

Gardening and Health

Recent studies have shown that spending **just 2 hours a week outdoors** in the garden or patio with your tubs and planters, is linked to better mental and physical wellbeing. Sometimes referred to as 'green therapy', spending time outdoors in the fresh air, caring for your garden and learning new skills are all positive steps you can take to keep occupied. Not only that, you'll find all of the digging, raking and weeding is an excellent way to get some important exercise.

In the UK, there are estimated to be 27 million people or 40% of the total population, who actively participate in gardening. There is mounting evidence that direct experience with natural environments offers a wide range of health benefits:

- improve your mood
- reduce feelings of stress or anger
- help you take time out and feel more relaxed
- improve your physical health – strength, balance and heart activity
- help you make new connections

If you don't have your own garden, then join a community group and **volunteer**.

Physical benefits

Weight management and a healthy heart

Gardening is a physical activity which burns 200-500 calories an hour, and can help maintain a **healthy weight**, reducing the risk of obesity. It is second only to weight training as an effective way to increase bone density.

Studies show that 48% of the new growers spend 1 to 2 hours a week growing food and of those 7% spend 8 or more hours a week digging, pruning, planting and hoeing. In addition, the new food growers ate an average of 4.5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day which is above the national average for adults aged 19 to 64 years.

Mental health and well-being

Research from **MIND** has shown that **gardening** can reduce anxiety, stress, and associated depression. These include immersion in a natural scene and taking part in a positive creative activity. People in difficulty talk of the garden being a refuge, one that helps feelings of calm and relaxation as well as competence, enjoyment, curiosity and hope.

Anxiety, bereavement, stress and serious injury are real-life issues that can be devastating. Gardening has come to the rescue for many people who face these challenges and the **RHS**

[website](#) has just some of these stories. One of these stories includes Gateshead's vegetable and planting project through Blaydon Methodist Church which involves the whole community.

Substance misuse

There is evidence that gardening has been shown to reduce hostility, risk taking and depression. The patience required for nurturing plants helps reduce the impulse for instant gratification, one of the drivers for substance abuse.

Getting the family involved

Getting out and about in the garden is an excellent way to keep children entertained. Whether it is in a garden, an allotment, a patio, balcony or windowsill, watching something grow from seedling to full bloom is satisfying and can cultivate a real sense of pride and purpose. Why not get the whole family involved in gardening by starting a sun flower growing competition, or seeing how many birds, insects and other types of wildlife you can spot? Gardening can help with relationships:

- help you bond
- develop fine motor skills
- lead to growing and eating your own vegetables

It has been argued that a decrease in contact with nature results in a number of health and behavioural problems, especially for children, which is referred to as “nature-deficit disorder.”

Grow your own

The idea of ‘growing your own’ is not only a great way to focus your time, but also to have access to fresh fruit and vegetables throughout the year, while maintaining your immune system with healthy, home-grown food. Read more from the [National Allotment Society](#).

Even if you don't have a large garden, growing produce such as cress, lettuce, chillies, tomatoes and strawberries doesn't require a lot of space. If you are new to gardening, these plants are easy to maintain and care for. Look out for pots to grow seedlings in and vertical planters.

Look at Vertical Veg's information on [how to grow](#)

Microgreens

Microgreens are the next stage in a plant's development, like the ‘toddlers’ of the plant world. Micro greens can be harvested when the germinated seeds have developed tiny roots and at least their first true leaves. They have nutritional value, including zinc, potassium, vitamins and minerals.

Luckily, many spice and dried pulse seeds sold for cooking will grow fine as microgreens, including: dried peas, dried chickpeas, coriander seeds, black mustard seeds and fenugreek. Alternatively, look for specialist sprout and micro green seed suppliers who supply large packs.

Sunflower, radish, rocket (rucola), and mixed mustard seeds are good ones to try. You need:

- a bright place inside or outside, ideally with two hours' sun or more
- a general purpose compost or growing media
- a seed tray, crate or container at least 1 ½ to 2 inches (4-6 cm) deep — with drainage holes in the bottom
- seeds
- watering can or bottle sprayer
- seed label and indelible pen

The shoots are edible as soon as they come up. Most can then be eaten at any size. Keep picking and tasting them to find the size you like best. In general, it's best to eat them sooner rather than later (they may go tough or bitter as they get older). Pea shoots are often at their best when 2 – 4 inches (5 – 10cm). Harvest by cutting with scissors about ½ inch (1cm) above soil. Sometimes they will regrow and you'll get a second cut. Cut pea shoots just above the bottom leaf. Shake off any dirt and put them straight into a salad spinner or bowl to wash.

Microgreens producers include: [Nature's Root](#) and [Sky sprouts](#)

Plants and the environment

Each of the 400,000 different kinds of garden plants in the UK, provide cultural, environmental and socio-economic benefits such as, localised cooling, mitigating flooding and wellbeing benefits.

If you've identified a run-down space to transform in your community, have a look at any existing plants or wildlife on the site and whether they need to be protected. You can have a chat with your local [Wildlife Trust](#) for valuable advice. You can get local advice from:

- [Northumberland Wildlife Trust](#).
- [Urban Green](#)
- [Greening Wingrove](#)
- [Scotswood Community Garden](#)
- [Jesmond Community Orchard](#)

Water conservation

No matter what the weather, plants need water to grow. But with increasing demand and a reduced average rainfall, fresh water is not as available as it was. Things you can do are:

- catch the water from your shed or house roof in a butt, particularly in the Winter
- conserve waste water (not full of detergents) as it is suitable for the garden by fitting a diverter
- conserve soil moisture by making sure your soil is crumbling, hoeing regularly and choosing plants that give good ground cover
- use mulches and organic matter
- use water retentive gels
- group pots and plants together to shade each other

Don't use waste or rain water for seedlings

Conservation and biodiversity

Gardens are homes for wildlife, providing food, shelter and breeding sites. You can make your gardens wildlife friendly by:

- avoiding plants with multi petals
- never using pesticides

Wild bees and other pollinators are in decline. There are many [plants that attract pollinators during each season](#)

Useful digital resources and references

Website and apps to help you

Look out for websites, apps and books that can help you. There are so many books and e books or magazines that are available from [local libraries or library apps](#).

- [BBC Gardeners World magazine](#) is available to download for free from Newcastle Libraries
 - [Gardena UK has a tool](#) to draw and visualise your own garden
 - [Gardentags](#) (Google Play and iOS) plant advice
 - [My Soil](#) (Google Play and iOS) part of National Geographic
 - [RHS grow your own](#) ((Google Play and iOS) has fruit, vegetable and herb profiles,
 - [Royal Horticultural Society \(RHS\) personal gardening coach](#) create a free account to help plan and maintain your garden with email reminders of seasonal jobs for the plants you grow
 - [Smartplantapp](#) (Google Play and iOS) good for identification and advice
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References

- [Gardening is beneficial for Health: a meta analysis](#); Hartig et al., 2014
- [A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care from MIND](#)
- [Government Framework for physical activity](#)
- Chief Medical Officer [infographic](#) on physical activity for adults 19 years and older

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Useful Organisations

Scotswood Garden

Email: office@sncg.org.uk

Website: <https://scotswoodgarden.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0191 275 0000

Address: Scotswood Garden, NE15 6TT

Newcastle Parks and Allotments

Website: <https://new.newcastle.gov.uk/parks-and-allotments>

Telephone: 0191 275 0000

Address: Ouseburn Parks Visitor Centre , NE7 7BQ

Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Email: mail@northwt.org.uk

Website: www.nwt.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 284 6884

Address: Garden House, NE3 3XT

Greening Wingrove

Email: hello@greeningwingrove.org.uk

Website: <https://greeningwingrove.org.uk>

Telephone: 0191 273 6418

Address: 1 Croydon Road , NE4 5LN

FoodCycle Walker

Email: monkchester@foodcycle.org.uk

Website: <https://www.foodcycle.org.uk/location/monkchester/>

Telephone: 07377 866 316

Address: Monkchester Community Centre, NE6 2LJ

Foodcycle Westgate

Email: westgate@foodcycle.org.uk

Website: <https://www.foodcycle.org.uk/location/newcastle-westgate/>

Telephone: 07377 866 316

Address: Westgate Baptist Church, NE4 6QD

Azure Charitable Enterprises

Email: enquiries@azure-charitable.co.uk

Website: <http://www.azure-charitable.co.uk/>

Telephone: 01670 733 966

Address: McCallum House, NE23 8JT

Vertical Veg

Website: <https://verticalveg.org.uk/>

Telephone: 01670 733 966

Jesmond Community Orchard

Website: <https://jesmondcommunityorchard.co.uk/>

Telephone: 01670 733 966

Address: St Andrew's Cemetery, NE2 3BU

Butterfly Conservation

Email: info@butterfly-conservation.org

Website: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/>

Telephone: 01929 400209

Address: Manor Yard, BH20 5QP

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