

## OUT ON A LIMB

### 'Garden Therapy'

By: Roger Davis, Landscape Architect

Some people tell me that there is no other place they would rather be than working in their garden. Many people enjoy creating and planting but loathe maintenance. I have a friend who tells me pulling weeds takes his mind away from his every day problems and he actually enjoys the task. I wish I could get him to come to my house. Someone said "The way to tell a valuable plant from a weed is to pull on it, if it comes up easily, it's a valuable plant." To me, pulling weeds would be a punishment to which I would be assigned if I went to Hell.

When I did my Landscape Architectural Senior Thesis at the University of Georgia, I chose Garden Therapy. The research that I did indicated that hopeless patients at the State Hospital in Milledgeville improved significantly by being helped to plant a seed in a cup of potting soil and being helped to water the plant through germination. Growing a plant; something finally went right in their life.

According to Eva Shaw, PhD, Author of *Shovel It: Nature's Health Plan*, 'gardening reduces stress, lowers blood pressure and helps fight depression. A study done by Kaiser Permanente showed the brain wave activity of a gardener mirrored that of someone praying or meditating. Hospitalized patients' wounds heal faster and they require fewer pain killers and antidepressants when they are merely looking at a painting of a garden. says Shaw'. "Imagine the effect a real garden can have."\*

Dr. David B. Carr, MD a geriatrician at Washington University in St. Louis says "It has been my experience that those patients (with Alzheimer's or dementia) do better in the long haul and have a slower rate of decline than those who don't do anything." "Gardening is one of the non-prescription interventions that has the ability to slow the rate of cognitive decline".\*

It is interesting to me that as some people grow older, they become much more interested in gardening. I suppose being an 'empty nester' gives them more time and other avenues of interest. Some people just like a neat well planned yard while others like the horticultural aspect of having a wide assortment of different plants. We believe in massing similar plants for the floral effect, but in a horticulturist's garden, the trend is, some of this and one of that. Tony Avent, owner of Plant Delights Nursery in Raleigh, refers to this as planting in masses of one. It is fun to walk out in the garden and see what plant is flowering or fruiting today that wasn't there yesterday.

Augusta is a peculiar gardening place because of the Masters. When I first came to Augusta in 1965, I discovered that if a plant didn't bloom during the first two weeks of April, nobody wanted it. The predominant flowering plantings were azaleas and dogwoods and after they bloomed it was just green. Thankfully with the introduction of plants like the Encore azaleas we can have bloom times in the fall as well as the spring. It's okay to have a garden peak during Masters but don't forsake the opportunity of enjoying flowering periods at other times of the year. Some how that morning cup of coffee just tastes better when we experience surprises the garden has brought over night.

Hate working in the garden. I've never heard anyone say they hated viewing or walking in the garden. It just makes you feel better and after all that is garden therapy.

- Excerpts taken from <http://www.caringtoday.com/reduce-stress/garden-therapy>