



MISSION: BEAUTIFICATION ... CONSERVATION ... EDUCATION

Planting and Nurturing

April, 2020

Volume: IV Number: 12

Landscape Design: Suzanne Finger, Editor

Environmental Edition: May, August, November, February – Mary Lovings, Editor

Gardening: June, September, December, March - Linda Doiron, Editor

Landscape Design: July, October, January, April – Suzanne Finger, Editor



Above: Mockorange I was delighted to find on my new homestead

A Natural Distraction

As I tried to identify a landscape design topic for this newsletter, I found it ingenuine to consider anything devoid of at least a nod to the gravity of the times we now find ourselves in. A few short months ago, not one of us could have imagined ourselves quarantined in our homes because of a virus with global reach.

As my daily routine has suddenly shifted to Zoom meetings with clients, virtual site visits, homeschooling our kids, and worshipping on Sunday via the internet, I am all the more grateful for the things that have not changed. Photosynthesis is one such thing. Photosynthesis was discussed in my daughter's science lesson this past week, and I was reminded of the simple

miracle that the tree in my backyard breathes out what I need to breathe in. This called to mind two verses, John 16:33, and Isaiah 41:10. One assures us that even though we will face troubles in this world, we can find peace in Christ, and the other reminds us that we do not have to fear because God is with us. The simple observation of how my basic need for oxygen is provided by the plants in my own back yard, served as a powerful reminder to me of God's presence and provision in my life. Even in this time of uncertainty, the evidence of His hand can be as close as the tree that shades my yard or the pretty little flower growing along my fence.

This encouraging thought sparked the idea of "Garden Therapy" as a timely topic for this edition of the Planting and Nurturing Newsletter.

Over the last few weeks, after the dinner dishes have been washed and put away, our family has made it an evening ritual to get outside for some fresh air. With the days getting longer, we have a little more daylight available for a long walk or to pull a few weeds in the garden. The outing lifts our spirits after being couped up all day. My family is experiencing the benefits of what experts have coined, "Horticulture Therapy," or Garden Therapy, as it was called when I was in landscape architecture school.

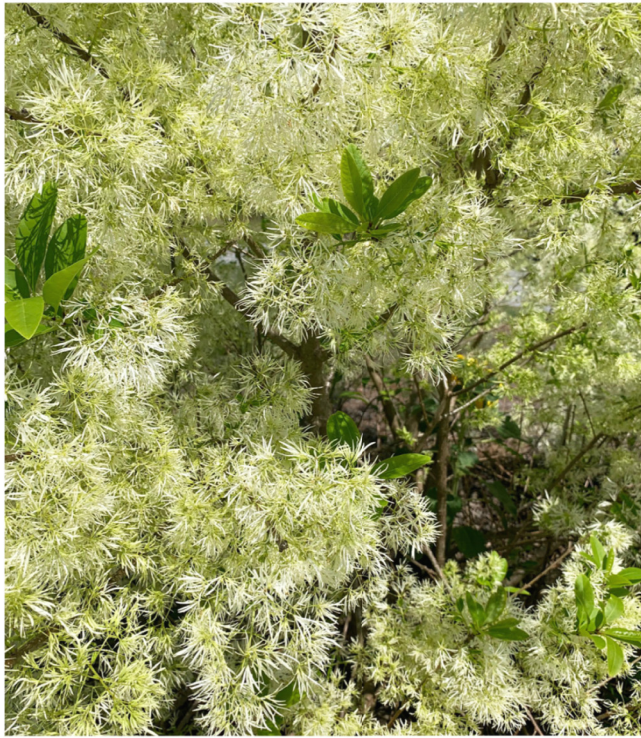


Above: *Lantana camara*



Above: *Common Buckeye*

The idea of Garden Therapy is actually a very old one. Ancient Egyptians recognized the health benefits of garden walks and horticulture therapy, as did people in the middle ages. Dr. Benjamin Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, helped to revive the old practice in the United States when he documented the positive effects of working in the garden for those with mental illness. Since then, the practice of Garden Therapy has become commonplace and is accepted as effective treatment across many disciplines.



Left: Fringe Tree

We all know the physical exercise employed while gardening is beneficial; however, it has been proven that even three to five minutes of merely observing nature has restorative effects! These effects are not only beneficial to our psychological and emotional well-being but to our physiological health as well. Significant positive changes in blood pressure, heart activity, muscle tension, and brain activity have been observed in this short three to five minute period. Because of this research and the proven stress-reducing benefits, hospitals are now investing in restorative landscapes for their patients and staff to view and enjoy.

Garden Therapy is something that our garden clubs have embraced for many years. Our members have invested countless hours and poured resources into beautifying landscapes all over our state for the enjoyment and benefit of others. Now, more than ever, your efforts may be making a difference. As that lonely truck driver crosses our state with essential supplies, he will soon enjoy blankets of colorful wildflowers filling the median. A weary physician working through two shifts at a rural Georgia hospital enjoys a much-needed break as he walks through a butterfly garden installed by a local garden club. A resident of a senior care facility around the corner forgets their fears for a moment by tending flowers in a raised bed easily accessible from their wheelchair. The beds were placed in the facility's courtyard as a result of a local garden club's Garden Therapy project. I am sure that your club could add to this list, and it could go on and on.

So, take heart! We may have had to cancel our well-planned meetings and flower shows, but the fruits of our many projects continue to make a difference in people's lives. That is why we do what we do. I hope each of us has a renewed appreciation for our Garden Therapy programs and is poised to jump into our community beautification projects with both feet as soon as the coast is clear!

For now, I will look forward to the day when this present danger passes, and I do not have to cook EVERY meal at home (*this has certainly been a real test of my domestic skills*). Until then, I will enjoy my restorative evening walks and garden observations, and if you are able, I urge you to do the same!



All photos by Suzanne Finger taken on her "Garden Therapy" walks over the last week.