



## **GARDENING: The feel good factor**

**How can gardening improve my  
mental and emotional wellbeing?**

- **At least one in four British adults will experience some kind of mental health problem in any one year.\***
- **Prescriptions for anti-depressants are at record levels in England, with 50 million dispensed in 2012.\***

Research shows that gardening can change the way you feel. Ask any gardener why they enjoy this simple task and they will often say that "it makes them feel good".

The therapeutic value and feeling of wellbeing that people get from gardening, growing food and the outdoor environment, has a strong and positive impact on our physical and mental wellbeing.

Our research shows that gardening can help people through a specific period of difficulty in their lives. Gardening can help you get back on top of things and restore balance when it feels like your life is veering out of control. Gardening can help you feel happier, more confident and healthier.

\*Mental Health Foundation (2013)

\*HSCIC (2013) Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community Statistics for England (2002-2012), London: Health and Social Care Information Service





## **Gardening can help because:**

- It can be great physical exercise – which in turn helps boost your mood by releasing endorphins – our body's own natural feel-good hormone
- You can work at your own pace and in small steps doing as much or as little as you like
- Regular gardening can help bring a new structure to your life
- You can learn new skills which might be useful in other areas of your life, such as volunteering or employment
- It can provide a great opportunity to meet people if you want to – for example by joining a gardening club or getting an allotment
- Gardening is fun, it can offer an opportunity to explore your creativity
- Tending plants can literally give you a reason to get out of bed in the morning and the satisfaction of knowing that you made it happen
- If you are finding everyday life hard to cope with, gardening outside could even help you take a first step out of the house





## Getting started

If you are feeling low finding the motivation to start something new can be difficult. Gardening with someone else – maybe at a set time and place – might help. You could also try to set yourself small goals. For example, if tackling an already overgrown garden is too much, could you start in just one area of the garden?



Here are a few ideas – which you don't even need a garden for – to help get you started:

- Houseplants can be a cheap and easy way to experiment with growing things. Try local plant sales and car boot sales or ask a friend or neighbour for a cutting
- Most health food shops and garden centres sell seeds and beans for sprouting – try growing your own beansprouts, which will be ready for eating in a week which. Or try radish or cress. This quick growing an give a real boost
- A chilli plant and herbs will thrive on a sunny windowsill – look out for 'plug' plants in garden centres or seedlings at plant sales in the springtime



Of course you won't get the exercise of more strenuous gardening but you'll still benefit from the pleasure of seeing something that you have nurtured grow – and you can garden inside if the weather is bad or you just don't feel up to venturing out.



## Gardening and other ways to feeling good

One of the great things about gardening is that it appeals to a wide range of people – young and old and can be done in urban and rural areas.

Gardening fits in with the Government's *Five Ways to Wellbeing* as you

- **connect with others** – become less isolated
- **become more active** – by taking part in gardening outdoor, gaining physical and mental health benefits
- **take notice of the world** – being outdoors and experiencing the joys of nature
- **keep learning** – develop new skills and gain in confidence
- **give to others** – through sharing and supporting others and working as a team

The good news is that health professionals have an appetite to find out more about alternative approaches like ecotherapy, of which gardening forms part of, and would be prepared to refer patients to services, like the projects run by Thrive.\*

\*Ecominds Report: Feel better outside: feel better inside. Ecotherapy for mental wellbeing, resilience and recovery.



## Want to find out more?

Thrive is a national charity that uses gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people who are living with disabilities or ill health, or are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable. This is known as social and therapeutic horticulture (STH).

With almost 40 years experience of using gardening to make a real difference to people's lives, we are able to offer information and advice to anyone who wants to harness the benefits of gardening to support good health. We also offer support and training to health, education and social care professionals in social and therapeutic horticulture.

Always consult your GP before making significant changes to your lifestyle, such as accommodating a new exercise regime. Contact us to see if there is a project near you, or use the tips in this leaflet to start gardening yourself.



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