

🌱 Does the garden give a home-like feel?

Plants are memory-prompters and can lead to “I remember when” stories. Typical plants you might expect to see in a Midwest residential healthcare facility would include roses, lilacs, peonies, daylilies, and hollyhocks.

🌱 Are there opportunities for active involvement?

Involvement in the care of the garden can provide meaningful activity, and can be comforting to residents, families, staff, and community members. Gardening also provides physical exercise and activity that can have important positive physical and emotional health benefits.

🌱 Is horticultural programming offered to residents?

Horticultural activities and opportunities to be outdoors should be regularly scheduled. Activities can be as simple as a spring picnic or a container gardening competition. Regularly scheduled outdoor gatherings should be a part of every healthcare facility's programming. Garden locations, when well designed, can be successfully used for physical, occupational, and recreation therapy. Therapists often find that patients get more enjoyment out of outdoor therapy and therefore also receive more benefit from the therapy.

Therapeutic gardens can be an important factor in easing the transition between home and other housing situations. Garden spaces may allow continuation of hobbies, such as growing tomatoes or nurturing roses, that were formerly enjoyed in a home setting. Best practices at a healthcare facility include offering comforting and inviting amenities both indoors and outdoors for patients, visitors, and staff.

For more information

Check these additional publications in the Therapeutic Gardening Series:

- *Benefits for Healthcare Facilities*, RG 109
- *Creating Raised Bed Planters*, RG 111
- *Gardening Tips for Older Adults*, RG 107
- *Resources*, RG 110

Check these Web sites:

ISU Extension Distribution Center
Online Store—

www.extension.iastate.edu/store

ISU Horticulture—

www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu

Reiman Gardens—

www.reimangardens.iastate.edu

If you want to learn more about horticulture through training and volunteer work, ask your ISU Extension office for information about the ISU Extension Master Gardener program.

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Therapeutic
Gardening

A Factor in Choosing Healthcare Facilities



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University Extension

Evaluating a healthcare facility for yourself or a loved one is a daunting task. Factors such as location, staff qualifications, and staff to resident ratios are just a few of the important considerations.

But what about the outdoor amenities? Well-designed landscapes provide therapeutic benefits to physical, emotional, and mental health. Families, visitors, and staff all experience an enhanced quality of life when accessible outdoor spaces are available.

Research has shown what many of us already sense is true: exposure to nature is therapeutic to humans and offers many positive physical and emotional benefits. Patients who spend 10 minutes or more in a garden have been shown to have improvements in behavior, pulse rate, blood pressure, weight, and vitamin D levels.

Consider the following questions when visiting potential healthcare facilities.

🌿 Are attractive outdoor spaces available?

Every healthcare facility should have some outdoor space. For maximum therapeutic benefit outdoor spaces should include a profusion of lush vegetation and flowers; a water feature for soothing sound and sight; pleasant open views; visible wildlife, such as birds and butterflies; and sounds of nature, such as rustling leaves and grasses.

A well-designed therapeutic garden provides opportunity for exercise to help increase muscle tone, quiet spaces for meditation, gathering places for conversation, sensory reminders, and stress relief.

🌿 Can you access the garden?

Facilities with quality therapeutic gardens provide safe, unrestricted access for residents and their guests. Safety is a primary concern so some type of enclosure may be necessary. Some residents will require assistance and/or supervision in the garden. Ideally, daily access to the outdoors should be available for all residents when weather conditions permit.

Directional signs should be in evidence to help visitors find the garden and invite them to enter.

🌿 Do the gardens include paved pathways for walking?

Pathways should have a smooth, non-skid surface and be wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass. Paving may be tinted to reduce glare.

Looped pathways with landmarks (benches, bird feeders, wind chimes) allow residents to find their way without becoming disoriented.

🌿 What kind of seating is available?

Seating should be provided for all types of weather and all times of day. Benches and individual chairs with arm rests plus both stationary and moveable seating should be offered. Also look for seating that accommodates both individuals alone in quiet contemplation plus small and large groups for conversation and to watch neighborhood activity.

🌿 Does the garden include places of interest and activities for families and children as well as residents?

Families and friends tend to visit more often if there is something to do. Paved pathways, bird feeders, sculptures, and colorful plantings can enhance a visit to a loved family member. Additional garden features that could prompt visitor interest might include a playhouse for young visitors, watering cans and access to water, garden-size chess or checkers, or a putting green.

🌿 Does the garden provide luxurious foliage with abundant flowers?

Thriving foliage and flowers are pleasant to see, touch, and smell, and have been proven to be stress-relievers. Sick or dead plants can bring negative thoughts so a well-maintained garden is important to emotional and mental health.

