

# LIFESTYLE

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## Garden of Healing

Horticultural therapy lets patients nurture themselves as they help plants thrive.

By JOAN BROOKWELL  
Special to the Sun-Sentinel

**B**ari and Marie look forward to the days they work in the shade house, planting seeds and cuttings and caring for the plants they grow.

"I learn a lot," Bari says. "How they grow, how to give them food. Different plants need different watering. Sometimes you have to put your arms around the whole plant to see how much water it needs."

"You feel beautiful when the plants are beautiful," says Marie.

The two women are patients at South Florida State Hospital in Pembroke Pines where, in the program known as horticultural therapy, they learn how to grow plants, make soil mixes for potting, prune and fertilize and get rid of insects.

Meanwhile, they help beautify their surroundings. Their touch extends to the landscape where shrubbery and flowering plants soften bare walls, and halls and offices now decorated with potted plants and hanging baskets.

The program's purpose, however, is to nourish people, not plants.

The American Horticultural Therapy Association defines horticultural therapy as a process that uses plants and gardening to improve people's social, educational, psychological and physical adjustment.

In short, gardening is good for you. It's a popular activity at SFSH, says Eileen Luongo, program director for the

Bayview Center for Mental Health, Inc. The center leases space on the grounds and works with mental patients from both within and outside the hospital.

"It's a little like getting out of school," she says. "They like being outside, working with plants and seeing a finished product."

Patients grow plants from cuttings and seeds taken from coleus, red-flowered pentas, crotons and other species growing on the hospital grounds. Other material comes from private gardens like that of Rosemary Blumberg, a Plantation resident who volunteers at the hospital. A few months ago, patients planted seeds taken from dwarf poincianas in Blumberg's garden; already the small potted trees bear bright yellow-orange flowers.

Two shade houses at SFSH shelter philodendron, dracaena, spathiphyllum, ivy, aglaonema, aralia and more, while tables outside hold container-grown flowering plants and shrubs that need sunlight. Fragrant herbs grow in raised beds.

Two or three times a year the patients

PLEASE SEE GARDEN /5D



# Garden therapy has long roots

Gardening as a medical tool may seem like a new idea, but the American Horticultural Therapy Association says a greenhouse for mental patients was built in 1879 by Pennsylvania's Friends Asylum for the Insane in Philadelphia (now known as Friends Hospital).

Later, after World War II, volunteers from garden clubs brought plant therapy into veterans hospitals.

Now, says the association, gardening programs can be found in about 300 hospitals across the country.

Founded in 1973 and headquartered in Gaithersburg, Md., the association has about 750 members. Some are registered as professional horticultural therapists; others work in a horticultural therapy program or are simply interested in it. Ten chapters are part of the national association. For information on the Florida chapter, contact Richard Bornstein at 1-305-389-4205.

While many colleges and universities offer courses in the subject, Kansas State University is the only one offering bach-

elor's and master's degrees, according to the association.

For anyone interested in learning more about horticultural therapy, Bornstein recommends these books:

■ *Growing with Gardening: A Horticultural Therapy Training Manual* by Bibby Moore (Chapel Hill Botanical Garden, University of North Carolina, 1987).

■ *The Enabling Garden* by Eugene A. Rothert (Taylor Publishing Co., Dallas, Texas, 1994).

— JOAN BROOKWELL

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## Holiday shopping can be simple for do-it-yourselfers

jects like making a beaded lampshade and covering a picture frame with tartan plaid fabric. Each project includes step-by-step instructions, a list of materials, diagrams and patterns.

One nit-pick: This book requires some basic crafts knowledge, since some of the illustrations aren't that detailed.

**For the gardener:** If price is no object, *Taylor's Master Guide to Gardening* (Houghton Mifflin, \$60), edited by Rita Buchanan and Roger Holmes, is a must-have resource guide, particularly for the northerners on your holiday list.

This 612-page reference book relies on the expertise of 18 gardening writers and horticulturists from around the country — unfortunately none from South Florida. As with the majority of national gardening books, the "South" is seen through the eyes of experts from Texas and Alabama.

You won't find anything on growing a mango tree and the palms are limited to two pages. Still, this is a comprehensive primer on 3,000 species for American gardens — including firebush, jacaranda and even tabebuia — with how-to-grow information for each.

The "Growing Healthy Plants" section gives tips on evaluating and improving soil, making compost, planting, terracing and obtaining native plants. It also offers recommendations for environmentally sound control of pests and diseases.

**For the country fan:** *Mary Emmerling's American Country Details* (Crown, \$25) is just right for the person seeking inspiration for decorating projects who doesn't have a lot of time to read.

Emmerling, the guru of country decorating and author of 14 books, has produced a downhome decorating encyclopedia with more than 550 color photographs.

Reading *Details* is like chatting with a knowledgeable friend about how to solve your decorating problems. You will learn how to decorate your mantel, how to display collections of china, dolls and bears and when the best decoration above the bed is a simple quilt.

She gives readers permission to experiment and make up the

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## Nurturing plants helps patients connect with life

have a sale, when hospital employees and the public can snap up plants at bargain prices — some as low as three for \$1. One sale can net the patients as much as \$500, says Luongo, and proceeds go back into the program to buy pots, tools and other gardening supplies.

Some patients also do landscaping maintenance outside the hospital, and Luongo plans to expand the program to include small home landscaping projects. "We're looking to get them out into the community more," she says.

Similar gardening therapy programs are being used in hospitals, nursing homes and other facilities in South Florida.

In Boca Raton, the Habilitation Center for the Handicapped, Inc., is producing approximately one million plants each year, says Linda Cooke, director of work operations.

The center, which serves disabled adults from Broward, Palm Beach and Dade counties, has several shade houses where patients propagate annuals and perennials. The biggest crops are liriopse and pentas, grown in 4-inch and 1-gallon containers and sold to country clubs, golf courses, property owners associations, landscapers and municipalities.

Recently, the center won a bid to supply plants for Broward County and the city of Fort Lauderdale landscaping projects; the bid was in direct competition with other nurseries with no spe-



Staff photo/PHIL SKINNER

South Florida State Hospital staff member Heidi Schmitz, left, shows Bari Bliss the correct way to pot a plant.

cial consideration, Cooke says.

"While we are able to, as a disadvantaged business, we don't take advantage of special treatment," Cooke points out. "We want to work [on an equal basis] with other nurseries."

The center also has a mobile work crew which does small outside projects such as planting and weeding.

Gardening therapy is being used with various groups — sight impaired, elderly, physically handicapped, prisoners, mentally ill, juveniles in trouble with the law and patients in drug rehabilitation programs. It may train someone for a career, provide exercise for damaged muscles or hands crippled by arthritis or calm an anxious mind.

"What you learn in one area can be applied in others," says Robert Bornstein of Fort Lauderdale, vice president of the Florida Chapter of AHTA and a horticultural therapy consultant.

Bornstein is setting up a pro-

gram for persons with eating disorders, where patients learn that if they can take care of a plant they can take care of themselves, he says.

"A plant they give no nourishment to will die. If a plant is overwatered and overfertilized, that too will perish," he points out. "It teaches lessons that are not easy to forget."

Gardening therapy, he adds, is nonthreatening. And for patients who may never have worked before, growing a plant successfully provides a feeling of accomplishment and independence.

"What's great about it is that, whatever their background, people get back to nature," Bornstein says. "They get out of their own problems, learn to accomplish something and feel better about themselves."

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