

Horticulture Therapy: Benefits of Gardening for Children with Autism and Special Educational Needs

Adapted from:

<http://kidcompanions.com/benefits-of-gardening-for-children-with-autism-and-special-ed-needs/>

“Horticultural Therapy (HT) and Therapeutic Horticulture (TH) use plants, gardens, and the natural landscape to improve cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. -[Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association](#)

Benefits of Digging

There’s a whole chapter on the benefits of digging. This will show you the wide scope of horticultural therapy because do not think it is only about placing seeds in the soil and weeding. Digging provides numerous learning experiences and benefits the whole child. The following are some of the benefits of digging:

- Gives children the time to play and explore in the soil incorporating play and gross motor skills.
- Reduces muscle tension and lowers blood pressure.
- Builds endurance and hand dexterity.
- Gives a chance for the child to learn how to cooperate with buddies or the caregiver.
- Gives practice is following instructions and safety regulations.
- Helps lessen negative feelings, anxieties, aggressive tendencies, etc.
- Helps to reduce tactile defensiveness.

Each chapter has four or five complete lesson plans with easy-to-follow sections: Aim, Tools, The Activity written in bulleted format and numbered sequences.

Sensory Gardens for Kids

Plants and Accessories to Stimulate the Senses

An objective in sensory garden design is to encourage users to interact with the plants, often directly, for instance by breaking off leaves to smell or taste. So all plants must be non-toxic, hardy and sturdy enough to withstand handling. Another reminder is make gardening FUN and that all involved think it is PLAY!

Touch

Chose plants that are durable enough to withstand frequent brushing or handling. Look for textures in soft flowers, fuzzy leaves, springy moss, rough bark, succulent leaves, prickly seed pods. Enjoy the textures of sage, rosemary, thyme, tarragon, both types of parsley, mint.

Accessories can include rocks and sculptures in a variety of shapes, sizes and textures. Use sculpted handrails for safety and added textures.

Smell

Rosemary, sage, tarragon, heather, mints, and fragrant creeping herbs, such as thyme, are planted along pathways, walking or wheeling on them will release their aroma intense smell. Rosemary also has a very good texture and in the spring/summer it has tiny pretty purple flowers. All these herbs are great for cooking too!

Sight

Use plants in all shades of green foliage with various leaf shapes, and different colors of flowers. Choose colorful plants that change through the season offering a new facet with each one.

Mobiles, bird baths and sculptures can add visual stimuli as well as sunlight and shadows dancing along all surfaces. Accessories for enhancing visual pleasure include color flood lights, torches, mirrors, and gazing globes.

Taste

Have herbs like mints and chives to provide both scent and taste opportunities. Cherry Tomatoes, strawberries, blueberries, edible flowers, fruit trees and the endless vegetables will offer the taste buds an array of choices. Zucchini also grows a flower and the flower is edible too.

Sound

Kids will hear the sound of wind rushing through the leaves, grasses rustling and seed pods of some plants rattling. Have non-plant materials (wind chimes, fountain bubbling). Birdsongs will fill the garden if birds baths, bird-attracting plants, bird feeders and bird houses are provided and maintained.

Suggested Reading:

[Gardening for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Special Educational Needs – Engaging with Nature to Combat Anxiety, Promote Sensory Integration and Build Social Skills.](#) By: **[Natasha Etherington](#)**