Co-funded by the European Union

Erasmus+: „Zero effects of Environment Changes”
2022-2-RO01-KA122-ADU-000094582

Gardening for people with disabilities

„Innovative Approaches to Environmental Education”

ZERO EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT CHANGES

Asociatia Zona Integrare Europeana
in colaborare cu
Centrul Scolar de Educatie Incluziva Buzau





Introduction

Enhancing Life Through Nature's Touch

Our institution is specialising in supporting individuals with mental ill health, autism or a learning disability to build confidence, develop social skills and improve their quality of life through the provision of therapeutic training, vocational skills, creativity and work experience.

Why we garden?

The question of “why we garden” is more than an intellectual curiosity. Gardening is an enormously popular practice that generates billions of dollars in plant sales in the United States (HortiDaily, 2020). According to one survey, 42% of American households grow some of their own food and 75% participate in some form of lawn or garden activity (National Gardening Association, 2021). Another survey found that Americans are increasingly interested in establishing a friendly habitat for pollinators and native plants, indicating that gardens are more than just a source of food and visual beauty, but also a connection to nature. That survey also showed that gardening is surprisingly popular among the younger nature.



In the United Kingdom, gardening is considered “cool” by 18- to 34-yearolds, and 54% of them would rather spend time in a garden center than dance in a nightclub (Knight, 2021). Let us quickly dispel the notion that people garden simply for cheaper or higher quality food. In some cases this motivation is at play

Gardening

To understand why we garden is to gain profound insights into human nature. After all, gardens are ubiquitous scenes in the pageantry of human history, serving myriad purposes. Epicurus gathered his students in his garden to explain why the gods do not exist (or if they did, why they were indifferent to humans). Catholics erect Mary gardens to honor the mother of their god. Victorian English would boast of their gardens, containing flora of all the nations the British Empire had conquered, whereas Native Americans today nurture native gardens to preserve the varieties of maize (Zea mays) almost driven to extinction by European settlers (Campbell, 2019). Although a totem pole or an Islamic prayer rug is specific to a certain culture, gardens play a role in all cultures and time periods, making gardens objects of material culture (Mukerji, 2013) from which we can better understand ourselves



If gardens are more than just an alternative source of food, what exactly is the gardener attempting to achieve? It must be something more subtle, something that makes gardens less a means to an end and closer to the end itself. The general goals humans pursue in life are referred to by psychologists as terminal values, and research suggests a standard list of 18 universal terminal values:

1) true friendship, 2) nature love, 3) self-respect, 4) happiness, 5) inner harmony, 6) equality, 7) freedom, 8) pleasure, 9) social recognition, 10) wisdom, 11) salvation, 12) family security, 13) national security, 14) a sense of accomplishment, 15) a world of beauty, 16) a world at peace, 17) a comfortable life, and 18) an exciting life (Rokeach, 1973). In philosophy, such terminal values can be approached as platonic forms, reaching back to the writings of Platon and his idea that a flower may be beautiful, but beauty is itself a “thing” that exists independently of that flower. An effective garden is one that is in harmony with nature, and “harmony” also exists separately and transcendent of a harmonious garden. When Platon described the “highest” or “one” god, he named it the Demiurge, and explained the Demiurge used the template of the beauty-form to create beautiful objects, and the template of the harmony-form to craft a natural world in balance (Plato, 1977). When humans seek happiness, tranquility, and meaning, they are reaching for singular goals that seem to exist above and beyond the world of natural objects. They are yearning to encounter platonic forms.



Horticulture is unique in that the part concerning how to garden is valued almost for its own sake. The attributes and knowledge are mediated by one consequence: a plant. The knowledge of how to raise roses is valued by the gardener for the roses themselves. The rose itself provides terminal values such as a world of beauty. The hobby gardener enjoys the sweat and the dirt because the act of gardening is valued for itself, providing terminal values such as self-respect and inner harmony. Gardening is part of living the good life, something Socrates taught us is worth drinking hemlock for a terminal value if there ever was one. For a more familiar model of human motivations, consider Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.



Figure 1 shows a more elaborate hierarchy than the one most are accustomed to seeing, the one Maslow specified later in his career and the one that better reflects modern psychology (Kaufman, 2018). These needs are listed as a hierarchy in the sense that humans typically first seek needs in the lower part of the triangle before reaching for the higher parts.



Gardening, whether it’s working with a vertical garden or a large plot, is a wonderful way to get in touch with nature. For people living with intellectual or developmental disabilities, gardening (or horticultural therapy) can be a holistic way to learn a new skill while also feeling more grounded. Gardening helps people with disabilities in several ways. It can help a person with disabilities feel productive, or it can encourage someone to learn a new skill. Those with limited mobility can have raised bed gardens or gardens created with their needs in mind, so they can participate in an activity with their peers regardless of their skill levels.

Benefits

Gardening helps people use their fine motor and cognitive skills, and it also encourages them to get outside in the sunshine. For those who can’t get outdoors, indoor gardens or window boxes create a space for the adaptive gardener to get involved.

There are multiple benefits of gardening for people living with disabilities. Here are four of the most significant benefits to consider.





Physical Health Benefits

One of the main reasons to try gardening is because it’s a good way to increase physical activity. Gardening can require skills and movements like bending, digging, pulling, and pushing, all of which can help with exercise.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have recognized gardening as exercise. In fact, it can burn up to 210 to 420 calories in just one hour. The health benefits are great for everyone.

Social Benefits

Another reason to get involved in gardening is because of the social opportunities that come with it. An accessible garden in the community creates a place where people with disabilities can get fresh air and interact with others in their community. Gardening can be used as a tool to improve social skills. It also provides easy access to support from others who may have more knowledge about gardening.



Mental Health Benefits





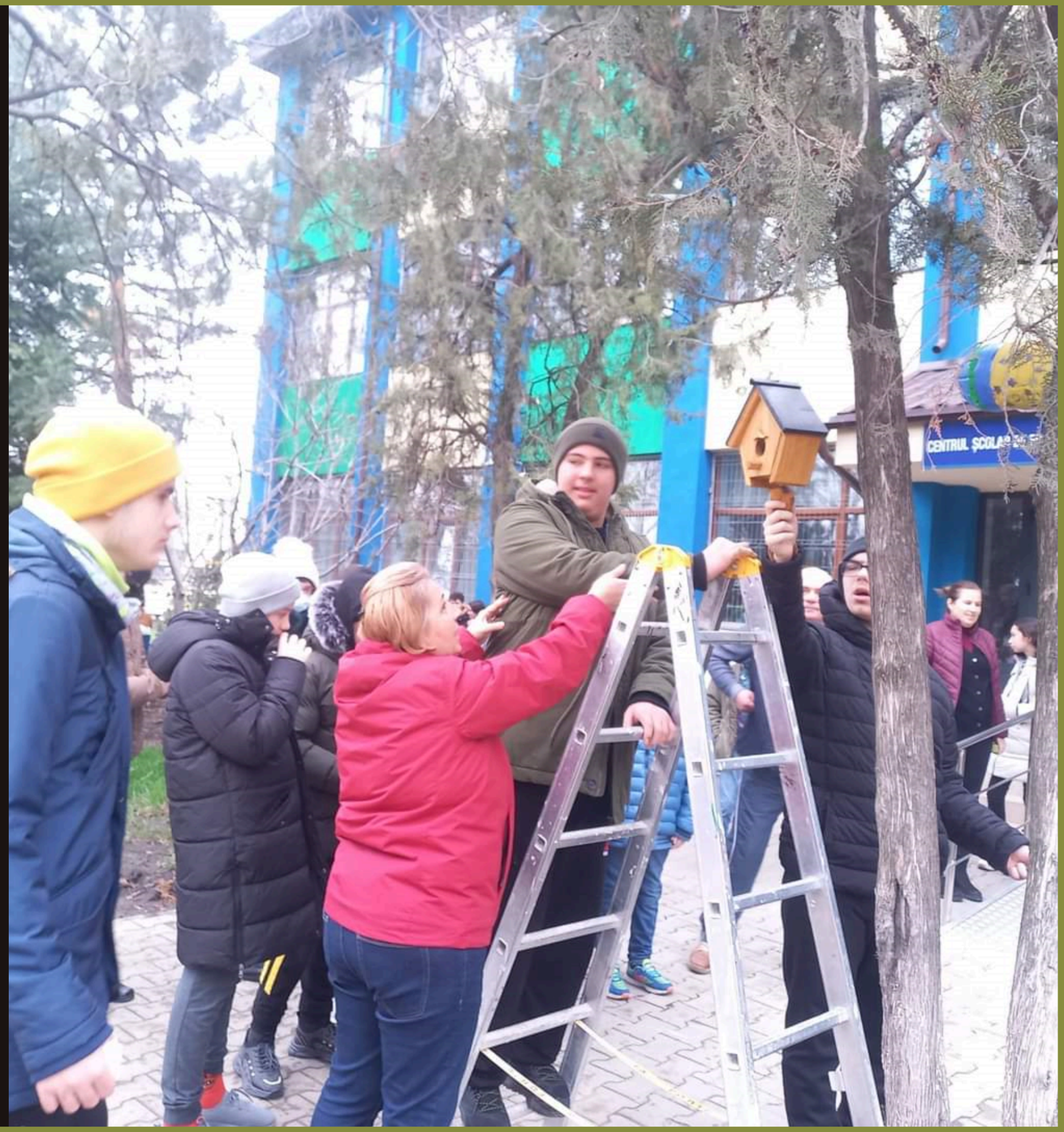
Gardening for Mental Wellbeing
Incorporates Motor and Cognitive Skills

Gardening incorporates both motor and cognitive skills, making it a great task to improve physical health. Someone who has an intellectual or developmental disability may have improved self-esteem after raising their own healthy foods, and someone with limited mobility may find low-stress exercise good for the body and mind.

Social Benefits

Community Inclusion

One final reason to consider gardening as a hobby is that it’s good for your mental and emotional well-being. Along with social inclusion, people who work on their own gardens find that they meet more people than they would have outside of a gardening program. Additionally, they’re able to grow healthy food that they can share, increasing the benefit of their growing gardening experience.



In our unit, which is frequented only by people with intellectual and associated disabilities, we use this method of recovery, of spending time in a different space than the conventional one of classrooms.

The children but also the adults who frequent our facility prefer to work in the garden, take care of the flowers, plant trees, clean them, prepare the land. The multiple benefits listed above are felt especially in the recovery process. These activities have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving the well-being of people with disabilities.



Embrace the Garden Lifestyle

Ours teachers propose that those who participate in these gardening workshops improve their fine and gross motor coordination, maintain flexibility and muscle strength, connect with nature, having positive effects on mental health, reducing stress, anxiety and depression. and to improve their self-esteem.
By participating in group gardening activities, their social and collaborative skills are stimulated.
Gardening helps develop empathy and patience by caring for plants.
We also carry out activities of this kind in the parks near our institution, in trips organized especially for a connection with nature, since the space in the yard is not so generous for the large number of people with disabilities who have access to it.





We propose

-Creating sensory gardens with plants that stimulate the senses through smell, touch and color.

including gardening in the school curriculum as part of hands-on learning activities.

- Interdisciplinary lessons connecting biology, ecology and nutrition with gardening activities.

-Creating a relaxing and stimulating learning environment for students that can improve concentration and engagement in school activities.

• Working with volunteers and local organizations to provide support and expertise.

• Organizing community gardening events and activities to include students' families.



Thank You

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