



Nurturenature is a healing garden based at Station house, Wortley, Nr Sheffield. It aims to promote health and well-being for individuals with chronic illness, both physical and mental, including life limiting conditions, through the benefit of being in the garden and undertaking activities matched to users' needs.

Background

There is an increasing body of evidence that nature in general and gardens in particular can be of benefit to both physical and mental wellbeing. Formal frameworks for using the benefit of nature to improve health and wellbeing can be grouped together under the umbrella term 'Green Care'. In 2010 an international group collaborated to produce a conceptual framework for Green Care. (*Green Care: A Conceptual Framework*) Importantly, Green Care is *active* engagement with the natural environment rather than just passively being in nature. In reality this is not a new phenomenon. Historically, hospitals and prisons had both general gardens and kitchen gardens and inmates and patients who worked in the gardens or undertook agricultural roles were observed to fare better both physically and mentally than those employed in roles indoors or not undertaking any physical activity at all. Despite this longstanding interest in the beneficial nature of gardens and gardening it is only fairly recently that a robust evidence base has begun to emerge that supports the use of gardens to improve health and wellbeing and this is important if we are to justify investing resources, both time and money, into developing green care facilities whether large or small

In 2016 the Kings Fund undertook a review funded by the National Garden Society (NGS) of the evidence for the benefit of gardens which demonstrated a range of benefits both in terms of health promotion and prevention of disease as well as for both chronic physical health and mental health problems. (<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/gardens-and-health>) They advocated placing gardens and health within mainstream health and social care policy and cited a number of exemplar projects that are already in place. MIND, the large mental health charity, undertook a study of ecotherapy and found that it was of benefit to individuals both at risk of mental health problems and with existing mental health problems. In addition, it was found to promote general mental well-being.

(<https://www.mind.org.uk/media/336359/Feel-better-outside-feel-better-inside-report.pdf>)

This has led to therapeutic horticulture being part of the NICE guideline recommended treatments for individuals with recurrent mild to moderate depression.



Gardens used for therapeutic benefit can be classified in a number of ways. However, therapeutic gardens of any type have a number of characteristics in common which should be taken into consideration when planning them. Planting should be done taking consideration of all the senses; smell, touch, visual impact both large and small scale, auditory input such as running water and even taste by access to produce grown on site. The Green Care document divides them into a number of different types largely depending on the extent of the intervention/interaction with the clients and input from qualified therapeutic horticulturalists. For example, the distinction is made between horticultural therapy where there are pre-defined clinical goals and supervision by a qualified horticultural therapist and therapeutic horticulture where nature/gardens are used to promote well-being in a more general way though this may include goal setting. A healing garden fits within the therapeutic horticulture paradigm and aims to promote health and well-being for its users but does not have regular input from a qualified therapeutic horticulturalist.

Nurturenature

Nurturenature is located in a 1+ acre private garden in Wortley between Sheffield and Barnsley. The garden has been through a number of iterations while the present owners have lived there (approx. 20 years) but 3 years ago it was decided that the garden would be developed to be used as a healing garden in order to give something back to the community and realise a passionate belief in the benefit of nature in general and gardens in particular, for physical and mental well-being. The garden has been planned with good practice for healing gardens in mind so that there is a focus on scented and tactile plants, a number of quiet, defined seating areas to allow potential users to simply sit in nature, the sound of running water both from a culvert and a water feature. Users can observe and be part of care of the cycle of life in the garden as the seasons change. There will be the opportunity to learn basic garden techniques such as seed and cutting propagation, basic pruning, potting on, weeding, helping prepare for plant sales etc. In addition, a number of events potentially beneficial to health and well-being such as mindfulness, creative writing and art based workshops are being run in the garden with a focus on nature so that the benefits of nature are being utilised in partnership with the specific focus of the workshop. Some of the places on workshops are subsidised to ensure that those on low income or benefits are not excluded.

Funding

Nurturenature was previously run as a not-for-profit social enterprise but in March 2019 charitable status was approved so that we are now a registered charity, albeit a very small one.

To date funding the project has principally been done by selling plants both at plant sales and ad hoc between formal plant sales. In 2018 the HPS generously awarded £700 through the Kenneth Black Bursary to assist towards the purchase of plug plants to pot on both to develop the garden itself and to sell at plant sales. This enabled us to purchase plug plants for potting on in April/May and subsequently sell in our September plant sale and plant out in warm autumn soil in our own garden. Those not sold or planted were overwintered outside on racking ready for the first plant sale of 2019 and planting when some hard landscaping to improve accessibility planned for 2019 was complete. We live in a frost pocket so it is a good test of the hardiness of the perennials! In addition, the bursary allowed us to purchase more plug plants than would otherwise have been possible in September which were potted on and overwintered in polytunnels. Much to our delight our first plant sale of 2019 on the early May Bank Holiday weekend was by far our most successful plant sale to date. A number of visitors had come to the sales in 2018 and commented on how well the plants were doing that they had purchased. We are establishing a connection with the local community which is very much one of our aims so that visitors know the garden is here and can be used by them if needed as well as attending specific events. Visitors to the plant sales are also able to see that the plants are truly hardy both by looking at the plants for sale and even better observing plants in situ in the garden. Particular favourites are Penstemon 'Husker Red', an unusual penstemon with beautiful dark red stems and white flowers and which likes shade making it suitable for a woodland garden which is where we have placed ours. Also striking in the woodland is the gorgeous Heuchera 'Lime Marmalade' which lights up the woodland all year and works particularly well planted with a dark heuchera such as 'Plum Pudding' or 'Nearly Black'. Another popular shade loving plant is Teucrium "Purple Tails". I personally particularly like the dwarf achillea Achillea 'King Alfred' which has beautiful small cream flowers, grey feathery foliage and unlike the majority of achillea grows to not much more than 10 cm so is suitable for the front of a border or containers. The gorgeous Cosmos

‘Chocamocha’ is unfortunately only borderline perennial for us – planted in a sheltered place and well mulched in the autumn it will survive an average Yorkshire winter but is not hardy enough for an exposed position. Visitors highlight the fact that the perennials available for purchase are not those usually seen in commercial nurseries, a key aim of both the planting and the sales. Despite the garden being very much a work in progress visitors both healthy and with difficulties seem to find the garden inspiring. I think my favourite recent response was a lady with dementia who had walked round the garden touching grasses and admiring the alliums in particular and then said, “this is paradise”. Thank you so much to the HPS for your support in making this possible.

“Hot bed” June 1st 2019



Teucrium “Purple Tails”



Hellebores



Workshop in garden