

DESIGNING A HORTICULTURAL THERAPY PROGRAMME FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

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Your success in developing a horticultural therapy programme that improves the quality of life of people with dementia hinges on how well the programme addresses clients' physical and mental needs, and capabilities.

Some of the strategies that have worked well in Homewood's Horticultural Therapy programmes are listed below.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Promote structure and client/resident/staff/volunteer commitment by establishing a set time for your programme.
- Outline programme goals with the client/resident to encourage better participation and reduce anxiety.
- Place clients/residents in small groups to allow them to work at their own pace, thus increasing therapeutic success.
- Use a subtle approach when teaching as this leads to greater interpersonal interaction.
- Listen intently. A trusting relationship develops through a sincere, caring manner and honest, open communication.
- Watch for subtle changes in mood, appearance or attitude. Also bear in mind that some medications will produce negative side effects or reactions (for example, people taking neuroleptics can react negatively to sunlight).
- Include quiet or non-responsive clients/residents in group sessions.
- Be open to suggestions from a client/resident who wishes to do something different.
- To alleviate boredom, make your session as interesting as you can and develop projects or activities that are challenging, but not beyond a client/resident's ability.
- Encourage direct participation and tailor activities to individual capabilities and needs.
- If you are based in a residential home,

establish a good rapport with other staff to ensure residents are dressed and nourished before the programme begins.

- Keep a record of the most successful activities and plants used.
- Add an extra dimension to your programme by holding field trips to botanical gardens, parks and horticultural shows, showing films or inviting guest lecturers.

TEN OF THE BEST THERAPEUTIC PLANTS

Plants can be used to develop or improve physical or cognitive skills, maximise function and independence and encourage positive interaction with the external environment. In a horticultural therapy programme select plants that are:

- non-poisonous
- multi-dimensional (with more than one use)
- interesting in colour, shape and texture
- easy to grow and propagate under a range of conditions
- useful for providing sensory stimulation
- useful for stimulating memory and creativity
- able to provide clients with meaningful activity.

The following 10 plants or plant groups meet these criteria:

1. *x Citrofortunella microcarpa* (Calamondin)
2. *Pelargonium 'Clorinda'* (Scented Geranium)
3. *Lavandula* (Lavender)
4. *Solenostemon* (Coleus)
5. *Chlorophytum comosum* (Spider plant)
6. *Menthe* (Mint)
7. *Viola Tricolor* (Wild pansy)
8. *Tradescantia*
9. Succulents
10. *Saintpaulia* (African violet)

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