

What do plants, trees and nature do for you and your family?

Some of the contributions made by plants are obvious; they provide food, material for housing, material for clothing and ingredients for medicines. They also moderate climate, reduce energy costs, improve property values, improve air quality, reduce noise pollution and enhance the appearance of private properties, and public spaces in towns and cities.

However it is the effects that plants have on the mental health, safety, stability and livability of a community, how plants make people feel and the profound effects that are produced by interaction with plants in so many areas of a person's life that is the real evidence of how human beings are sustained by plants.

Research studies document reductions in stress, healing time, crime and road rage, improvements in memory, concentration, and self-esteem, increased worker productivity and worker satisfaction.

Lack of exposure to green space and plants has serious effects on children. In his book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv refers to research pointing to attention disorders, obesity, a dampening of creativity and depression as problems associated with a nature-deficient childhood. Interaction with plants and nature helps children learn better at school.

Plants also improve quality of life and have a restorative effect on people with mental health issues such as depression; gardens have a calming effect on those with dementia. Urban green spaces provide opportunities for recreation and better physical health, but also have mental, social and spiritual benefits. These places are where people can find quiet and solitude, for contemplation or where social groups can meet and interact.

Some of the psycho-social benefits of plants have been known for centuries, poor psychiatric patients in the late 1800's often paid their hospital bills by working in the hospital gardens and their doctors noticed they recovered quicker than those who stayed indoors. Through gardening and nature-related activities what is now known as horticultural therapy makes a significant difference in the lives of many people. Gardening and interaction with plants positively affects self-image and social relationships of prison inmates.

Many of benefits discussed above are relatively unknown, but almost all of us know someone whose life has been affected by loss of a loved one, cancer, Alzheimer's and other serious illness, depression, schizophrenia and many other mental illnesses, and many of those people will have been involved in some type of plant based therapy during their recovery and rehabilitation. Sometimes it will have been formal therapy, but it may have been I walked in the woods every day, or I just sat in the garden.

Many hospitals, hospices, rehabilitation centres and residential facilities for those with mental illnesses now have gardens designed to provide benefits for their patients.

If you would like more information on this topic or on the research that provided this information please contact the Streetsville Horticultural Society, streetsvillehort@hotmail.com check out our website at www.streetsvillehort.ca

From the Streetsville Horticultural Society newsletter April 2015