



Healing Garden

Create a Healing Garden Retreat to Let Nature Nurture

Written by Jerry Schelhorn and Presented at Grandma's Gardens & Landscape

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread,
places to play in and pray in,
where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.”
~ John Muir, Scottish-American Naturalist, Founder of the Sierra Club



Create a Healing Garden Retreat

Healing can occur when we create a garden which enhances our surroundings to such a degree that we escape the burdens of everyday life, immersing ourselves in and absorbing the richness and fullness of our organic creation, letting nature nurture us. In a Healing Garden, whatever heals nature can also contribute to our own physical and mental healing. A Healing Garden should be organic and wildlife friendly. By setting these goals for your garden and property, your outdoors will also be friendly to you.

Ask yourself the question, "Will a toad grow on my property?". If you're using products which can kill you if ingested even in small quantities (products labeled with a "Warning" or "Danger" notation stating that they are harmful or fatal if swallowed), then these products will definitely kill the smaller creatures who live on or visit your grounds. There are of course many products for car and home which would do us harm if ingested. We just should not be spreading them all over our lawns and gardens.

No plant is worth having if you have to use poisons to keep it looking good. Either get rid of the plant or tolerate it not looking perfect. The majority of plant choices do not have insect or disease issues to the degree that you would need to use chemicals in order for them to look good. If an issue does arise, there are good organic solutions.

My favorite insect devouring plant story involves the Butterfly Weeds I have in my garden. Every year they are totally chewed down to the ground by caterpillars. The Butterfly Weed has already bloomed when it is eaten and then comes back up to bloom again the same summer. The butterflies enjoyed the nectar from the blooms, laid eggs which hatched the caterpillars who devoured the plant so when they pupate back into butterflies again, there would be another bloom cycle for them to enjoy! Amazing!

A garden cannot be beneficial to wildlife or humans if we use harmful chemicals to maintain a "perfect" look. I have to ask, is it really healing for us to try to achieve perfection in our gardens? There are plenty of outside pressures on us as it is without the pressure of trying to maintain a lawn which looks like a golf course and a garden without weed or a hole in a leaf. We run the risk of viewing our landscape or garden as another household chore instead of a place of healing and escape. A Healing Garden will help you, your family, neighbors, friends, bees, butterflies, birds, toads, frogs, dragonflies, fireflies and earthworms – just to scratch the surface. The "Perfect Garden" is high maintenance and will hurt everything a Healing Garden helps! A Healing Garden cannot be a high maintenance garden. A Healing Garden will give back to you! You don't want a landscape that takes away your time, energy, and health.

You can have a Healing Garden certified as an official Backyard Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation and as a certified Monarch Weigh Station. This will be especially enjoyable and educational for any children who live at or visit your home. The Monarchs need as many places to feed as possible as they migrate south to Mexico in September and October. Most children never get to see a Monarch hatch from a chrysalis or tadpoles turning into frogs - something easy to accomplish with a small pond filled with plants so algae will not be an issue. I'll never forget the look on

my young daughter's face when she stood still near a hummingbird feeder as about twenty of them swarmed around her buzzing in an out of two feeders I had set up near each other. My neighbors couldn't understand how I had attracted so many hummingbirds. They had their feeders placed on "perfect sterile lawns". I had my feeder amid a sea of hummingbird attracting flowers.

Today my daughter can still remember the hummingbirds racing around her head in a feeding frenzy. This happened many years ago. She can't remember the text message she sent yesterday. A Healing Garden can provide a child with experiences they will keep with them the rest of their lives. I think when my daughter is eighty, she will remember the experiences she had in her childhood home garden. And the great thing about that is many of them were spent with me. I'll have the same memories.

By growing a variety of plants which bloom at different times of the year you will also benefit our dwindling honeybee population. Bees need a constant supply of diverse nectar sources to be healthy. I think many honeybees are dying from landing on clover or dandelions in sprayed lawns and then taking this chemical back with them to the hive. I know of one local beekeeper who is having a hard time maintaining a living hive. One of his direct neighbors has all weeds in his lawn sprayed. I was there one day after the chemical truck had left and noticed the warning signs stuck in his lawn. I could taste the chemicals on my tongue. I tried not to breathe deeply. I would recommend never spraying any plants or weeds which are in bloom with anything, even organics. If you are spraying an herbicide on weeds, pick or cut off the blooms first.

A Healing Garden should provide an intimate space where you may enjoy a quiet moment soaking in all the colors and sounds of your creation. Speaking of creation, a good Healing Garden allows you to create! Creating is healing! Don't worry about any rules and don't be afraid to make mistakes! If you grow bored with a feature in your garden, change it! If you are able to reach this stage, then you have officially become a true gardener. You will always be wanting to change something or try something new. A real garden is always evolving and never static. With a well designed Healing Garden, you will always be anticipating and looking forward to the next show your plants will be performing, the next flavor you will be tasting, the next fragrance you will be inhaling, the next creature who will be visiting.

Besides the visual show your plants will provide, many also contain important nutrients needed by our bodies for good health. The addition of these "healing plants" to your garden is a valuable element which should not be overlooked. Plants from your garden supply nutrients in an easy-to-assimilate, natural form without creating imbalances the way megadoses of vitamins can. Even the common dandelion- a plant I guarantee you will at some point find and is a good indication of a "friendly lawn", is rich in protein, potassium, vitamin A, iron, manganese and other trace minerals. In fact, all the dandelions in my lawn are my survival strategy if there is a run on groceries for some reason. I don't need a bunker full of canned goods!

An often overlooked benefit of using edible plants in your landscape is their use for improving the diets of our pets. Commercial pet foods are often full of by-products, preservatives and coloring agents which, after being consumed by our pets over several years, can result in poor health. Grabbing a few leaves from your edible plants and occasionally mixing these in with their food could be beneficial to your pets.

OrganicGardening.com is a good source of information for your Healing Garden. In their August/Sept. 2013 publication issue there is a good article on plant-based pet diets. They are also recommending a book written by Michael J. Balick, Ph.D. titled: Rodale's 21st Century Herbal: A Practical Guide for Healthy Living Using Nature's Most Powerful Plants.

Don't be afraid to let vegetable plants and herbs out of the prison cells we tend to confine them to on our properties. Use them in your Healing Garden or landscape along with your other ornamental plants. Many of them are very attractive and deserve to be given a place of prominence on your property. Don't worry -- they will get along well with others! It's all about starting to think of the property beyond the walls of your house as not only an extension of your home, but as a way of living your life to increase the well-being of you and your family!

I recently heard about a study done which showed how office workers who took a daily break from their computers and spent time outside in a garden setting were more productive than their counterparts who only took breaks inside buildings such as restaurants. The scientists concluded that taking a break to be around the greenery of plants increased the workers mental capacities to help them remember and learn new tasks more quickly and to process information more efficiently. Think of your Healing Garden as a "natural caffeine" which will help to clear your mind and focus better when you are in the trenches of everyday life.

Another benefit of gardening occurs when you are working the soil, which releases microbes into the air you are breathing in. These microbes help to keep your lungs healthy. There are many other benefits associated with the activity of gardening. To name two, gardening will burn calories and tone muscles!

Many homeowners never go beyond object landscaping - landscaping we place around the foundation of our house and around lamp posts, mailboxes, decks, sheds, etc. This type of landscaping is necessary, as the plants used for these areas greatly enhance the appearance of our homes and increase our property values. But object landscaping is not true gardening. A real garden will be one which creates an outdoor room, one you can walk through and then stop to sit. You should not be able to see all the features of the garden by standing in front of it. A real garden evokes a sense of mystery that will draw visitors in to explore. The sound of water which cannot be seen is always a compelling feature. Include the element of surprise by revealing a striking plant, fountain or piece of garden art which would not have been seen had your visitor not explored.

You can achieve a Healing Garden anywhere under any conditions. A Healing Garden is all about choices. There is nothing wrong with designing your garden around particular plant choices you just have to have. Choose plants which catch your eye and put a smile on your face. A Healing Garden can take on any design theme. Try to incorporate the elements of privacy, fragrance, motion, taste, touch, color and sound. Plant bird, bee and butterfly attractors. All of these elements will heighten your senses and relax your body to contribute to healing and invigorate the mind, spirit and soul.

I have included a sample Healing Garden design to aid you in getting your creative juices flowing and to provide examples of choices in plant material you can use. At Grandma's Gardens we can provide you with all the necessary ingredients to help you in the construction of a Healing Garden. From design ideas and drawings, all the plants and soil amendments, garden art, furniture, water features, pottery and hardscaping, we have everything you need. We would be happy to quote you a labor price if you would enjoy some help in completing all or a portion of the project. We will also be able to aid you in insuring your Healing Garden continues to grow and thrive with our ever present on site knowledgeable staff who can answer any questions and direct you to the best organic products and fertilizers you can find.

A Healing Garden will provide you peace from a stressed-out digitally dependent world. Spending time in your garden will help alleviate digital eye strain and the headaches, blurred vision, dry eyes, neck and shoulder strain which comes from spending too much time in front of the T.V., computers and hand-held devices. Anxious thoughts about your week ahead and e-mails in your inbox waiting for replies will take a back seat as you breathe in the sweet air of your garden and relax listening to the sounds and notes of the great outdoors enhanced by the rich experience your Healing Garden has created.

Imagine walking out into your garden at dusk in late June, just in time to see evening primrose unfurl their tightly held daytime buds like a timelapse photography session. Their lemon yellow flowers glow in the twilight and emit a sweet fragrance into the still evening air. A large opalescent green lunar moth descends from behind you, brushing by your head, drawn to the intoxicating perfume exuding from the many fragrant plants in your garden. Hundreds of fireflies come out for the evening, drifting upward from an organic lawn into tree branches to create a dazzling light show no man can duplicate. You'll realize that what you have created goes far beyond names of plants you purchased and has provided healing not only for yourself, but also the life around you.

I encourage you to get out and discover everything that being a property owner has to offer by taking advantage of the tremendous diversity of product choices available to you here locally at Grandma's Gardens. By creating a Healing Garden you will be able to feed your mind, body and soul. You'll be caring for yourself, your family and the world around you. Dream with your eyes open and plant a Healing Garden. Then you shall be where you would be, then you shall be what you should be.

By Jerry Schelhorn, Grandma's Gardens & Landscape Waynesville, Ohio March 2014