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Healing gardens can follow you home from the hospital

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By **Kym Pokorny, The Oregonian**



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Motoya Nakamura/The Oregonian

Children find many ways to interact at the Legacy Emanuel Medical Center therapy garden. A favorite is following the Yellow Brick Road, where the Tin Man holds the famous ruby slippers.

For a brief time, Leigh Otting steps out of a hospital room and walks down the hallway. The neutral walls and shiny linoleum floors do nothing to relieve the anxiety that's overwhelmed her since the discovery of her son's brain tumor. But when she pushes through a thick glass door and steps into a lushly planted courtyard, she finds relief, at least for a few minutes.

No one needs to tell Otting the technical reasons the **Children's Healing Garden at Emanuel Medical Center** helps her relax. To experience it is enough.

"I came down yesterday and sat on each of the benches to see what different things I could see,"

she says, standing in the warm sun in front of a gathering of brilliantly yellow black-eyed Susans. "I stared into space, and it cleared my head. My mind receded. I was able to shut things off for a little while."

Thoughts of her own garden comfort Otting, too. And experts say that's a very good thing. The benefits of getting your hands in the dirt help not only in the hospital but for a lifetime.

"Undoubtedly, we need gardens in hospitals, period," says **P. Annie Kirk, a Portland landscape designer and consultant**. "But we can't stop there. You don't have to be sick to benefit. It should be carried across the platform into our homes."

Kirk knows this from both sides of the platform. The terminal illness of her father started the process that led her to enroll in the master of landscape architecture program at the University of Arizona, where she wrote her thesis on, in part, the elements of a healing garden.

"When he was in the health care facility, I kept thinking, 'Where do we go in this place to get away from the smell of a hospital? Where do we go for privacy and comfort?'"



Enlarge

Motoya Nakamura, The Oregonian

thergardens gallery (14 photos)

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And when she went through another difficult time, she came face to face with how nature nurtures us, both physically and emotionally. So, as she says, her career found her. "I realized I could be a conduit," Kirk says.

At the 3-year-old **Adventist Medical Center garden**, Julie Brown, a registered horticultural therapist, says patients walk the path from hospital garden to home garden naturally.

"They can't help but see -- or at least feel -- the circle of life play out in the garden, and that makes us feel like part of a whole," she says. "It's a comfort we encourage them to continue at home."

Back at the Emanuel garden, Caroline Carriker of Forest Grove is thinking about that. Spending time amid the calming landscape, she's realized what the same environment could do in her own backyard.

"I want it to rub off on me," she says. Her son was born at the hospital and has health concerns that bring them back often. The garden, she says, helps it feels like a home away from home.

"It just feels good."

ELEMENTS OF A HEALING GARDEN

Portland landscape designer and consultant P. Annie Kirk specializes in restorative, healing gardens, a discipline roused by personal experience and bolstered by her research for a master's degree in landscape architecture at the

University of Arizona. For her thesis, she focused on the elements of healing gardens, producing a list of 27 components key to a therapy planting, including the following seven:

Design more softscape than hardscape: Scenes of, and access to, lush verdant nature support stress reduction.

Balance plant complexity: You don't want to go too whacked out or too monotonous.

Work in seasonal interest: Gardens planted for year-round appeal provide continuing healing.

Attract wildlife: Momentary distractions give our brains a rest from stress and worry. That allows for restoration and reprieve.

Pay close attention to color choices: As our eyes age, our ability to see purple, blue and green decreases. Red, orange and yellow in hardscape, fabrics and plants allows us to enjoy a richer experience.

Accommodate for noise: What are the sounds and how do we mitigate them? The solution may be a water feature, wind chimes or bringing music outside -- even the sound and movement of plants.

Consider use and intention: What unique essence is sought? Remembrance, play, recovery, meditation, aging-in-place, etc.

TIPS FOR TAKING GARDENING HOME FROM THE HOSPITAL

Patients are encouraged to:

- Continue or start gardening if possible.
- Start small, and take it slow.
- Follow all doctor's orders.
- Stop before you get tired.
- Adapt to the new you. Gardening won't be your friend if you can't do it.
- Plant containers, which can be just as satisfying as in-ground gardening.

(Source: Julie Brown, registered horticultural therapist at Adventist Medical Center)

PLANTS FOR ALL SEASONS IN THERAPY GARDENS

Winter

'Sky Pencil' Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata* 'Sky Pencil'): tall and skinny with evergreen foliage

Golden Mexican orange (*Choisya ternata* 'Sundance'): white fragrant flowers in winter, continuous bright yellow foliage

Paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*): peeling red bark to enjoy all year, especially when leaves have dropped

Weeping Alaska cedar (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* 'Pendula'): comical-looking, droopy limbs with soft bluish foliage

Witch hazel (hybrids such as *Hamamelis* 'Arnold Promise' or 'Jelena'): yellow, orange and purple fall color and fragrant yellow, orange or red flowers in winter

Winter-blooming camellia (*Camellia sasanqua*): evergreen with white, pink or red flowers in winter

Spring

'Golden Raindrops' flowering crabapple (*Malus transitoria* 'Schmidcutleaf'): cloud of white flowers in spring; clusters of tiny yellow fruit in fall

Hosta, especially those with big leaves

Lungwort (*Pulmonaria*): many different varieties with sky blue, lavender, white or pink flowers; foliage can be splashed, spotted or completely white

Star magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*): covered with fragrant white or pink flowers with streams of petals in the shape of a star

Weeping bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum* 'Cascade Falls'): little tufts of bright, light green bursting out all along the limbs of one of the few deciduous conifers

Summer

Annuals such as coleus, begonia, geranium and petunia: plenty of fast color in every shade and combination

Common purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*): large, purple-pink, daisylike flowers on 3-foot stems; many new hybrids in shades of orange, yellow and pink, some double.

Crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* hybrids such as 'Arapaho,' 'Natchez' and 'Catawba'): large conelike clusters of flowers in white, lavender, purple, pink and red, some with decorative bark

Elephant's ear (*Colocasia*): extremely large, tropical-looking leaves in green, black and variegated

Hardy fuchsia: all the colors and flower shapes as the annual, hanging-basket varieties, but coming back year after year

Heuchera: an old-fashioned perennial with small spikes of traditionally pink flowers that's been hybridized into a large number of foliage colors from the darkest burgundy to amber, many with darker or lighter veins and shimmering overlays on the leaves

Hydrangea: mophead, oakleaf, lacecap; pink, blue, lavender, white, lime green; big, small or in between; a plant for every purpose

Golden Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' and other cultivars): bright gold and green and gold variegated, the most useful of all ornamental grasses that thrive in all shade conditions

Cape fuchsia (*Phygелиus capensis* and hybrids): dripping tubes of hummingbird-friendly flowers in orange, pink, yellow and purple

Fall

Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*, *A. novi-belgii*): scads of blue, lavender or pink flowers like daisies

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*): Feel-good, daisylike flowers in orange, yellow and bicolors

Ironwood tree (*Oxydendrum arboreum*): fingers of tiny, white, urn-shaped, flowers; blazing orange, red and purple fall foliage

Ornamental kale: large rosettes with skirts of green and centers of purple or white

Ornamental grasses such as fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*), purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'): gentle swish and rattle as breeze brushes through

Pansy: happy flowers in a multitude of colors

Sedum hybrids such as 'Autumn Joy' and 'Bertram Anderson'): succulent foliage and clusters of pink flowers

GARDENS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

LEGACY HEALTH SYSTEMS

Good Samaritan Medical Center: Stenzel Healing Garden

Emanuel Medical Center: The Children's Healing Garden

Mount Hood Medical Garden: Healing Garden

Meridian Park Medical Center: Lewis & Floetta Ide Healing Garden (opens later this fall)

Oregon Burn Center Garden at Emanuel Medical Center: Open twice a year in summer.

LABYRINTH GARDEN, KAISER SUNNYSIDE MEDICAL CENTER

10180 S.E. Sunnyside Road, Clackamas (in courtyard between the South and A wings); 503-571-4001.

Except for the Oregon Burn Center Garden, all locations are open 24 hours a day.

For information on a session about volunteering at a Legacy garden, see the Calendar.

-- Kym Pokorny

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