

PATIENT/STAFF BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES  
TO FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN A  
PRIVATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL DINING ROOM

by

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Patient/staff behavioral responses to flower arrangements within a private psychiatric hospital dining room.<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract: A three-week study investigated the effects of fresh cut flower arrangements upon the behavior of patients and staff at a private psychiatric hospital. The introduction of cut flower arrangements into the dining room was followed by an 83% increase in the number of patients sitting at highly preferred tables. Combined patient/staff data show that flower tables in the low preference area were occupied longer than control tables and that the number of occupancies also increased.

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## INTRODUCTION

Industrialization has increased at a tremendous rate over the last one-hundred years. The environment has shifted largely from rural to city life. By living in the city, people have lost their contact with the plant life associated with a rural existence. No one knows how this change affects the quality of our lives. There is more speculation on the quality of our environment as we become aware that disturbances in ecological balances affect man in a very significant way.

Accompanied with the growing interest in the environment, horticulture has been conceptualized as a therapeutic tool. Horticulture has been made an essential part of the rehabilitation program in institutions for the physically handicapped, mentally retarded, and prison inmates. Horticultural therapy has also been incorporated into the treatment milieu of many psychiatric institutions. With greater understanding of the relationship between man and plants, horticulture could be used more effectively as a therapeutic aide.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the late 1700's horticulture has been known to be of therapeutic value. Benjamin Rush, (10) maintained that digging in the soil had a curative affect on the mentally ill.

Gardening especially has been mentioned as a therapeutic tool throughout the literature. William Menninger and James Pratt (7) wrote, "Gardening therapy offers social opportunities for the individual. It serves to relieve symptoms by quieting

anxiety and releasing tension."

Howard Brooks (1) contends that horticultural therapy gives a patient "renewed confidence, a warm feeling of achievement, and a greater interest in tomorrow than yesterday."

Dunton (3) stated, "I cannot recall any analysis of the benefits of gardening itself; . . . there are many, such as . . . the satisfaction of producing something worthwhile . . . which gives pleasure to one's self and to others and possible increases in self-esteem."

Train (9) found that the life satisfaction level of geriatrics can be maintained by engaging them in gardening activities.

Mehrabian (5) advocates the utilization of plants to increase pleasantness and enhance social interactions.

Research in Germany and in the United States has shown that employees in plant landscaped offices are happier and more content than employees in the traditional cubicle offices. Individual and group morale has been improved and absenteeism has decreased. Everett Conklin(2) believes this is evidence that a primal association exists between man and plants.

Talbott, et. al. (8) found that the introduction of flowering plants into the dining room on a ward in a state mental hospital was followed by a significant increase in vocalization, time spent in the dining room, and amount of food consumed.

Three hypotheses to explain the effects of plants on man have been implied (1,2,4,7,8,9). "One possible hypothesis is that plants have a positive effect as stimulus objects for which the human perceptual apparatus is specifically primed.