

July 2001

# The Green Thumb Print

Green Thumb News

Topics of interest to community gardeners in New York City

The bulletin of Green Thumb, a program of The City of New York/Parks & Recreation

## The Healing Garden



PS 4K teacher with student

**What** was your last visit to the garden like?

A little effort may have produced a weed-free bed and happy, well-watered plants. After your work was done, maybe you sat in the shade, talked with other gardeners, or watched your children or grandchildren play. Nothing special about that, right? Yet, during this time, you were breathing cleaner air, decreasing stress hormones in your body, decreasing your heart and breathing rate, stretching and relaxing your muscles, and interacting socially in an attractive and safe environment. Your kids might have been exercising and learning about plants, insects, and nature. Not bad... some people spend a lot of money on vacations and classes trying to achieve those effects!

Gardeners know that just heading out into the garden is therapeutic for both mind and body, especially for the urban gardener coping with the stresses of the city...but are there ways that these benefits could be further extended to your community? Those with mental or physical challenges or special needs may not be able to use your garden to experience all the therapeutic effects of gardening.

Horticulture has been therapeutic since the beginning of time, but in the early 70's it evolved into a professional discipline. Nowadays, Horticultural Therapy uses gardening and horticultural activities within a defined treatment plan to

improve an individual's social, physical, and/or mental well being. Professional Horticultural Therapists work in programs at hospitals, nursing homes, schools, correctional facilities, substance abuse rehabilitation centers, and in many other places to help people with special needs attain their treatment goals.

These diverse populations experience benefits that can be classified as cognitive, social, psychological, and/or physical. Those with mental challenges could have cognitive benefits like learning new skills. People isolated by disabilities can enjoy social interactions and relating to others. Psychologically, self-esteem and self-confidence can improve through nurturing plants and new accomplishments. And of course, there are the physical benefits of exercise and movement.

Although a structured program maximizes these benefits, they happen whether or not therapy occurs in a program designed by a qualified therapist. There is a lot you can do to make your garden more friendly to garden members with special needs. If your garden could use new members, there are the added benefits of potentially increased membership. Plus, community support for your garden may increase when you invite in folks with special needs.

There are a number of GreenThumb gardens that work with schools, shelters, or other organizations to provide therapeutic horticulture. Mary Sciales of P.S. 4K/Paradise Garden in Brooklyn has been bringing special-needs children from all areas of Brooklyn to the garden for fifteen

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# NEWS YOU CAN USE

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## ***Clean Up***

Have you put a lot of work into making your garden look good? Help keep it that way by reminding passers-by to mind their manners with free signs! Call the Department of Sanitation's Action Center to get yours, such as "No Littering," "Curb Your Dog," or "No Dumping." Reach them at (212) 219-8090.

## ***Compost Quandaries?***

Speaking of the Department of Sanitation, they have a new website. The site describes their composting programs, including how to order compost for your garden through them. The site is also a good composting resource, with everything you need to know to start composting. Check it out at [www.nyccompost.org](http://www.nyccompost.org)

## ***The Coalition of Coalitions***

The NYC Community Garden Coalition has re-organized, representing gardens and coalitions from all five boroughs. Garden networks can help gardens support each other, problem-solve, and benefit from the experiences of other gardeners. Call (212) 420-8651 for more information.

## ***Injunction Update***

The date has been set for the next hearing regarding the injunction brought by the state Attorney General, Elliot Spitzer, to prevent removal of GreenThumb gardens without due process. The hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, July 25th, at 10am; it will be held in Room 361 of the New York Supreme Court Building, at 360 Adams Street in Brooklyn. To verify date before attending (as it has been postponed in the past), call the NYC Community Garden Coalition at (212) 420-8651.

## ***Parks Campaign 2001***

Make sure gardens are represented in the Parks Campaign 2001. The campaign, which has been featured in previous editions of this newsletter, wants your garden's endorsement for the goal of more money to improve and maintain parks-- an increase to a whole 1% of the city budget. Your garden doesn't have to be under Parks jurisdiction to endorse this important initiative. Call GreenThumb to back it up --(212) 788-8070.

## ***Get Your 'Open Hours' Sign!***

If your garden group has changed your hours this

year, don't forget to post a new sign so visitors know when to find the garden open. Contact us at (212) 788-8068 for a new laminated hours sign, or e-mail [Daniel@greenthumbnyc.org](mailto:Daniel@greenthumbnyc.org)

## ***Stewardship for Young Trees***

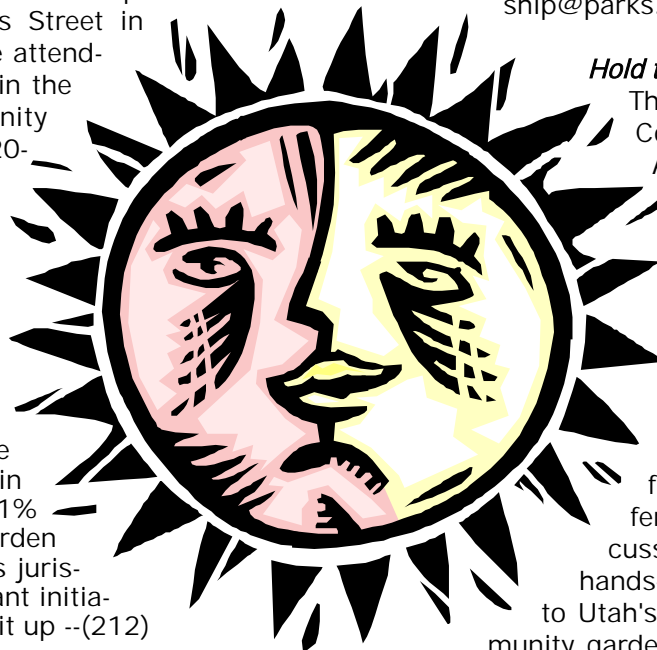
This July, the New York Tree Trust, a joint initiative of City of New York/Parks & Recreation and the City Parks Foundation, is offering free workshops for people who would like to adopt their neighborhood's street trees and Greenstreets. The Stewardship for Young Trees program provides free tools, training, and support for those who adopt and help care for these small green spaces. They are excited to work with GreenThumb gardeners and the trees in their neighborhoods.

New York City has approximately 500,000 street trees and soon to be 2,001 Greenstreets--traffic islands planted with trees, shrubs, and groundcover. The Stewardship for Young Trees program works to increase both the survival rate of and the community participation within these green spaces. The influence of stewards is not only an essential ingredient for the preservation of both street trees and Greenstreets, but a crucial component of the overall vitality to New York's neighborhoods.

To adopt your street trees, or Greenstreets or to RSVP for the workshops, please call Michael Hastings-Black, Stewardship Coordinator, at (212) 360-TREE or send an email to [stewardship@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:stewardship@parks.nyc.gov).

## ***Hold the Date***

The 22nd Annual American Community Gardening Association Conference will be held September 7th through the 9th, 2001, in Salt Lake City, Utah. This national conference for community gardeners offers a unique opportunity to share challenges and solutions and to learn from each other. The conference includes panel discussions, keynote speakers, hands-on workshops, and visits to Utah's botanical sites and community gardens. Registration begins in mid-July. See the ACGA's website at [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org) for more information, or call them at (215) 988-8785.



## The Healing Garden *contnd.*

years. Ranging from 4 1/2 to 10 1/2 years of age, the children have special needs due to emotional problems, autism, mental retardation, or multiple handicaps. The children participate in activities that improve physical and social skills, but focus on developing skills that helps them to meet the new educational standards.

TLC Sculpture Park Garden in Brooklyn is affiliated with a shelter for formerly homeless women with mental illness. "Being in the garden increases the participant's receptiveness to our program," says Susan Swift, Director of the shelter. Women in the shelter grow plants, participate in garden activities like crafts and barbecues, and plan to sell their produce at the East New York Farmer's Market this year.

While it's possible to partner with schools or other organizations in your neighborhood, there are less time-intensive ways to make your garden more accessible to people with special needs. Some modifications to existing structures may be all it takes to allow garden members or community residents with special needs to garden.

You may have someone with special needs in your garden already- say, a senior citizen, someone who can't see well or who is in a wheelchair. Paths wide and smooth enough to accommodate wheelchairs or walkers are important in these cases. For those who can't see well, path borders or railings may be helpful. Railings don't have to be expensive-- rope strung between posts could be sufficient, as long as it's high enough to hold on to.

Benches or seating areas that allow people to rest or enjoy their surroundings are also a good idea. Medication may make some folks sensitive to the sun, so make sure seating areas are shaded.

Plantings such as tall grasses that make sounds when the wind blows through them can be pleasant for those with limited mobility or sight. The sound of running water in a pond or small fountain also generates a peaceful, relaxing sound. Many folks like plants that smell nice, such as herbs or fragrant flowers, or that are interesting to the touch, like downy lamb's ear or echinacea cones.

"Surveys show that the blind appreciate guides who can show them around the garden, rather than signs in Braille," says Gwenn Fried of New York University's Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine. Consider making it known that you have someone who can serve as a guide. Ms. Fried also suggests that raising a bed several feet off the ground can allow someone in a wheelchair, or a senior citizen who can't bend or kneel, to tend a bed. It's also possible to make vertical beds by filling a frame against a wall with soil. Line the front with a plastic sheet, and cover with chicken-wire. Plant by poking holes through the plastic. This type of bed also adds some visual interest to a garden, and is a good option for gardens short on space.

Of course, for anyone, regardless of special needs, just the process of growing and caring for plants gives a feeling of accomplishment, as well as a measure of control and choice to those who may be limited in other ways. To explore therapeutic horticulture more in depth, see the resources below.



### ***Horticultural Therapy Resources***

#### **Courses**

The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx offers courses and a certification program in Horticultural Therapy. Call 718-817-8747 for schedule and info.

The Brooklyn Botanical Garden will offer an introductory course in the fall. Call 718-623-7220.

#### **General Information**

The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) is a good resource. See their website at [www.ahata.org](http://www.ahata.org), or call The Mid-Atlantic Chapter at 973-705-3833.

The Rusk Institute's Gwenn Fried can provide programmatic or structural info. Leave her a message at 212-263-6058, or e-mail [gwennfried@aol.com](mailto:gwennfried@aol.com)

## **Green Thumb's Summer Solstice Bash**

Gardeners from all over the city came together to celebrate the arrival of summer with food, music, and fun on June 16th, when GreenThumb and Clinton Community Garden in Manhattan co-sponsored the 5th Annual Summer Solstice Celebration bash. Activities to inform and entertain ranged from a compost demonstration to children's activities, from tabling by various greening organizations to a Solstice ritual. A giveaway bonanza included roses donated by Jackson & Perkins, herbs, and perennials, while the crowd got moving to live music groups from community gardens -- Santos White, Rincon Criollo, and Friendship Pagoda.

Several political candidates made appearances to express their support for parks and gardens, including candidates for public advocate Stephen DiBrienza and Kathryn Freed, and a representative of Bronx Boro President and mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer's office. The second annual GreenHands award went to Edie Kean for her years of dedicated work on behalf of GreenThumb and the greening of New York City. Thanks to everyone who attended or helped to plan and execute this unique event.



*GreenThumb staff kids have a good time at the Solstice. Left to right, Tiffany, Devon, and Tiara.*

## New GreenThumb Education Director

Tim Rutgers is GreenThumb's new Education Director. He'll be working with schools throughout the five boroughs, including both school gardens and schools that are involved in their neighborhood community gardens. He will assist schools with garden projects including: linking teachers and students across the city, ongoing development of garden and environmental curriculum, obtaining garden materials, and applying for GreenThumb's *Plant & People Grant*.

Before GT, Tim was a NYC Board of Education teacher at East Side Community High School, where he worked with Open Road of New York to help create the Lower East Side Park on East 12th Street in Manhattan. For the last several years, Tim has consulted for The Trust for Public Land's garden and playground projects in NYC and Newark, NJ. Most recently, Tim served as Program Director of the Lower East Side Park with Open Road New York.

Tim will be working with over 100 schools, and he will be contacting schools as soon as possible. But if you're a garden contact for a school, or your garden works with schools, you can give him a call first, even if it's just to say hello, at (212) 788-8080, or e-mail [Tim@greenthumbnyc.org](mailto:Tim@greenthumbnyc.org)

GreenThumb is committed to youth education and youth involvement in community gardens, and Tim will help us to accomplish these goals. A \$200,000 federal grant we've received for school garden projects from the Office of Management and Budget will also help us in kicking our education efforts into high gear. Tim fills a much-needed post here at GreenThumb and we're happy to have him aboard.

