



GARDENS ARE NOT JUST PRETTY FLOWERS!



After a long cold winter there is nothing better than getting outside. One immediately feels happier re-connecting with nature; listening to song birds, enjoying the smells of trees, shrubs, and flowers. Gardens are not only pretty to look at...their benefits surpass their beauty.

Gardens can be great additions to senior and Long Term Care communities. Older people in residential facilities suffer from many health problems and access to a garden provides opportunities for exercise, thereby increasing mobility, flexibility, strength, and endurance. A growing body of evidence suggests that exposure to gardens may improve sleep, reduce anxiety, depression, aggression, agitation, and enhance cognition in the elderly and in those with dementia (Krueger & Flora. 2014; Berman, Kross, Krpan, et al. 2012; American Horticultural Therapy Association, 2022). Gardens provide stimulation, improving memory, language skills, socialization, and general well-being! Gardens present opportunities to learn new skills, increase social connections, and allow older people to feel valued as they participate in gardening, such as watering, picking vegetables etc.

As the chair of the Canadian Horticulture Therapy Association so wisely stated: *“One of the biggest misconceptions that people have, is that they don’t realize that gardening is genuine therapy. Gardens are therapeutic...”* (Creamer, 2002). Gardening and garden-related activities can be a fun way of engaging Long Term Care home residents to be more physically active. For residents with dementia, gardening can provide opportunities to be involved, express themselves, and interact more with others. Gardening can also be a way of involving residents and staff in a common project such as a seed starting program.

When moving to Dom Lipa, many residents left their homes and gardens behind resulting in a sense of profound loss. This is especially true for those who grew up working on farms in Slovenia or growing herbs and vegetables in their backyards. Gardening had been a way of life for many residents and was important for both their physical and mental health. Any gardener will tell you how invigorated they feel after time spent outdoors amongst the shrubs and flowers. Even sitting or just looking at a garden increases feelings of wellbeing. The gardens at Dom Lipa have filled that void.

The Dom Lipa FAMILY COUNCIL volunteer gardeners have planted hundreds of perennials, flowering bulbs, several shrubs and trees, within the many flower beds they created. They have also donated two custom built wooden raised vegetable beds, a veg trug, and various containers for growing herbs and tomatoes. These projects were the brain child of the FAMILY COUNCIL president who understands the restorative effects of gardens and gardening. Now the Dom Lipa gardens are enjoyed by residents, family members, and staff, as they stroll past them or sit on nearby benches to meditate and observe the peace and tranquility of nature.

These gardens engage residents’ five senses as they see, smell, touch the flowers, and taste delicious cherry tomatoes. The sights and sounds of nature are also soothing...butterflies floating from flower to flower, the rustling of the leaves, the birds chirping, and the buzzing of the bees. Staff bring the outdoors in when they pick flowers and place them in vases for everyone to enjoy!



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In many ways the gardens have greatly improved residents' moods particularly after long periods of isolation, the cold drab winter, and many Covid Lockdowns. Residents look forward to spring with anticipation and joy to see what is growing in their gardens. Soon they will have something else to talk about during visits with loved ones. Some residents even help with watering, weeding, and picking vegetables as they would have done in their own gardens. Kitchen and activation staff prepare fresh salads from these picked vegetables for residents to enjoy. Residents are thrilled to know that these salads were harvested from *their own* Dom Lipa vegetable gardens.

Walking around Dom Lipa to see and delight in all of the beautiful gardens is good overall therapy for everyone. Please take your loved ones and visit all of Dom Lipa's gardens. Stop, have a closer look, and rest awhile. Remember...Gardens are not just pretty flowers!

