



Growing Socially, Emotionally Healthy Learners

Horticultural Therapy

What is horticultural therapy?

- Horticultural therapy uses gardening to improve the mental and physical health of its participants.
- This can be practiced in a variety of settings--typically with more general wellness goals in non-clinical group settings, including childcare centers, special education schools, and assisted living communities.



What are the benefits of horticultural therapy?

- Horticultural therapy can help youth:
 - improve self-esteem
 - reduce anxiety & depression
 - get moderate exercise
 - promote independence
 - acquire skills
 - reduce isolation
 - learn to care for another living thing & self
 - build healthy social and emotional connections to others and the natural world
- Gardening can enhance mood and promote mindfulness. Engaging in moderate outdoor exercise and connecting to soil increases serotonin levels in the brain.
- Garden spaces are safe spaces to connect with nature and calm our bodies and minds.

Connecting therapeutic themes to gardening activities

Gardening Activity	Therapeutic Theme or Significance
Growing and harvesting vegetables	Cycles of life and death; patience; reward
Seed starting (seed germination)	Caring and nurturing new life; hope, change
Plant propagation (stem cutting from a grown plant), dividing plants such as bulbs)	Taking something old or overgrown to start something fresh and new.
Weeding a garden bed	Removing unnecessary or negative things from our lives; making room for new growth
Pruning overgrown plants	Reducing a physical or emotional load; re-evaluating unhealthy relationships
Transplanting seedlings to the garden bed	Ownership, pride; sense of responsibility; caretaking



Gardening basics

Plants need:

- **Soil**
Healthy soil is key. Your local county UGA Extension agent will help you get your soil tested and can give you recommendations for how to improve your soil.
- **Water**
Containers need drainage holes. Water deeply and less often. Overwatering and underwatering can both lead to unhealthy, weak plants.
- **Sunlight**
Different plants have different needs, so be sure to check how much light your plants need. The south-facing side of a building will get the most sunlight all year.
- **Air**
Be sure to give plants enough space so that they do not compete with each other for light, water, and nutrients and can grow to their full potential. Keep the area around your plants free of weeds.

Starting with seeds vs. starting with seedlings:

- Seeds are smaller and harder to work with, and you need optimal conditions for them to germinate. However, they are also more affordable.
- Seedlings are more expensive but have a greater success rate and a shorter wait time until harvest.
- Root vegetables should always be direct-seeded.
- Some plants like tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, cabbage, and others should be transplanted.

Top 10 easiest to grow in an ECE setting

1. Radish (fastest)
2. Turnip
3. Herbs (low maintenance)
4. Lettuce
5. Cucumber/Squash/Watermelon
6. Onions/Garlic
7. Kale/Collards
8. Green beans
9. Okra (if you have more space)
10. Sunflowers, Zinnias, Marigolds



Warm-season crops:

tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, melons, okra, beans, eggplant.



Cool-season crops:

hardy greens, lettuce, roots (carrots, radish, turnip), garlic, broccoli.

