

Gardening for Mental Health



I have mentioned the mental health benefits of gardening here in the past. After all, I have a Masters degree in psychology. Moreover, I have extensive lived experience with depression. So, it's a topic that always comes up for me. There are so many ways that gardening can improve mental health. But it can also occasionally exacerbate symptoms for some people. So, I thought I would do a deeper dive into this topic that fascinates me so much.

Mental Health Benefits of Gardening

[Keeping plants has been shown to improve mental health](#) whether you have a fully landscaped garden or simply a single plant in your living space. Some of the known mental health benefits of gardening include:

Reducing stress

Gardening can help to reduce stress levels. It can be a calming activity. Plus, you also have a garden to relax in and enjoy.

Boosting mood

Gardening has been shown to improve mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. The connection to nature is usually cited as the key part here.

Promoting mindfulness

A garden helps you to focus on the present moment and your senses. You can notice the smell of the soil, the sound of birds, and the feel of the sun. I've shared my own [garden walks for mindfulness](#) with you.

Boosting self-esteem

You can derive a sense of accomplishment and pride in the work you've done to cultivate your garden.

Moving your body

Gardening can provide a moderate form of physical activity. This, in turn, improves mental health.

Purpose

You might feel more motivated to get up in the morning if you know that you need to water your plants.

Improving cognitive function

Gardening has been shown to improve cognitive function, including memory, attention, and problem-solving skills.

Promoting social connection

Gardening can provide opportunities for social connection. You can enhance this by joining a gardening club or community garden. Loneliness can be such a trigger for mental health challenges.

Providing a sense of control

Gardening can provide a sense of control over your environment, which can help to reduce feelings of anxiety and promote mental well-being.

Offering a break from technology

Gardening can provide a break from technology. Obviously, tech can be a source of stress and anxiety for many people. Therefore, less time on those devices is better for the mind.

Fostering a sense of awe and wonder

Gardening can provide a sense of awe and wonder. It allows you to witness the beauty and complexity of nature up close. This goes a long ways towards promoting mental well-being and a sense of connectedness to the world around you.

Potential Mental Health Drawbacks of Gardening

For those of us with mental health challenges, we can sometimes uncover triggers or drawbacks in even the most helpful of things. This includes gardening.

For example, I have a notorious brown thumb and have difficulty keeping plants alive. Therefore, a story I tell myself is I'm not good at gardening. When the plants reflect this, it can provoke shame, disappointment, overwhelm and other symptoms associated with my depression. Here are some

other examples:

Anxiety and OCD Triggers

Garden perfectionism can show up a lot for people. Am I doing this right? Why aren't my plants growing the way that they should? Perfectionism can show up as stress and negative self-talk in people with many types of mental health challenges. For people living with anxiety, it can worsen the anxiety. For people with OCD, it might become a source for the constant checking and rechecking of the plants.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

For people with SAD, gardening may be difficult during the winter months when daylight hours are shorter and the weather is colder and darker. This is part of a natural cycle built into our biology. However, those with SAD may feel it more than others.

Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD)

Although uncommon, some people with PTSD might have garden-related triggers. For example, the sound of a lawn mower or the smell of fertilizer could trigger symptoms.

ADHD

Gardening has been found to be primarily [beneficial for people, especially children, with ADHD](#). However, it can be an intensive process that requires focus and that can be frustrating for someone with ADHD symptoms.

Physical Limitations

For people with physical limitations, such as chronic pain or mobility issues, gardening can be challenging. This may exacerbate feelings of frustration or inadequacy, relating

back to mental health.

Mitigating the Drawbacks

None of this is to say that people with mental health challenges shouldn't or can't garden. It's overwhelmingly a positive experience for a diverse range of different people. It offers many benefits. However, if you experience specific triggers that stress you or exacerbate mental health symptoms, then it's worth considering ways that you can mitigate the drawbacks in order to reap the benefits.

For me, it's all about having a super limited garden in my own little world. I can't have an elaborate garden that requires a lot of care. Depression makes it too challenging to keep up with that, then it just makes me feel bad. For me, it's about having a single plant or two at a time. And one of the ways that I reap the benefits of plants and gardens is to visit all of the amazing public gardens and parks in this city. So, paring down your expectations of your garden is one of my biggest suggestions for reaping the mental health benefits.

Take breaks, set realistic goals, practice gentleness with yourself around gardening. And practice mindfulness. Being present in the here and now, breathing with the plants in your garden, really magnifies the benefits for most people.

10 Quotes About the Benefits of Gardening

I find quotes inspirational. I use them as affirmations or for uplifting my mood. So, I wanted to share these ten relevant quotes about the benefits of gardens.

1. "In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks." – John Muir
2. "The garden is a mirror of the heart." – Alice Sebold

3. "Gardening is the purest of human pleasures." – Francis Bacon
4. "Gardening is the art that uses flowers and plants as paint, and the soil and sky as canvas." – Elizabeth Murray
5. "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." – Lao Tzu
6. "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." – Audrey Hepburn
7. "Gardening is a way of showing that you believe in tomorrow." – Unknown
8. "Gardening is the ultimate therapy. It allows you to connect with nature and helps to heal the mind, body, and soul." – Unknown
9. "The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul." – Alfred Austin
10. "The greatest gift of the garden is the restoration of the five senses." – Hanna Rio

Read More:

- [6 Health Benefits of Gardening: How It Boosts Physical and Mental Health](#)
- [5 Ways Healthy Gardens Help The Planet](#)
- [5 Things I Learned About Gardening in 2022](#)