

Gardening for Naturist Health

photos by Michael Cooney

Michael Cooney and Mark Storey

Much of naturism's benefit involves its social aspects. We naturally yearn for the proximity of family and friends, and enjoying these good times clothes-free makes the experience richer. With coronavirus and related health issues serious social considerations for all, there is reason to recall the many healthy activities we can savor today, by ourselves or with those close to us. Gardening is, by every report, a tremendously productive pastime for bodily health and wellbeing, and continues to be safe. Gardening clothes-free adds its own naturist flavor and relish.

Little is unanimously agreed upon; that gardening leads to health is a rare exception. Hours of reading await anyone searching the Internet for reputable articles listing the benefits of working with soils and

plants. For instance, at healthtalk.unhealthcare.org, we find "8 Surprising Health Benefits of Gardening" (April 20, 2017). Included is the self-esteem arising from seeing your tended plants flourish before your eyes. You are clearly a person who can get things done. Gardening naked, we'll add here, can deepen this personal insight of self-acceptance.

Listed benefits also include general health, as daily gardening reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke. Gardening 30 minutes a day has also been shown to reduce cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress. Moreover, naturally inhaling mycobacterium, a healthy bacterium in many soils, helps increase your level of serotonin and thus reduces anxiety. A pleasant workout in the garden additionally



promotes better sleep at night, which in turn encourages overall health. Gardening even improves hand strength.

Kim Hayes writes for aarp.org in “5 Secret Health Benefits of Gardening” (June 14, 2017). In line with the earlier Health Talk article, Hayes adds that gardening provides exposure to vitamin D, which increases calcium needed for bone density and immune systems. Gardening, she explains, also decreases the risk of dementia by as much as 36%.

More recently, Caroline Picard and Amanda Hawkins write for goodhousekeeping.com in “7 Benefits of Gardening That Prove It Helps Your Mind and Body” (April 16, 2019). They cite many benefits claimed already, but add gardening’s readiness to burn calories, citing a Center for Disease Control and Prevention study claiming that an hour of light gardening can burn off approximately 330 calories, or the equivalent amount used in an hour’s moderately strenuous walk.

Adding to the flurry of online articles (all with the same style of title and content, and much like this *N* account), a writer at organiclesson.com tills analogous rows. “8 Surprising Health Benefits of Gardening” (November 16, 2019) highlights gardening’s readiness to reduce stress, boost immunity, serve as an antidepressant, and be an all-round good workout, claiming three hours of gardening to be equivalent to one hour of gym exercise.

Most of these lists attribute social benefits to gardening, too, pointing to studies that show how the activity can reduce loneliness, provide a source of community, and offer chances to bond with family and friends, even if they are working ten feet away from you. Additionally, vegetable gardening can reduce one’s food costs and provide healthier alternatives to what is often sold in too many grocery stores.

So, gardening by oneself or with others has enough benefits to make it a leisure practice of choice. Since polls show non-naturists envisioning gardening as the second or third thing they’d like to



try nude away from bed and bath (with swimming the clear first choice, and walking or hiking the second or third), nude gardening merits full attention.

It will come as no surprise that the Internet has its share of websites and articles devoted to nude gardening. Here in 2020, World Naked Gardening Day (see wngd.info) is in its 16th year, and going strong. You can check for multiple online spinoffs and commentary. Naturists will not need to be told of the tactile pleasure of being clothes-free in nature, or of the advantages of nudity outdoors alone, or with family and friends. We might need a reminder from time to time, though, to shut down the computer, turn off the cell phone, say “no” to streaming videos, and get outside and physically in touch with our nude and natural botanical world.

Longtime member of The Naturist Society and married to Michael Cooney, Donna Janus finds that nude gardening provides a healthy connection to nature. “Just under breathing, being in nature is a requirement for my wellbeing. When Michael and I first moved into our house 25 years ago, I planted small trees close to the windows so that even when we have to be inside, nature—birds and bees—would be up close. For me, all of nature is a garden to appreciate. When I am out in nature, I feel more alive and connected to this life we all share. When I take my clothes off, opening to warm sun on my face, a gentle breeze on skin, soft green grass under my feet, I am reminded to walk lightly on the earth. Being naked announces awareness of how vulnerable we humans are. Compassion arises.

“When I plant seedlings in the garden, gently push my hands into the dark earth, and am careful of the life in the soil, the worms, bugs, moles, roots, spark in me fascination and appreciation. Looking around the garden, bright colors, and shades of green seem to fill my body and easily open my mind to a confection of awe, delight, and gratitude. I am gifted with the ability to be aware that I am part of this miracle of being alive.”

Can nude gardening address fundamental challenges of our time like COVID-19, catastrophic climate change, and gun violence? No, but it might just help us cope better, improve our mental health, put better nutrition in our diet, and help us feel like we are doing something in a world that can appear to be out of control. Nude gardening brings together the therapeutic power of being in nature, and the joy of seeing what you plant grow, be harvested, and served. **N**

