

Healing Landscapes



Gardens as places for spiritual, psychological and physical healing

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Lecture outline

1. Introduction and history of therapeutic landscapes/healing gardens
2. Definitions of therapeutic landscapes/healing gardens
3. Concept and benefits of horticultural therapy
4. Examples of healing gardens
5. Design principles for healing gardens
6. Examples of therapeutic landscapes
7. Design principles for therapeutic landscapes
8. What is the connection between therapeutic landscapes/healing gardens and CSGS?



Vincent Van Gogh painted his famous "Iris" series at the Asylum of Saint Paul de Mausole, in Saint-Remy, France, in the Spring of 1889. Allowed to roam the asylum's grounds, Van Gogh began painting almost immediately.

In a letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh wrote: "...you will see that considering my life is spent mostly in the garden, it is not so unhappy." That summer, he wrote: "For one's health it is necessary to work in the garden and see the flowers growing."

(J. Paul Getty Museum exhibit, "Vincent's Irises," 1999).

Origins of the concept of landscapes as a health resource

Within the last twenty years there has been renewed interest in the role of designed natural environments and health. However, the importance of natural environments to health is ancient. The use of the garden as a place for healing can be traced back to early Asian, Greek and Roman cultures.

The Greeks created healing temples for their gods. The temples for the god Aesclepius (god of healing) were built in pastoral settings with mineral springs, bathing pools, gymnasium, and healing gardens.



Despite a long history in healthcare, the effects of natural environments upon health have only been recently systematically studied. Since the mid-1980s, an integrated approach to medicine has helped reawaken the belief that gardens can play a significant role in the healing process.

The best-documented study to date is that of surgical patients and their access to views to the outside world conducted by Roger Ulrich in 1984. This study demonstrated a relationship between the duration of hospitalization, pain medication usage and the ability to view nature through a hospital window. Patients with access to a view recovered faster and needed less pain medication to do so.

The distinction between healing gardens and therapeutic landscape design

The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Both are meant to improve people's wellbeing through spending time in a garden, either actively working or passively enjoying it.

There are subtle differences between them.

Healing gardens is a more general concept. It usually refers to gardens designed to promote recovery, but in this case, healing is seen as an improvement in overall health and well-being that incorporates the spiritual, emotional and psychological, as well as the physical. **Healing gardens can also include memorial gardens or monuments to wars, diseases, or tragic events.**



Therapeutic Landscape Design is more specific and relates to a particular aspect of a disease or healing process. The therapeutic landscape would be designed to produce a given effect and measurable outcome upon a disease or health problem for a given patient and/or group of patients. It can also be designed precisely to meet the needs of people with a certain medical condition such as arthritis, paralysis, blindness or other disabilities. It can be thought of as similar to a medication taken for a specific disease or illness.



The idea of horticultural therapy started when poor people in the 1600s worked in gardens to pay for their hospitalization. Doctors noticed these patients recovered quicker and to a better health standard than the other patients did. After both World War I and II, servicemen worked in gardens to improve functioning of injured limbs and increase mental function, but also to learn new skills and to provide food.

By 1955, the first undergraduate degree in horticulture therapy was given by Michigan State University and in 1971, Kansas State University offered the first graduate program. Now horticulture therapy is used in hospitals, nursing homes, institutions, rehabilitation facilities, schools, prisons, camps, day care centers, group homes, halfway houses, homeless shelters, community centers



Horticultural Therapy

The idea of *horticultural therapy* can be applied to both therapeutic landscapes and healing gardens. The American Horticulture Therapy Association defines horticulture therapy as "a process utilizing plants and horticultural activities to improve social, educational, psychological and physical adjustment of persons thus improving their body, mind and spirit."



Benefits of horticultural therapy

Physical

- increased muscular strength and body mechanics
- increased range of motion
- Improvement of fine motor skills
- Toning of underused muscles
- Improvement of coordination and balance

Mental

- increased autonomy and independence
- outlet for stress, anger and emotional expression
- increased self esteem -increases observation skills
- opportunity to make choices and ability to use problem solving skills
- increased attention span

Social

- reversal of dependency
- opportunity to interact with others
- commitment to a living thing
- cooperation and team working skills
- dealing with success and failure
- learning and inspiration from other people with similar disabilities

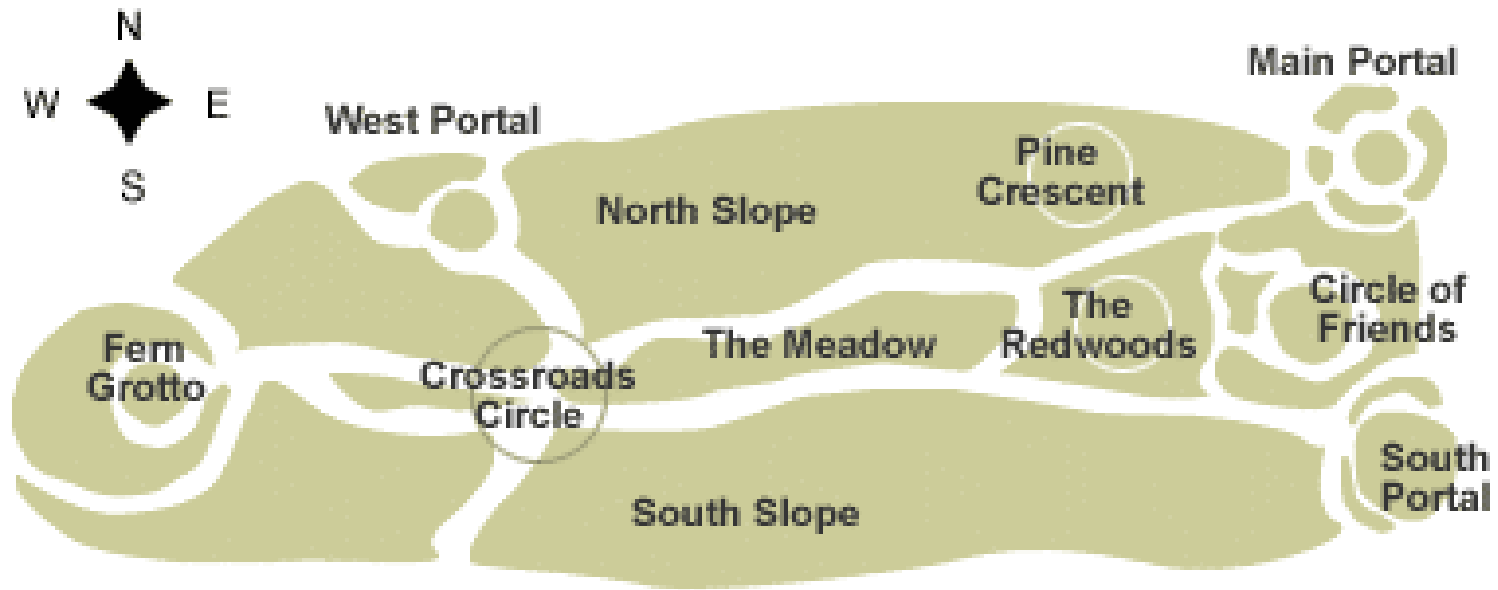
Examples of healing gardens,
including memorial gardens

National AIDS Memorial Grove, San Francisco, Golden Gate Park

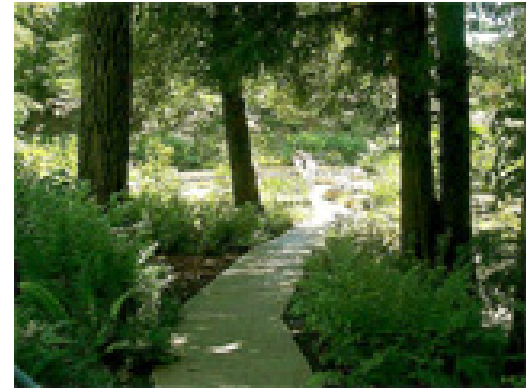
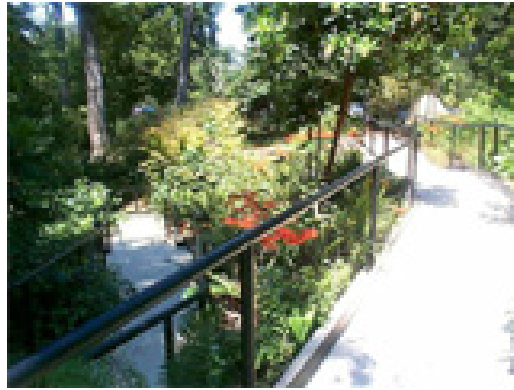
Millions of people touched directly or indirectly by AIDS can gather to heal, hope, and remember at this healing garden.

According to the garden's website, *the sacred ground of this living memorial honors all who have confronted this tragic pandemic both those who have died and those who have shared their struggle, kept the vigils, and supported each other during the final hours.*

The National AIDS Memorial Grove signifies that the global tragedy of AIDS will never be forgotten, and it serves as a place for the relatives and friends of AIDS victims to find comfort.



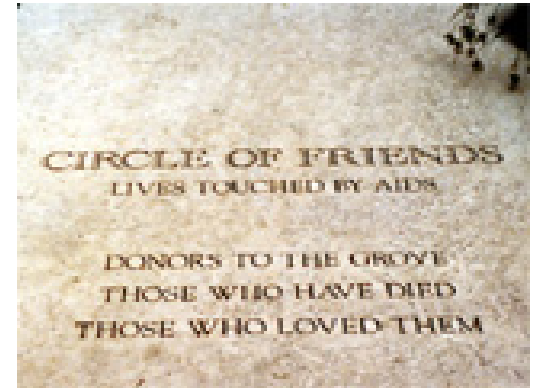
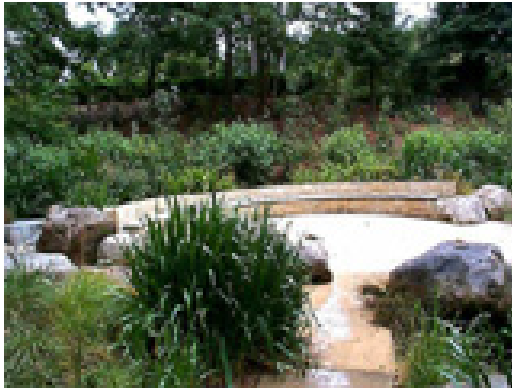
The National AIDS Memorial (NAM) was conceived in 1989 by a small group of San Franciscans who had lost loved ones to AIDS. Development of the Grove began in 1991. The Grove is a 7-acre wooded dell that is governed by a dedicated board of directors who have signed a 99-year renewable agreement with the City of San Francisco through the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department to maintain the Grove. It is privately funded through private and foundational donations.



The Main Portal is the Grove's primary entrance. This seven ton Sierra granite boulder was inscribed and placed here for the December 1, 1995 World AIDS Day observance

Visitors then enter the Woodland Path, a mobility-access ramp, extending from the Main Portal to the eastern floor section of the Grove.

Descending from the ramp and passing through the redwoods, one arrives at the Dogwood Crescent, home of the Circle of Friends



The entry to the Circle of Friends invites you to enter one of the most visited sections of the Grove. The Circle contains the names of those both living and deceased whose lives have been touched by AIDS. Often visitors place flowers or other memorials in the circle.

To date, 1,524 names have been engraved into the flagstone floor.



A monthly volunteer workday includes a ceremony called the "Healing Circle," when everyone gathers and calls out the names of their lost or ailing loved ones.

All of us really enjoy gardening. We love being in the dirt and growing things. So we attended the September 2000 Volunteer Workday. Now we look at all the wonderful people we have met at the Grove. They have been an inspiration to us! The silence beforehand seems like the collective prayer of all these people who have loss in common. It's very powerful, and it has really meant a lot to us. I feel there is such serenity in the Grove, even when it's full of people. I think it's a little holy - inspirational, like a walk in any forest can be.

--the mother of Cathi Bowman, an AIDS victim

Budapest, Great Synagogue, Tree of Life memorial



Dora Efthim Healing Garden

The garden, near Boston, is based on the Native American concept of the medicine wheel. The garden is divided into four quadrants, or rooms, each associated with a direction, a season and a character trait. At its center is a Rain Catcher sculpture and ancestor stones, symbolizing wisdom. It is open to the public.



Design elements for the healing garden

In the book “*The Sanctuary Garden*” by C. Forrest McDowell and Tricia Clark – McDowell (1998), they say, “...the key to a (healing garden) is to honor and celebrate our broader human relationship with Nature and Spirit, not just plants”.

The proposed six design elements are a guideline for the design. They are a means to the end process of identifying the intention of the space. That is, a marriage between the garden keeper and the spirit of Nature.

Overall, the healing garden design should comfort the soul and renew the spirit – no matter if it consists of a bench next to a tree or an intricately designed landscape.

Of most importance is the intention to honoring the design element and its relationship to the spirit of Nature.

1. A Special Entrance that invites and embraces the visitor into the garden



2. The integration of art to enhance the overall mood/spirit of the garden



3. The element of water for its psychological, spiritual and physical effects

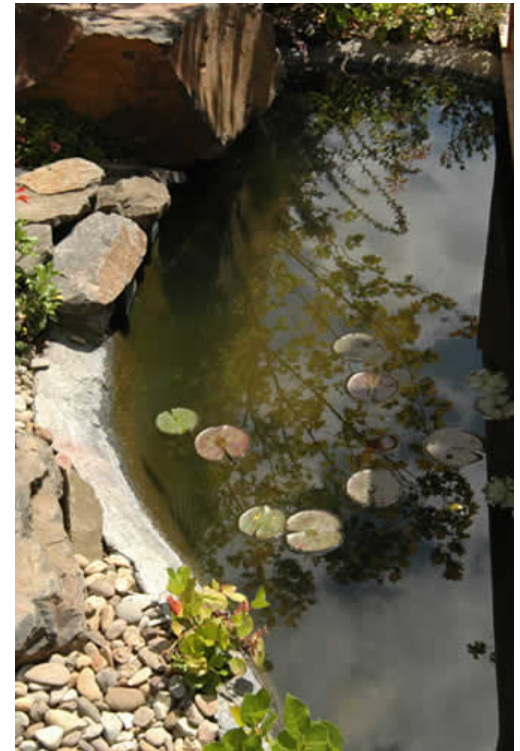




4. A creative use of color and lighting to
elicit emotion, comfort, and awe



5. The emphasis of natural features as grounding points – such as the use of rocks, wood, natural fences, screens, trellises, wind, sound, etc.



6. Garden features that attract wildlife and provide diverse habitat



Examples of therapeutic landscapes

The Elizabeth & Nona Evans Restorative Garden

Cleveland Botanical Garden, Cleveland, Ohio
Designed by Dirtworks, New York, New York





The therapeutic landscape is about 1200 sqm. The Cleveland Botanical Garden board of directors, staff and donors wanted a garden that was "beautiful, natural, lush, green; a setting that offers a range of opportunities, choices and experiences; a setting engaging and enriching for all who visited."

Comfort, accessibility and beauty were to be equally important elements.



The garden is a series of three unique settings, each with a distinct character and level of activity: quiet contemplation; both individual exploration and teaching large groups; and horticultural therapy.

Path gradients were carefully calculated to minimize fatigue and to provide subtle places to pause and rest, enjoy a fragrance or admire a focal point.



Compositions of water, plants and walls create distinct experiences.

Thin rivulets of water fall into a shallow pool, creating a “bright” sound to muffle nearby traffic.



Movable benches and chairs create comfortable, flexible seating areas with varying degrees of privacy for individuals and groups.



The railings are designed with Braille inserts. They are placed on the backside of the rail to make them more comfortable to use. The inserts incorporate a changing collection of poems supplied by visually impaired friends of the garden.

Overlooks provide a place to pause while viewing the surrounding gardens. The railings were custom designed to accommodate arthritic hands.

Legacy Salmon Creek Hospital therapeutic landscape Vancouver, Washington



Numerous healthcare institutions within and outside the United States have begun to incorporate therapeutic landscape design. As Clare Cooper-Marcus, and Marni Barnes have noted in their book “*Healing Gardens: Therapeutic benefits and design recommendations*” (1999) these gardens focus on providing stress relief; alleviation of physical symptoms; and improvement in the overall sense of wellness for both patients and healthcare staff.



The firm's planning and design work for this new hospital provides therapeutic gardens, roof gardens and a central entrance garden with water features and plaza.

Design principles for successful therapeutic landscapes

1. Variety of Spaces. Spaces for both group and solitary occupancy. By providing a variety of spaces, the patient is given choices, thus providing an increased sense of control - leading to lower stress levels.

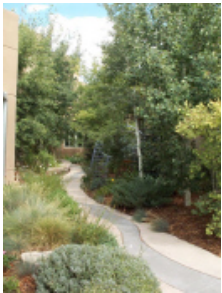
An area for solitary occupancy allows one to “get away” from the sterilized environments of an institution, such as a hospital. There should also be areas for small groups such as family members or support staff to congregate provide social support to the patient.



2. *A Prevalence of Green Material-* Hardscaping is minimized and plant materials dominate the garden. The goal would be to minimize hardscaping to only one-third of the space being occupied. It is through the softening of the landscape the patient can feel an improvement in her/his overall sense of wellness.



3. *Encourage Exercise*- Gardens that encourage walking as a form of exercise have been correlated with lower levels of depression.



4. *Provide Positive Distractions-* Natural distractions such as plants, flowers and water features decrease stress levels. Other activities such as horticultural therapy programs that help residents/patients to work with plants can also provide positive distractions in the garden setting.



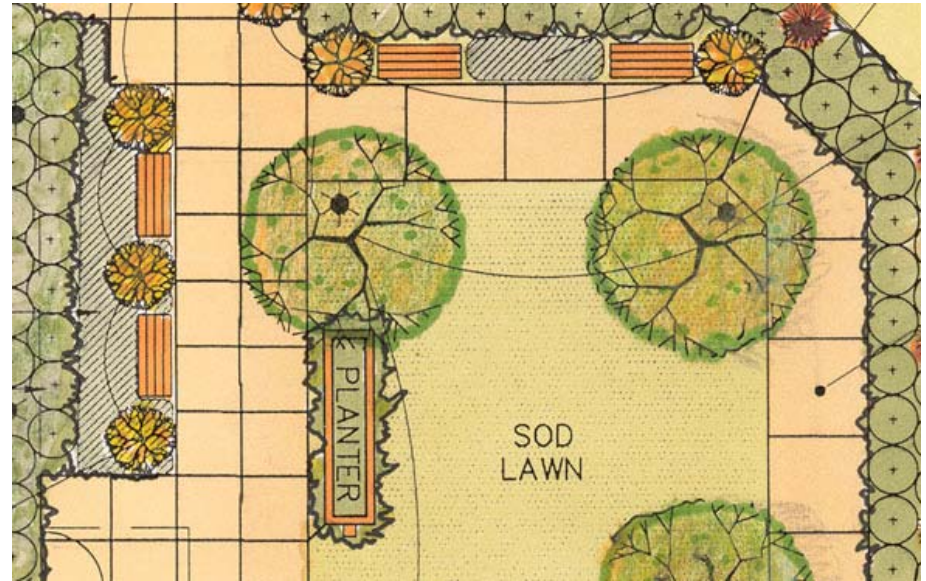
5. *Minimize Intrusions*- Negative factors such as urban noise, smoke and artificial lighting are minimized in the garden.

Natural lighting and sounds are additive to the positive effects of the garden.



6. *Minimize Ambiguity* Abstract environments can be interesting and challenging to the healthy, but to the ill they may have counter-indicated effects. Numerous studies show that abstraction in design is not well tolerated by persons who are ill and stressed. Clearly identifiable features and garden elements should be designed.

Abstract art in the facility and garden is often inappropriate.



How do healing or therapeutic gardens and horticultural therapy relate to CSGS?

As landscape architects, we can view healing gardens/therapeutic landscapes in two different - but both completely correct - ways.

1. We can think of them as a totally separate professional area of landscape architecture with its own design principles, its own professional standards, its own practices and its own circle of clients.
2. Or, we can view healing gardens/therapeutic landscapes as a source of inspiration and ideas for landscape architecture in general. In a sense, every garden can potentially be a healing garden, including CSGS. Many homeless shelters, children's emergency shelters, prisons, and abused women's shelters use gardens to provide residents with constructive activity and a peaceful place to rest.

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Community gardens in homeless shelters or other institutions



This past summer I did a garden at the local emergency shelter. The goal was to not only supply fresh produce to the shelter, but to teach the residents that they can grow fresh produce in any space they may have whether it's containers on their window sill or a small piece of yard.



What I did find, though, is that gardening brought many folks back to a time in their lives when they were in a better place. Some remembered that it kept them sober, some remembered that it was therapeutic. Either way it gave them an escape, it gave them hope and to some it gave them renewed energy to find permanent housing so that they could have their own gardens again.


--Susan Shear, volunteer

Some therapeutic benefits of community gardens for homeless, abused children, jail inmates, or other people in crisis institutions:

- increased self-esteem from doing something creative and constructive
- economic self-help (selling flowers, vegetables or other products)
- reduction of stress through physical work
- aesthetic experience of seeing a beautiful garden
- teamwork, forming friendships and trust with each other
- sense of being back in a 'normal,' healthy place

I particularly recall one prostitute - she was beat up, bruised, dirty... the mean streets are particularly mean to some people. She wandered into the garden because there was a shooting gallery in the back. But inside the gate, it was green and warm, there were birds singing, flowers. She looked around the garden, started chatting, remembering when she was little and everything was alright and her parents had a garden and she'd picked up a lot of it, she correctly identified most of what was growing. She pulled a crumpled old photograph out of her purse, a little bleached out, of a kid sitting on a pony. You could see in her eyes she was transported.

--Fred Conrad, Atlanta Community Food Bank, Atlanta, Georgia



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Member

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- American Community Gardening Association Board of Directors