

ADAPTED GARDENING PROGRAM

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Editor's Note: *This article was written with a vegetable garden in mind, but adapt this information for an Adapted Gardening Program for flowers and houseplants.*

The purpose of this article is to explain an Adapted Gardening Program. Individuals living in long term care settings have physical or cognitive limitations. To meet the needs of the participants, gardening practices and procedures have to be adapted, so the purpose of an Adapted Gardening Program is to meet the recreational interests of the participants, not to produce a harvest of crops.

BENEFITS

- ✓ Getting outside for sunshine and fresh air
- ✓ Seeing the beauty of the outdoors
- ✓ Getting sensory stimulation from the touch, smells, sounds, and sights of the outdoors
- ✓ Interacting with other residents and staff who have the interest of gardening
- ✓ Having pride telling others about the garden
- ✓ Getting physical exercise
- ✓ Getting mental stimulation from planning and setting goals
- ✓ Anticipating the changes of the plants
- ✓ Gaining purpose and self-worth from the responsibility of taking care of the plants
- ✓ Receiving assurance from staff and volunteers when needed

Individuals involved in the Adapted Gardening Program need to know that the goal of this program is the process, not to have a harvest of crops. In fact, it is the not knowing that enhances the sense of anticipation and heightens the thrill during the process of tending the garden throughout the season. By definition, this includes an inherent risk of crop failure. But this risk is not in any way related to the real success of the program. The criteria for judging success or failure of the program includes the benefits previously mentioned. In addition, look for "yes" answers to the following questions.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ? Is the individual given the chance to do as much as he wants to do or can do?
- ? Is the individual given the help he needs in order to do as much as he wants to do or can do?
- ? Is the individual's safety protected with provision of drinking water, sun hat, sunscreen lotion, work gloves, walking escort, supervision, etc.?
- ? Are the garden beds raised to an adequate height so that seated persons can reach the soil without bending over and without getting down on their hands and knees?
- ? Is each individual offered the choice to have his own garden plot where he can plant whatever he wants to grow?
- ? Does each person have the opportunity to decide what plants he wants to use?
- ? Can each person go to the garden plot when he wants? Sit down in a chair in the garden area? Put his fingers in the soil? Hold or see a garden tool? Use his hands or a tool

to turn over some soil? Hold or see a packet of seeds and/or live seedlings? Plant the seeds or seedlings? Water the seeds or seedlings? Pull weeds? Observe plant growth? Thin out thick growth? Engage in discussion about various aspects of gardening tips and techniques? Engage in reminiscing about past gardening experiences? Socialize with others? Watch others as they garden?

Nowhere in this list is a goal to harvest a crop. Sure, come harvest time, it is disappointing if the corn withers and tomatoes don't grow. That part of the experience may spark more conversation and reminiscing and provide motivation to do better next year.

It is my hope that this article will help people understand what the important aspects of an Adapted Gardening Program are and what criteria should be used to judge the success or failure of the outcomes. Remember, the goal is the participation in the process and not the product that counts. CF