

Healthy gardening delivers a connection

Part of my responsibilities as an OSU Extension horticulture agent is to teach Douglas County Master Gardener volunteers the art and science of sustainable gardening.

When we garden or landscape sustainably, we adopt a low input style of gardening that strives to reconnect our landscapes to nature.

This physical reconnection with nature means that we want our property to provide all the ecological services that the native land once provided. Services like habitat for wildlife which includes insects, food sources for pollinators,



Steve Rehnquist
Extension Spotlight

natural water absorbing surfaces that feed ground water, allowing leaves and other organic waste to be recycled on our property to enhance the soil, and layers of vegetation in our landscape that approximate the original biomass of our forests to clean air and cool our cities.

Sustainable gardening teaches us to move away from gardening practices that do not provide these

necessary ecological services. Strive to stop fighting all insects with pesticides, use native plants that require less irrigation and provide habitat and food for our native birds and insects, reduce the amount of chemical fertilizers that often create too much vigor and can pollute waterways, recycle garden waste by composting, and minimize the use of high input lawns. Moving away from many of these practices creates a healthier environment for all of us.

Gardening or landscaping has a number of other practices that can contribute positively to your health. Growing your

own vegetables and fruits provides a fresher, often healthier local source of food. The practice of mixing food and ornamentals into edible landscapes is a very popular topic and is a sustainable practice that works well for small yards.

Another healthy benefit of gardening is the physical exercise necessary to maintain a garden. Exercise is always considered one of the key inputs to a healthy body and mind. And contrary to walking, jogging or riding a bike, gardening takes place in your landscape surrounded by plants that are cleaning the air.

Just recently I have

heard many physicians saying how important it is to keep getting exercise during our COVID-19 lockdown. A strong immune system is supported by good nutrition and physical activity.

Finally one of the most positive aspects of gardening on our health is made through the connection gardeners have with nature. Our gardens are one of the only places where many of us make contact with nature, and this contact has a calming, stress reducing, positive impact

on us.

If you don't have space to garden actively where you live and want to surround yourself with great gardens while you walk, visit the Master Gardeners Discovery Garden next to River Forks Park. It is open every day from dawn until dusk.

Steve Renquist is the Horticulture Extension Agent for OSU Extension Service of Douglas County. Steve can be reached by email steve.renquist@oregonstate.edu or phone at 541-672-4461.