—a place where her anxieties dissipate into the ground.

Throughout her illness and treatment Cooper Marcus wrote in a journal and discovered that working in the garden had symbolic parallels to her illness. When Cooper Marcus decided to clear a corner of her garden cluttered and overgrown with brambles, she realized it was similar to the chemo drugs eliminating the cancer cells from her body and making her healthy again. Cooper Marcus now focuses on the therapeutic aspects of gardens and their design through her consulting business, Healing Landscapes.

Whether tending to a houseplant, growing some flowers or turning an outdoor garden into a relaxing retreat, plants have the power to heal our body and our soul. Research has shown that working in the garden can benefit everyone. The physical efforts of gardening—digging, planting, bending and walking—are great forms of exercise to keep the body healthy. Strenuous yard work such as digging or weeding not only burns calories, it is similar to weight training in building bones and preventing osteoporosis. Gardens and gardening activity can also improve mental outlook and our emotional mood by reducing stress, anxiety and depression. Studies have found that gardening can lower blood pressure and cholesterol, which reduces the risk of heart disease. Researchers at the Cleveland Botanical Garden found that the blood pressure of many visitors dropped the longer they stayed in the gardens.

A healing garden can take many forms but always provides interaction with nature. Visually plants provide inspirational colors or peaceful tones. We can hear the relaxing sound of water or the stimulating activity of visiting wildlife. The rich aroma of fresh earth and the delightful scent of perfumed herbs fill the air we breathe, while the fresh flavor of a crispy pea pod or sweet berry tempts our taste buds. We can touch the velvety smoothness of a flower petal or be touched by the movement of leaves in the wind.

Begin to create your own garden of healing today simply by planting a container filled with colorful flowers, a nutritious vegetable, or an herb such as lavender, sage, basil or thyme. In addition to being attractive and aromatic, these and many other herbs have been used medicinally for centuries. Watching and nurturing any plant as it grows provides power and energy to enhance your well-being.

In an outdoor setting, incorporating a few simple design elements turns any garden into a place of healing and inspiration.

- Grow plants that you find pleasing. Are you energized by bright colors? Then include annuals such as zinnias, petunias, sunflowers or cosmos. If you enjoy cooking, incorporate herbs, vegetables and edible flowers into your garden. Plants such as sage or lavender can be harvested and used for aromatherapy.
- Include a place to sit and observe the beauty of nature or a path for walking through the garden. Enclose it with shrubs or fencing to create a secluded retreat.
- Add a focal point for meditation and reflection such as a piece of sculpture, a special plant, interesting rocks, wind chimes or a water fountain.
- Encourage butterflies, birds, insects and other wildlife to the garden for their healing energy. Birdfeeders and birdhouses quickly and easily begin attracting garden visitors. Choose plants that supply nectar and food including coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*), butterfly flower (*Aesclepias tuberosa*) salvias (*Salvia spp.*), dill, parsley and sunflowers.

The design and development of a healing garden, just like the process of healing and recovery, takes place over time. It is that journey and the time spent with nature that heals our body and soul.

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For additional resources about therapeutic gardens, visit the Therapeutic Landscapes Database ([www.healinglandscapes.org](http://www.healinglandscapes.org)), which lists healing gardens throughout the United States and Canada, as well as links to other informational websites and organizations. More information on gardening is available on the NGB website. Go to [www.ngb.org](http://www.ngb.org)

*We recognize Janis Kieft as the author of this article.*



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