

WELCOME TO THE WASHINGTON STATE FEDERATION OF GARDEN CLUB!

My name is Dorrie Carr, and I am the WSFGC President for the 2025-2027 garden club term.

THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE –

Hippocrates said, “Nature itself is the best physician.” But what is nature? I found a wonderful description of what nature is on the internet – the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations: or better said as “The breathtaking beauty of nature.”

Constant stimulation and digital saturation seem to be the norm in our world at the present time. Psychologists have found that we are spending too much time indoors on our phones or computers, which may lead to psychological harm. They are suggesting a new psychological condition entitled “Nature Deficit Disorder.” And what would be the prescription to help with this disorder? Getting out in nature of course! Numerous studies have found that spending time in nature has not only physical benefits, but psychological ones as well.

From a stroll through a city park, hiking in the wilderness, working in a garden, walking on the beach or near a river, nature has many benefits. It can improve your mood and make you feel more connected to the natural world; it can improve your mental health, lower your blood pressure, boost your immune system, and reduce stress.

Frederick Law Olmsted felt that natural landscapes should benefit the psychological and physical health of individuals. His creations are still being used by us today – New York’s Central Park, Arnold Arboretum at Harvard, the Emerald Necklace surrounding Boston, Stanford University campus, and Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks.

Studies show that the effects of nature may go deeper than providing a sense of well-being. In a 2015 study of 2,000 people in the UK it was found that more exposure to nature translated into more community cohesion and substantially lower rates of crime.

Research has also shown that children who lived in neighborhoods with more green space had a reduced risk of many psychiatric disorders later in life, including depression, mood disorders, eating disorders, and substance abuse.

During my time as president of my garden club, I was contacted by an elementary school PTSO representative. In her email she explained that the school had garden beds that had not been used in a while and had become overgrown with weeds. Some of the students had begun weeding the beds during their recess periods. The PTSO believed this project could be beneficial for the students and a teacher’s assistance was sought. When they were

unsuccessful in finding a teacher to help the decision was made not to pursue the initiative further. Then the principal informed the PTSO that discipline visits to her office had decreased since the students had started maintaining the garden beds and she wanted the project to continue. That's when the PTSO contacted me and we now have a few garden club members helping the kids with the garden beds.

From this we can see that spending as little as 15-20 minutes twice a day outside, caring for plants and digging in the dirt can positively impact children.

Studies in health care settings show a link between nature and healing. Hospital patients with plants in their rooms displayed less pain, shorter stays, and less anxiety. Dementia patients who had access to gardens were less likely to display aggression and decreased agitation. With all the positive research proving that nature helps in the healing process, hospitals, nursing homes, and rehabilitative centers have installed healing gardens for patients, visitors, and staff.

As you can see, with a growing body of research that shows exposure to the natural world is not only beneficial, but essential to our mental and physical health, we need to unplug more often and work in our gardens, take a walk in a park, forest, or on the beach.

So do yourself a favor – step outside, breath in the air, take in the sights and sounds, and let nature work its magic on your mind, body, and soul.

After all, remember Hippocrates said, “Nature itself is the best physician.”

Dorrie Carr
President, WSFGC