



Ohio State HCS News

HORTICULTURE & CROP SCIENCE IN VIRTUAL PERSPECTIVE - THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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People Blossom While Planting and Weeding



The weekly horticulture therapy program relies on volunteers to provide one-on-one interaction with the clients.

Thaddeus Swilley wanted to make sure the garden had room for one last tomato plant. He had helped plant five others, but the garden was getting crowded, and he was concerned. "We can't leave him over there by himself. He's got to be with his brother," Swilley pointed out.

Space was made for the remaining plant, and Swilley's ever-present smile grew wider. After planting his last tomato, Swilley, who struggles with balance even on sturdy ground, concentrated mightily as he left the garden, careful not to step on any of the tender vegetable seedlings planted that morning.



With the help of Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens volunteers, developmentally disabled adults maintain gardens that surround OSU's Howlett Hall.

Swilley is one of six to 12 clients of the [Association for the Developmentally Disabled's](#) Community Connections program who work regularly in the greenhouse and gardens at the [Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens](#) on the Ohio State University campus. "It's fun," he said of his time in the garden. "You can learn about different plants, and it gives me a chance to do something."

praises the program, "The OSU Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens sessions are one of the most popular activities we offer. The level of programming is superior. We now hear our clients talking about plants and gardening with their peers. This program fosters personal growth and enriches the lives of our clients."

ADD's Director **Mel Rhoades**



In addition to weeding, pruning, and harvesting, the clients gain enrichment through activities such as this floral arrangement made entirely from plants they cultivated themselves.

Established in the fall of 2002 by **Jenny Pope**, this unique opportunity for adults with developmental disabilities has blossomed into full fledged horticulture therapy program. From February to October, the Community Connections clients spend Monday mornings with Pope, Ohio State Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and Chadwick Arboretum Volunteers. In addition to the physical challenges of weeding, pruning, maintaining and harvesting garden beds and vegetable gardens, the Horticulture Therapy Group clients participate in planned activities that provide enriching and educational experiences.

"Planting, nurturing and enjoying flowers and vegetables has therapeutic value," explained Pope, the volunteer coordinator for the Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens. "We are nourishing the minds, bodies and souls of our clients." She says the connection between plants and people can bring about changes -- some big, some little but almost all good -- in the adults with whom she works. She recalled one client who couldn't get his hands dirty because of phobias. About halfway through a potting session, she looked up to see him digging into the dirt. "We've had other folks with behavioral problems who started out hostile or standoffish. In three or four weeks, they came in smiling and eager to work."



ADD's clients painted pots that were sold to generate funds to maintain the totally self supporting program.

Due to the dedication and commitment of the volunteers, clients are able to work one-on-one with the clients. Volunteer **Lisa Dove** sees the positive effects. "They do great work, and they feel good about it. You see people develop. You score the little victories." In 2006 the group worked on many gardens that surround Howlett Hall, where the Horticulture & Crop Science Department educates students in the science of growing plants. A particularly satisfying project had clients create floral arrangements entirely from vegetables and flowers they

had grown themselves.

For people who might not have a great deal of control over many facets of their lives, taking care of another living thing can be very meaningful, said **Kathy Harris**, education director of the [Alzheimer's Association of Central Ohio](#), a volunteer who works with clients. "Plants give you something to nurture and validate that you have an important function."

As a totally self-funded program, the Horticulture Therapy Group relies on volunteers and donations to sustain itself. A recent donation by [The Scotts Company](#) allowed the clients to paint pots which were then sold at the arboretum's annual Plant Sale. The [Painted Pots](#) project provided clients the opportunity to express themselves and generate funds to preserve the program. Please contact [Jenny Pope](#) if you are interested in donating to the program.

Story by Laurie Loscocco and Victor van Buchem. Web publishing by [Victor van Buchem](#). Photos by [Jenny Pope](#). Portions of this article first appeared in the September 3, 2006 edition of the Columbus Dispatch. "People Blossom While Planting and Weeding" by Laurie Loscocco reprinted with permission from The Columbus Dispatch.

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