


The Benefits of Well-Designed Outdoor Garden Spaces in Senior Living

Enhancing Life Experiences Through Collaborative Design

The bottom of the slide features a decorative graphic consisting of three overlapping, wavy horizontal bands. The top band is a light sage green, the middle band is a slightly darker sage green, and the bottom band is a muted reddish-brown. These bands create a layered, organic effect that suggests a landscape or garden.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF NATURE

Human beings have an innate tendency to focus on life and living things which E.O. Wilson named biophilia. This affinity for nature and living things is supported in numerous studies, which show that when individuals are given a choice of a nature or urban/built scene, they consistently choose nature scenes as their preference for viewing. This preference exists whether in actual experience of nature or in pictures of nature scenes.¹



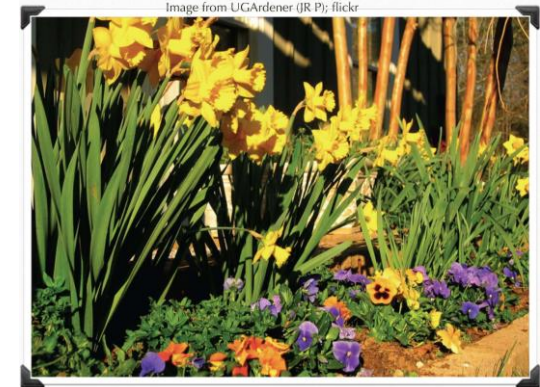
The **biophilia** hypothesis suggests that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. Edward O. Wilson introduced and popularized the hypothesis in his book, *Biophilia* (1984). He defines **biophilia** as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life".

¹Hartig, Evans, Jamner, Davis, & Garling, 2003; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Lewis, 1996; Van Den Berg, Hartig, & Staats, 2007

In addition to preference for nature scenes, the outdoor natural environment has many health benefits. Views of nature and being in nature settings are associated with elevated mood, decreased depression, and stress reduction.²

In senior living, garden spaces minimize feelings of isolation and vulnerability, and enhance self-esteem among residents.³ When outdoors as little as 10-15 minutes of sunlight exposure per day helps to balance circadian rhythms for improved sleep, which is often a problem for those with dementia.⁴ Sunlight also promotes vitamin D synthesis and calcium metabolism;⁵ important to bone health of older adults.

Studies have also shown that outdoor green spaces and gardens promote physical exercise.⁶ Easy access to well-designed gardens, encourage walking,⁷ and decrease pacing, wandering, and agitation among individuals with some types of dementia.⁸



² Beute, & de Kort, 2014; de Kort, Meijnders, Sponselee, Ijsselsteijn, 2006; Van Den Berg, Hartig, & Staats, 2007

³ Van Someren, et al., 1996; Chen, Sloane, and Dalton, 2003

⁴ Rea, Figueiro, and Bullough, 2002; Roberts, 2002

⁴ Holick, 2002

⁵ Austin, Johnston & Morgan, 2006; Van Den Berg, Hartig & Staats 2007

⁶ Joseph, Zimring, Harris-Kojetin & Kiefer, 2005; Mooney & Nicell, 1992

⁷ Detweiler, Murphy, Myers, & Kim, 2008; Detweiler, Murphy, Kim, Myers, & Ashai, 2009; Murphy, Miyazaki, Detweiler, & Kim, 2010

THERAPEUTIC GARDENS IN SENIOR LIVING



Gardens in this document and for what is proposed in senior living refers to a therapeutic garden space that offers more greenscape than hardscape, and a variety of landscaping that stimulates the senses, and affords a variety of ways to experience the space for sitting, walking, looking, listening, reflecting, or napping.⁸ Therapeutic gardens, that are well-executed with evidence to support their designs, promote the varied health benefits discussed previously. Well-design spaces compensate for increased frailty and sensory loss in cognitively impaired individuals, and can reduce challenging behaviors. Conversely, poorly designed garden spaces can precipitate agitation and contribute to disorientation, and confusion.⁹ Outdoor garden spaces also encourage mobility and general exercise.¹⁰ A person's physical fitness, particularly important in later life, influences overall health and well-being. Because of this James Rimmer (2004), who is director of the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability, suggests making exercise a priority for residents in dementia care.

⁸ Cooper-Marcus & Sachs, 2014)

⁹ Brawley, 2007

¹⁰ Brawley, 2007

In addition to the many benefits to health and well-being, outdoor garden spaces provide older adults with a sense of connection with the world around them, and are often preferred spaces for visits between residents and their families and friends.¹¹

Therapeutic garden spaces also stimulate long-term memories of previous home life, and provide a context to participate in familiar routines and tasks such as hanging clothes, sweeping, watering flowers, raking leaves, and gardening, which support individual identity.¹²

¹¹ Chapman & Carder, 2003

¹² Brawley, 2007

¹³ Brawley, 2007

¹⁴(Carmen, 2011)

These familiar activities and routines have been performed in both indoor and outdoor environments, and provide a sense of purpose and define who we are as individuals.¹³ Many of the current generation of older adults grew up helping the family tend vegetable gardens as a supplement to the family's food source.

We should not think that familiar routines once performed outdoors are no longer important to older adults or that our

interaction with nature is no long important just because we age".¹⁴ When we relegate older adults to indoor environments, we ignore the fundamental need to remain connected with nature and perform familiar and routines, which may have significant meaning for individuals.



Resident Park, Cypress Cove at HealthPark CCRC
Fort Myers, FL – design by Brad Smith Associates, Inc.

VALUE OF OUTDOOR GARDEN SPACES

In a study by Mather Lifeways Institute on Aging about marketing assisted living facilities, outdoor garden spaces ranked almost as important as facility features such as handrails and walking surfaces.¹⁵ Similarly, other studies have found that residents want access to outdoor spaces, with “green, landscaped grounds,” and outdoor places for “enjoying nature, talking with friends, and looking at plants.” These features of an outdoor space ranked as the most important aspects of a retirement community.¹⁶ One study examined the cost benefit of outdoor garden spaces in assisted living. The study found that outdoor garden spaces translate to resident satisfaction and improved psychological well-being, which leads to an 8% increase in resident referrals.¹⁷ In a 2011 study by Reynolds, outdoor garden spaces were found to influence facility choice for nearly 50% of prospective residents, and 100% of participants in the study reported a high value for nature. The value for nature was reported in statements such as “nature is alive, and offers a kinship to living creatures and plants that isn’t possible with inanimate objects,” and comments about the outdoor garden spaces providing a connection with “a world beyond the walls”.¹⁸



Image from LandscapeDesignAdvisor.com

¹⁵ Keane, Cislo, & Fulton, 2003

¹⁶ Keane, Cislo, & Fulton, 2003; Reynolds, 2011; Stoneham & Jones, 1997; Talbot & Kaplan, 1991

¹⁷ Rodiek, Boggess, Lee, Booth, Morris, 2013

¹⁸ Reynolds, 2011, p 88

CONCLUSION

An extensive body of research supports the numerous health benefits of nature, and the high value older adults have for it. Evidence-based garden designs promote health and emotional well-being, and satisfaction with the senior living facilities. In dementia care, in particular, a therapeutic outdoor space can reduce challenging behaviors and improve sleep, when the garden space provides a walking path for pacing and opportunities for participation in activities. To disregard this very large body of research on the benefits of nature is to devalue late life for older adults living in senior care communities.

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