

Gardening Guide for October

Autumn Awakenings in a Healing Garden

By Cynthia Brian

"Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens." ~ Carl Jung



The beauty of the Hydrangea awakens the soul.

Photos Cynthia Brian

We celebrate joyous occasions such as weddings, childbirths and career moves with flowers. In sadder times or with the death of a loved one, plants and bouquets offer hope to meet the challenges.

Since the beginning of time nature has been the secret weapon of humans to combat disease. From the ancient Chinese with their medicinal herbs, to the Greeks and Romans with their gardens set amongst mineral pools, green has been a sacred color. The Quakers in Colonial America believed that gardens were a place of creativity and relaxation for the body, mind and spirit. At Philadelphia's Friends Hospital in 1879 a program to use plants as therapy was established after a physician noticed that his psychiatric patients who worked in the fields were calmer. The gardens were curative.

If you are feeling burned out from all the emails in your inbox, a quick boost of energy awaits you with a brisk walk in nature. Scientific studies now back up what gardeners have known forever — spending time outdoors is therapeutic! Since the 1980s, the Forest Agency of Japan has been encouraging citizens to indulge in what's called "forest bathing" or shinrin-yoku to lower stress and increase well-being. Researchers at the Nippon Medical School in Tokyo believe that technological distractions, city noises, pollution and crowding lead to anxiety and ill health, whereas the quiet atmosphere, aromatic smells, fresh clean air, and beautiful surroundings of nature provide relief for heart disease, cancer, anxiety, depression, attention deficit and other disorders. A University of Michigan study discovered that individuals improved their short-term memory by 20 percent after a nature walk but those who walked on city streets had no improvement.

Although our Indian summer is in full swing with sometimes three-digit daytime temperatures (and the possibility of being the warmest October in our history), the evenings are temperate, perfect for a stroll. The medicine of nature awakens our five senses allowing us to decompress. Bringing the natural world into your indoor environment is equally critical to good health.

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