Florida Horticulture for Health Network – Resource Hub

CATEGORY: POPULATIONS/PROGRAMS

Cancer Populations and Plant-based Programs

People being treated or recovering from cancer have specific health challenges including need for privacy, sense of place, greater need for shade due to medication, and possible compromised immunity. Involvement by family and friends in the cancer journey is an important aspect as well. Plant-based programs and gardens offer all involved in a cancer journey some respite from sterile hospital environments, distraction from pain, and settings that can be restorative and beautiful. A range of programs and places for people dealing with cancer demonstrate the variety of health strategies, the breadth of cancers, and the impact plants can have on physical, emotional, and spiritual health of patients, care partners, and staff. Numerous program and garden examples are included in this resource.

Gardening lifestyle intervention studies in particular have emerged in greater numbers for cancer populations since 2025 (Bail et al, 2022; Blair et al, 2021; Cases et al, 2022).

Significant number of studies connecting plants and cancer care have focused on nutrition and plant-based diets supporting this lifestyle choice, particularly as it relates to cancer (Guerra et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2020; Santana-Gálvez et al., 2020; Buentzel et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2023). Recent research has been published investigating plants' anticancer properties as potential preventative and treatment options. These include aromatherapy (Beyliklioğlu et al., 2019; Demark-Wahnefried et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2023), nutra pharmaceuticals (Amatto et al., 2025) and built environment and green space impacting cancer outcomes (Bikomeye et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2024; Ebaid, 2023; Odebeatu et al., 2024).

Research on specific plants and their role in cancer prevention and care continues to expand this field: gooseberries, mistletoe, black berries, chickpeas, bananas, cruciferous vegetables, green tea, pomegranate, and orange peel (Shafi & Iqbal, 2025; Gupta et al., 2022; Rostock, 2020; Heydarirad et al., 2019; Mondale et al., 2021; Mazur et al., 2025; Pantiora et al., 2023; Tajaldini et al., 2020).

Refer to Resource Hub: Plant-Based Food, Nutrition & Food Security Initiatives category: plant-based food subset, nutrition; Horticultural Therapy & Health Services category: all sections; and Horticulture for Health Overview: gardening health benefits for related resources.

Key Organizations
American Horticultural Therapy Association (*AHTA*)
American Cancer Society

Books, journals & epublications on cancer populations
Cooper Marcus, C. & Sachs, N. (2013). Chapter 8 Gardens for cancer patients. *Therapeutic landscapes: An evidence-based approach to designing healing gardens and restorative outdoor spaces.* Wiley.
Fleming, L. (2016). *Therapeutic horticulture a practitioner's perspective.* Smashwords.
Haller, R., Kennedy, K. & Capra, C. (2019). *The profession and practice of horticultural therapy*. CRC Press.
Journal of Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology

Research & articles on cancer populations and plant-based programs
Recently published selected research & articles:

Alexander, G.K., Bashore, L., & Brooks, V. (2022). Improving food literacy and access among young adult cancer survivors: A cross-sectional descriptive study. *Cancer Nurs., 45*(2).

Amatto, PPG., Chaves, L., França, SC. et al. (2025). Efficacy of different pharmaceutical forms of *Curcuma longa* or curcumin in reducing oral mucositis severity and incidence in cancer patients: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Front Pharmacol., 16.*

Bail, J.R., Blair, C.K., Smith, K.P. et al. (2022). Harvest for Health, a randomized controlled trial testing a home-based, vegetable gardening intervention among older cancer survivors across Alabama: An analysis of accrual and modifications made in intervention delivery and assessment during COVID-19. *J Acad Nutr Diet., 122*(9).

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Bikomeye, J.C., Balza, J.S., Kwarteng, J.L. et al. (2022). The impact of greenspace or nature-based interventions on cardiovascular health or cancer-related outcomes: A systematic review of experimental studies. *PLoS One, 17*(11).

Blair, CK., Harding, EM., Adsul, P. et al. (2021, Feb). Southwest Harvest for Health: Adapting a mentored vegetable gardening intervention for cancer survivors in the southwest. *Contemp Clin Trials Commun., 21.*

Blaschke, S., O'Callaghan, C.C., Schofield, P., & Salander, P. (2017). Cancer patients' experiences with nature: Normalizing dichotomous realities. *Social Science & Medicine, 172.*

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Chen, N., Mita, C., Chowdhury-Paulino, I.M. et al. (2024). The built environment and cancer survivorship: A scoping review. *Health & Place, 86.*

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Cimprich, B. (1993). Development of an intervention to restore attention in cancer patients. *Cancer Nursing, 16.*

Demark-Wahnefried, W., Oster, R.A., Smith, K.P. et al. (2024). Vegetable gardening and health outcomes in older cancer survivors: A randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Network Open, 7*(6).

Ebaid, M.A. (2023). A framework for implementing biophilic design in cancer healthcare spaces to enhance patients' experience. *International Journal of Sustainable Building Technology and Urban Development, 14*(2).

Fleming, L., & Morrison, J. (2021). Superfood garlic: Applications for people-plant programming. *Digging In, 7*(3).
Fleming, L., & Figueirdo, M. (2016). Healing gardens for cancer populations. *Therapeutic Horticulture A Practitioner's Perspective*. Smashwords.
Guerra, A.R., Duarte, M.F., & Duarte, I.F. (2018). Targeting tumor metabolism with plant-derived natural products: Emerging trends in cancer therapy. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, *66*(41).
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Hedhili, L. (2024). *Ippia alba* essential oil: A promising complementary therapy for breast cancer. *Chemistry & Biodiversity*, *21*(4).
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Heydarirad, G., Choopani, R., Pasalar, M. et al. (2019). The effect of a chickpea-based Persian diet on cancer-related fatigue in breast cancer patients: A semi-experimental study. *Complement Med Res., 26*(6).
Howarth, E. (2025). Bringing the outdoors in: Psychologists' perspectives on incorporating nature into indoor environments when supporting people living with and beyond cancer. Doctoral dissertation: The University of Manchester (United Kingdom).
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Pantiora, P.D., Balaouras, A.I., Mina, I.K. et al. (2023). The therapeutic alliance between pomegranate and health emphasizing on anticancer properties. *Antioxidants*, *12*(1).
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Yun, J., Yao, W., Meng, T., & Mu, Z. (2024). Effects of horticultural therapy on health in the elderly: A review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Public Health*, *32*(10).
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Examples of cancer populations and plant-based programs

Amita Health Cancer Institute and Outpatient Center in Hinsdale Ill. uses a leaf sculpture suspended in its main foyer as a connection to nature, where the aluminum lacelike patterned leaves have subtle movement.
https://www.hfmmagazine.com/articles/2890-getting-a-lift-from-nature

Camp Dream Street Kaplen Jewish Community Center's summer camp is specifically for children with cancer and other blood disorders. Therapeutic horticulture and other programs address needs of this population.
https://www.dreamstreetms.org/

Carle Foundation Hospital rooftop garden, opened in 2022 is for use by all patients and families including those being treated for cancer.
https://carle.org/newsroom/community/2022/06/new-rooftop-garden-opens-this-week-at-carle-founda

Cone Health Cancer Center in Greensboro NC offer therapeutic horticulture to cancer patients, survivors and caregivers in partnership with Wesley Long Healing Gardens and Alamance Regional Medical Center Healing Garden (Burlington) focused on wellness goals of coping with fear and uncertainty often experienced by cancer patients.
https://therapeutic-hort.ces.ncsu.edu/2025/01/program-spotlight-cone-health-healing-garden/

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute's Thea and James Stoneman Healing Garden and the Morse Conservatory in Boston, MA offer patients, visitors and staff green space for healing including green space with strict infection control standards for use by those who are immune compromised.
https://www.hfmmagazine.com/articles/1404-bringing-nature-indoors

Friends of Kids with Cancer organization delivers therapeutic horticulture at Mercy Clinic in Saint Louis Missouri as part of its programming services for this young population.
https://www.friendsofkids.com/horticulturetherapy.html

Garden of Hope created by Ohio State University and designed in collaboration with OSU's agricultural research center and partner James Cancer Hospital, is a community food garden for cancer survivors and caregivers with a mandate to encourage more fruit and vegetable consumption and healthy eating patterns.
https://www.aicr.org/news/spring-gardens-support-cancer-survivors/

Healing garden in Hawaii welcomes cancer patients to restore emotional health and engage with cancer survivors in a plant-dense outdoor sanctuary. A KITV.com report on ABC.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-UB34-HnUU

Hope in Bloom non-profit installs gardens for patients in their own homes recognizing cancer patient's preference for healing at home and challenges related to mobility and stamina.
https://www.hopeinbloom.org/

Seidman Cancer Center's therapeutic space at *University Hospital* includes a labyrinth, circular garden, zen sculptures and restorative areas.
https://www.sculpturecenter.org/oosi/items/show/1384

The Garden of Hope and Courage, a 2.5-acre outdoor space on NCH Healthcare System's Baker Hospital in Naples, FL is near the Raymond L. Lutgert Cancer Pavilion.
https://gardenofhopeandcourage.org/

Missouri Botanical Garden (MOBOT) began a therapeutic horticulture program for pediatric oncology patients in 2024, growing plants, seeds of hope, perseverance and social connections.
https://www.laduenews.com/health-and-wellness/mobot-provides-therapeutic-horticulture-to-kids-with-cancer/article_53a3bef8-d0f9-11ee-82ba-2b6d5b359859.html

The Mustard Tree Macmillan Cancer Support Center at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth UK delivers *Blooming Well* community-based therapeutic horticulture program for patients with a cancer diagnosis.
https://www.plymouthchronicle.co.uk/gardening-gives-cancer-patients-time-to-heal/https://www.plymouthchronicle.co.uk/gardening-gives-cancer-patients-time-to-heal/

The Gathering Place Norma's Garden, Cleveland, Ohio is a facility with multiple gardens designed to support the cancer journey, offering activities, yoga, and support groups in this green setting.
https://www.tclf.org/landscapes/normas-garden-gathering-place

The Gathering Place in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, a facility servicing people touched by cancer, uses a garden designed with 2 themes – play and meditation, for restoration and recovery.
https://landscapeontario.com/healing-gardens-the-power-of-nature

University of Alabama Birmingham's *Harvest for Health* program and research paired cancer survivors with master gardeners to grow food in their home gardens, with improvements in physical exercise, nutrition, self-confidence and sense of control.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpzKxjNOLsw

Virginia Thurston Healing Garden, Harvard Mass. is an 8-acre woodland setting with a cancer facility.
https://healinggardensupport.org/

Wilmot Botanical Gardens, College of Medicine Healing Gardens and Teaching Laboratory at the University of Florida delivers group therapeutic horticulture programs for people with cancer (and other populations).
https://wilmotgardens.med.ufl.edu/programming-2/therapeutic-horticulture-program/

Videos, webinars and websites on cancer populations and plant-based programs
Cancer Treatment Centers of America video examines plant-based and organic meals for cancer patients with dietician and cookbook author Ellie Krieger, sharing nutrition insights like eating the rainbow.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BAbMIff7Pg

Cancer Treatment Centers of America CNN video highlights advanced stage cancer patients working on a 25-acre facility-supported garden growing food for themselves to improve their physical and mental health.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8OKVhaiD1M

Hospice UK, offers a garden for intervention, distraction, connections with nature and food production for cancer patients in support of their treatment and recovery.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Npz2UI_dWFE

Carti Cancer Center's Blooming Garden, planted by cancer survivors, is a floral space serving as a retreat for cancer patients that is presented as an opportunity for people on the cancer journey.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMmOyjzbmoI

Healing Garden at this cancer facility is described as an oasis, removed from cancer treatment areas, providing adjunct cancer care, with additional support and services with input from the patients at all stages of cancer.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVJbycthrdk

Horticultural healing article by T. Novak in *Cancer Wellness* site outlines how nature, horticulture and related programming can support a cancer journey.
https://cancerwellness.com/horticulture-therapy/

John Sykes Curtis Harvey Center lists healing gardens including Blackstone River Healing Garden for cancer patients, Dana Farber/Brigham and Women's Cancer Center in Weymouth, Howard Ulfelder Healing Garden at Yawkey Center, Mass General, Mary Eagan Garden at Children's Hospital Waltham MA. and others throughout the U.S.
http://jschcenter.org/healing_gardens.html

Melbourne Australia's *Paula Fox Melanoma and Cancer Center* and garden provide patients, families and staff with respite, retreat, and beauty in a hospital setting turning the area into a "people-humming place".
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSNBN41jLQU

Ohio State Cancer Center helps survivors heal through gardening, using urban gardening, nutrition education and active physical tasks as part of the wellness journey.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGtl4k2hrno

Pancreatic cancer survivor shares his use of gardening, in his own garden, and physical tasks that provided strength, hope and healing during his cancer journey.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rMvmHdp34E

Parkview Cancer Institute's Healing Garden indoor space with floor to ceiling windows and live plants brings the outside in for patients, families and visitors in support of healing.
https://www.parkview.com/blog/inside-the-parkview-cancer-institute-healing-garden

Pearson Cancer Center Garden video tours the garden in Lynchburg, VA. in summer; organic horticulture practices, with raised beds, inground gardens, and vertical structures, supported and maintained by master gardeners are key elements of the garden.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgNrII1riFs

Siteman Cancer Center has partnered with Missouri Botanical Garden to bring *Journey to Well Being* walking tours in a virtual format, using their Japanese Garden for cancer treatment-related programming.
https://siteman.wustl.edu/virtual-support-services/

THAD (Therapeutic Horticulture Activity Database) offers TH activities across populations including those with medical conditions like cancer (activities like herbal heating bags, growing garlic, I'm tired: Plants & people, care of houseplants, balancing stones-creating rock towers, beach sunflowers & resiliency).
https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/therapeutic-horticulture-activities-database/medical-conditions/

Therapeutic Gardens for Cancer Populations, part of presentation "Half-Day Intensive Grow Your Professional Skills: Gardening, Gardens and Therapeutic Horticulture" at the Canadian Therapeutic Recreation Association's Annual Conference by Lesley Fleming, HTR and Jennifer Kirby, CTRS shares a downloadable pdf on therapeutic gardens, enabling gardens and restorative gardens.
https://canadian-tr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/103.pdf

Therapeutic Gardening with Barbara Boone Episode 46 podcast discusses gardening benefits through Dr. Jennifer Young Pierce's endometrial cancer journey.
https://cancering.com/therapeutic-gardening-with-barbara-boone

Related organizations
National Breast Cancer Foundation
National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (U.S.)
Specific cancer types & related organizations *(Ovarian Cancer Organizations, Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network etc.)*

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