

Your Health & Happiness

Living Landscapes Bring Surprising Health Benefits

(NAPSA)—There's a good—and surprising—reason you may pine for greenery. Living landscapes are an important part of the outdoor lifestyle that Americans enjoy but the benefits go beyond the barbecue and backyard baseball. Green spaces are necessary for your health.

“The advantages of grass and landscaping surpass the usual physical benefits that result from outdoor activity,” explained Kris Kiser, president and CEO, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI). “Numerous studies have found that people who spend more time outside or who are exposed to living landscapes are happier, healthier and smarter.”

Researchers have studied the effect of nature on human well-being for years, but recent studies found a more direct correlation between human health, particularly related to stress, and the importance of access to nature and managed landscapes.

Here's a look at a few:

- Getting dirty is actually good for you, according to Dr. Christopher Lowery, a neuroscientist at the University of Bristol in England. *Mycobacterium vaccae* in soil stimulates serotonin production, which explains why people who spend time gardening and have direct contact with soil feel more relaxed and happier.

- Living near living landscapes can improve your mental health. Researchers in England found that people moving to greener areas experienced an immediate improvement in mental health that was sustained for at least three years after they moved. The study also showed that people relocating to a more developed area suffered a drop in mental health.

- Green spaces can make you healthier, too. People who live



Studies show that green spaces and landscaping contribute to health, happiness and intellect.

within a half mile of green space (such as parks, public gardens and greenways) were found to have a lower incidence of 15 diseases by Dutch researchers—including depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, asthma and migraines. A 2015 study found that people living on streets with more trees had a boost in heart and metabolic health.

- Living landscapes can even reduce attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms. Children gain attention and working memory benefits when they are exposed to greenery, says a study led by the Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology in Barcelona. In addition, exposure to natural settings may be widely effective in reducing ADHD symptoms in children.

- Spending time around plants also improves concentration and memory in adults. Research shows that being around plants helps you concentrate better at home and at work. Charlie Hall, Ellison Chair in International Floriculture at Texas A&M University, believes that spending time in gardens can improve attention span and memory performance by as much as 20 percent.

- Gardening is great for the body and the soul. People who gardened for at least 30 minutes a

week had lower body mass indexes, a measure of body fat, as well as higher levels of self-esteem and better moods overall. They also reported lower levels of tension and stress.

- Nature walks (or runs) are great for your brain and stress levels. A National Institutes of Health study found that adults demonstrate significant cognitive gains after going on a nature walk. A Stanford University study found that walking in nature, rather than in a concrete-oriented, urban environment, resulted in decreased anxiety, rumination, and negative affect, and produced cognitive benefits, such as increased working memory performance.

- Living landscapes help you heal faster. Multiple studies have discovered that plants in hospital recovery rooms or views of aesthetically pleasing gardens help patients heal up to one day faster than those who are in more austere environments.

- You might even be a nicer person when you spend time in nature, as it enhances social interactions, value for community and close relationships. A systematic research review concluded that “the balance of evidence indicates conclusively that knowing and experiencing nature makes us generally happier, healthier people.”

All these benefits reinforce the importance of maintaining yards, parks and other community green spaces. Trees, shrubs, grass and flowering plants are integral to human health. Not only do they provide a place for kids and pets to play, they directly contribute to mental and physical well-being.

Learn More

For tips on maintaining a living landscape, even in drought conditions, go to www.opei.org/stewardship.