Gardening for mental health: turning over a new leaf

Gardening has a large variety of benefits for both the body and the mind. Many studies have shown that gardening can greatly reduce stress and improve mood as well as physical health and fitness. But how can being surrounded by soil and plants really improve your mental health?

The study's participants described experiencing a range of physical, emotional, mental and social benefits correlating with regular time spent in their gardens.

Kids with lots of energy will find plenty of things to do in the garden, from digging soil to picking flowers and staking tomatoes to watering seedlings.

Dubbed horticultural therapy or ecotherapy, gardening gets us away from screens or desks and out into the fresh air. Engaging in relatively simple, repetitive tasks such as pulling weeds or raking leaves can help to put the mind in a meditative state and instil a sense of relaxation.

Practicing patience in your garden will be beneficial as you wait for your plants to grow. It is also likely that you'll feel a deep sense of pride when the time comes to harvest your crops whether they be flowers, fruits or vegetables. Putting the time and effort into something that you can enjoy later will leave you with a sense of satisfaction and pride.

The relationship between a person and their environment is often symbiotic. The more time you spend working on your garden, the more it will flourish and thrive. Likewise, the fresh air of the outdoors combined with light physical activity and a sense of satisfaction will work to improve your mental, physical and emotional wellbeing.

Gardening is also a good way to connect further with loved ones or to make new friends. Spending time working outside in the soil with your family will build valuable memories and leave you with a lasting sense of accomplishment as you see your garden each day.

Kids are also more likely to want to try new fruits or vegetables if they have been home grown. Having kids put effort into growing the plants could be a good way to get picky eaters to improve their palate.

Gardening with others in a community garden can give you a sense of purpose and also provide opportunities to make new friends. It also provides a sense of belonging and acceptance for those who may otherwise feel isolated.

When working in the garden, it is important to ensure that you wear sun protection and drink plenty of water.