

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Garden therapy helps patients recover from mental illness

***Support the Bethlem Garden in the Big Give this December and double your donation***

The Bethlem Royal Hospital Therapy Garden is taking part in this year's Big Give with every pound donated being doubled.

The Bethlem Royal Hospital Therapy Garden uses the power of gardening to help patients recover from severe mental illness. The world's oldest psychiatric hospital, dating back to 1247 and once known as 'Bedlam', Bethlem is one of the country's leading mental health hospitals. It has a long history of successfully using horticulture to support patients and there has been a therapeutic garden on the site in Beckenham since 1930.



The garden has been able to operate throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, creating a lifeline for patients who might otherwise have had little opportunity to be outdoors, especially important during the challenging time since March.

One patient said: "Throughout the pandemic, the therapeutic benefits of gardening have given me a sense of calmness and relaxation in a somewhat chaotic life. Being outdoors with nature means for that short period I can breathe, and nothing else matters. It also helps me to discover new talents and in time build up my confidence, which is something I lack on a daily basis".

The garden, which is funded by the Maudsley Charity, allows patients to connect with nature, grow fruit and vegetables, learn about healthy eating and engage with wildlife. The weekly sessions, led by horticultural therapy experts and volunteers, provide a safe, special place away from the hospital wards, in which to explore, develop and socialise with others. The sessions also offer paths to employment opportunities.



Head Occupational Therapist Peter O'Hare said: "I've seen amazing transformations. People with severe anxiety who've never even been able to go into a garden - by the time they leave they're immersed in it and love it. It's lovely to see people come alive again."

He continues: “It’s amazing how many people understand how important it is for mental wellbeing to be able to access nature. That has really helped to improve the dialogue around mental health issues”.

This December, the garden is taking part in The Big Give (1-8 December), an annual campaign in which every pound donated is doubled through match-funding. This funding will ensure that the garden can continue to operate and support more patients.



The therapeutic benefits of horticulture are well documented, and gardening has long been used as a healing medium for a range of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Bethlem Royal Hospital provides care to people facing severe mental illness, of all ages. This includes specialist treatment for a range of conditions including Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and eating disorders.

### **Quote from Jo Brand, former mental health nurse at Maudsley and Bethlem hospitals**

Jo Brand said: “As a former Bethlem and Maudsley Nurse I saw first-hand how important it is for people to access outdoor space and nature to aid their recovery. The Bethlem Garden is a unique and wonderful example of NHS staff providing a vital service, supported entirely by charitable funding.

We are already seeing the tragic impact COVID-19 is having on people with existing mental illness, as well as those experiencing mental illness for the first time in their lives. With projects like the garden being under increased pressure to help more people - when many other activities are cancelled at this time resulting in increased isolation and loneliness.

Please donate to this important cause today – for every £1 you donate will be doubled.”

### **5 Tips For Improving Your Mental Health Through Gardening**

The project is urging everyone to connect with nature – whether you have your own garden or visit a local park, here are five top tips for improving your mental health through connecting with nature, based on the New Economic Foundation’s Five Ways to Wellbeing.

#### **1. Connect with other people**

Give a hand on the land in your local community garden, allotment or just try some guerilla gardening in neglected areas of your neighbourhood with some friends. It will provide a sense of belonging and self-worth through sharing experiences and having a positive impact on you and beyond.

- [Capital Growth: Urban food growing and community gardens](#)
- [GOV.UK: Apply for an Allotment](#)
- [Guerrilla gardening](#)

## 2. Be physically active

Did you know that getting out in the garden for just 30-45 minutes can burn up to 300 calories? Even low impact activities as sowing seeds or raking leaves involve focus, balance and coordination. Regular gardening as a form of exercise is extremely beneficial to your mental and physical health. Research suggests that people who garden are less likely to suffer from depression, anger and stress.

*"The cure for this ill is not to sit still, Or frowst with a book by the fire; But to take a large hoe and a shovel also, And dig till you gently perspire; And then you will find that the sun and the wind, And the Djinn of the Garden too, Have lifted the hump -- The horrible hump -- The hump that is black and blue!" - Rudyard Kipling*

- [NHS: 'Regular exercise may lower your risk of depression'](#)

## 3. Learn new skills

Growing plants is a laboratory where you can experiment, source, create, inspire and learn. You can grow food and cook with fresh home-grown produce, or design your own beautiful Eden in your backyard. It might inspire you to paint or even lead to a new career or hobby. The tomatoes you grow might be smaller than the ones in the catalogue picture, or they might never turn red because it was too late to plant them, but you can make delicious green tomato chutney out of it. Creative learning will increase your self-esteem and sense of achievement and purpose.

- [BBC Food: Seasonal Food by Month](#)
- [Study for an RHS Qualification](#)
- [Royal Academy: Six of the best artist-gardeners](#)

## 4. Give to others

Why not share the bounties of your garden? Random acts of kindness such as giving a bunch of flowers or a lettuce grown in your garden to your neighbour will create positive feelings and help build community around you. If you don't have a garden, your elderly neighbour will appreciate a hand to maintain their own.

Have you thought about volunteering in a community garden or food bank? The act of giving will give you a feeling of purpose and self-worth while connecting with other people.

- [RHS: Volunteer in your community](#)
- [South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust: Volunteering](#)

## 5. Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)

A garden is a feast to the senses. The smell of lavender in the morning, holding a silky lamb's ear leaf between your fingers, bees buzzing in a hot summer day, nibbling some peppery rocket just harvested, witnessing a flock of jackdaws heading to their perching tree before dawn - all these experiences will help ground you in the present.

Being in nature can be a form of mindfulness that will contribute to heightening your awareness, enjoy life more and positively change the way you feel and how to approach challenges.

- [NHS: Mindfulness](#)
- [NHS: Be Mindful Online Course](#)
- [National Trust: A beginner's Guide to Forest Bathing](#)



**Make a donation to Bethlem Garden between 1 – 8 December in The Big Give campaign and every pound you give will be doubled.**

**Donate here: <https://maudsleycharity.org/case-studies/bethlem-garden/>**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**For press enquiries please contact:** Elizabeth Morrow [elizabeth.morrow@maudsleycharity.org](mailto:elizabeth.morrow@maudsleycharity.org)

**Social Media (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook):** @MaudsleyCharity

**Website:** [maudsleycharity.org/case-studies/bethlem-garden/](https://maudsleycharity.org/case-studies/bethlem-garden/)

## **Maudsley Charity**

We work with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London. Together we drive direct improvements in prevention, clinical care and treatment. This unique partnership enables us to fund innovative projects and research which change lives across London, the UK and the world. Building the proof and expertise which will allow us all to live in better mental health.

We also work with a wide range of voluntary organisations and partners who share our values and commitment to improving mental health.

We're committed to the mental health and well-being of those who live locally, but we believe that the work that we fund can have impact at a national and international level. Our primary area of operation are the boroughs that South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust provides mental health and substance misuse (drug and alcohol) services in, these are: Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark.

When someone becomes ill, the effect on them, their friends and family can be life-changing. It can happen to any of us. The consequences of mental ill health are far reaching – affecting employment, relationships, finances and even life expectancy.