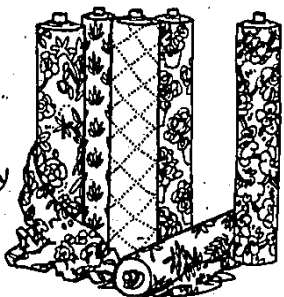


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Green thumb therapy new career choice

By ALICE WESSELS
BURLINGAME

Gardening means pleasure to all people in different ways: beauty, exercise, sharing, eating its products, a way to upgrade one's property — and now we have horticultural therapy which is a 12-month program to motivate those who are mentally or physically ill.

In the late '40s, I was walking through the housewares department of the J.L. Hudson Co. and noticed a refrigerator hydrator. Now refrigerators come with hydrators and today these plastic boxes are used for storing sweaters.

With a background in occupational therapy, psychiatric social work, landscape architecture and horticulture, the idea hit: This plastic box would be wonderful for a sick person to have beside their bed as a petite greenhouse."

A box was purchased and ideas for helping patients using plants multiplied. Pontiac State Hospital (now Clinton Valley Center) allowed me to introduce ideas to their patients as a volunteer. In 1951, I began to train others.

In 1952, the idea was taken to

Michigan State University, and then began symposiums to train professionals and volunteers, recognizing horticultural therapy as an adjunctive tool for rehabilitation.

Today, many universities are giving training beyond the four-year degrees. The program is in hospitals and schools for special education all over the country. This same story is repeated all over Canada and England with each country having yearly conferences to introduce new techniques and give reports on evaluations of successful applications. There are over 800 active members of the National Council for Therapy Through Horticulture with headquarters in Mt. Vernon, Va. After special training and externships, the members can be accredited for professional recognition. Over five countries are prescribing to the technique.

The professional training follows easily from the recognition of the benefits from gardening as Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, said: "Gardening is beneficial to people who are ill."



The idea hit me:
Wouldn't this
plastic box be
wonderful ...
as a petite
greenhouse?

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