



May 01, 2020 08:00 BST

Wellbeing Gardens - National Gardening Week

We are all spending more time at home at the moment than we might like and this looks set to continue for some time to come. As a child I roamed the countryside around our family home, with favourite trees to climb or collect conkers from – whatever did we think was we were going to do with a bag full of inedible horse chestnuts? As an adult this love of nature extended to gardening and now that I am working in the field of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture I try to spread the message that connection to nature is a vital support for our mental as well as physical wellbeing.

Any walker or gardener can tell you that stress seems to reduce amongst

greenery and bird song and research has shown that it only takes ten minutes of sitting quietly, watching and listening in a green space for the effects to kick in. There is certainly less roaming woods and fields at the moment but I am able to get out into my garden and I encourage everyone who can to do the same. Even looking out of window onto a garden, planted balcony or natural view helps and connects us to nature and the seasons.

This is National Gardening Week, so what could be more appropriate than appreciating your garden for its wellbeing benefits. Whenever I tell people that “Gardening is all about wellbeing” or “Gardening is good for the mind”, someone will always wistfully comment that they wished that were true of their own garden. The most common problems are that the garden is too big and ‘planty’ for them to look after, they hate mowing the lawn or weeding and that the garden is full of plants they do not actually like. The first one, is understandable as age, health and circumstances change a garden may need to evolve to suit changing needs and capabilities. For the ‘hated’ task, I usually suggest looking forward to the finished effect to see the benefit: a lawn for children to play on, a border where flowers are not competing with weeds for water. And you can choose to see these tasks as tedious or mindful, focused on the activity of the moment and shutting out the chatter that goes on in our minds. But it is the final problem that I find both inexplicable but obviously a very common feature! Life and health are too precious and gardens too valuable a wellbeing resource to be filled with things you do not like.

There are no rules on what a Wellbeing Garden should contain or the layout or style. If you search for this term on the internet you will see a lot of curved paths, blue flowers and feathery foliage and these are suited to idea of relaxation and restoration. But if growing fruit and veg brings purpose and fulfilment then that is what your garden should contain. If bright colours fill you with joy then those soft pastel flowers are not for you.

At the **ellenor**, the Green Shoots garden therapy group looks after a Pot Garden outside the Dining Room. Growing in pots means that participants can sit at a table, indoors or out, to sow, plant, deadhead and weed and avoids any digging. We maintain a display of flowers for every season and usually grow a few veg in summer, This year we had just divided up a bag of seed potatoes for everyone to take a few home and ‘chit’ when the movement restrictions halted our meetings so I am hoping that potatoes are being grown at home.

I have found no reason for anyone to have a garden except that it makes them and their family feel good. Gardens are all about wellbeing and the right garden for you in National Gardening Week is the one that makes *you* feel good.

*Alison Marsden is a Social and Therapeutic Horticulture practitioner who facilitates the Green Shoots garden therapy group at **ellenor** as part of the Living Well programme*

Three-minute video on 'What makes a good garden' is available at:

https://youtu.be/O6mXPVB_gKk

We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children's Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley, receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

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