

GROWING HEALTHIER

Gardening can be therapeutic, and that statement is not just a homey fable or a hobbyists' truism.

Like many of you, my mind has a skeptical side, but the evidence keeps piling up.

At the top of the pile is a news release from the Texas A&M Agrilife, where floriculture professor Charlie Hall recently published research on the mental benefits of gardening and related activities.

"As many people already knew and others discovered during the pandemic, plant-related hobbies like gardening offer an opportunity to enjoy nature and give a person a more positive outlook on life," Hall says.

The benefits, according to his research, include anxiety and stress reduction, attention deficit recovery, decreased depression, enhanced memory retention, improved happiness and life satisfaction, mitigation of PTSD, reduced effects of dementia, and enhanced self-esteem.

Hall's research got me thinking. I know from writing about agriculture that there are USDA dollars, programs and support organizations that encourage veterans to take up farming after they leave active military service. One combat veteran told me that taking on a farm felt like an empowering step and allowed him and his wife to take ownership of their lives.

Another item in the pile of evidence is a survey that Monrovia recently did. "Nearly 30% of those we surveyed said they strongly believe that gardening allows them to 'just be,'" Katie Tamony, chief marketing officer at Monrovia, said in a news release.

I can connect that to my own experience. I don't know about you, but during the pandemic, my garden — both flowers and vegetables — grew substantially. I didn't garden much at all until 2018, a stressful year when I became a dad for the third time and we had just moved to a new home. And maybe it's retail therapy, but my wife sometimes will buy a plant to improve the kind of week she's been having.

So, how does the horticulture industry fit into this positive connection between gardening and mental health? Marketers in the industry can get creative in finding a solution. There's a lot of room for innovation.

Monrovia has released "Shades of Beautiful" — a guidebook that brings design, color and plant inspiration to home gardeners. The book recommends specific plants based on 10 curated color palettes with names like "Refreshing and Refined" or "Sunny Day."

"We are seeing a trend where gardeners are designing spaces that reflect their personal wellness needs," Tamony said. "That can be anything from a social space to energize creativity, warm and welcoming outdoor rooms or a calming, private area to escape the noise and stress of everyday life."



Research shows participating in gardening and other horticultural activities gives people a more positive outlook on life.

Photo: Texas A&M Agrilife



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