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The psychological



benefits of gardening

BY TERRI LOFTIN

The Plant Fairie, Fairhope

Interacting with nature is essential to maintaining a sense of well-being. Through gardening and spending time around plants, individuals can reap a wide range of psychological benefits. Here are just a few mental health benefits of being around indoor plants and gardening.

1. Improves Mood

Human beings generally feel happier

and more optimistic in surroundings with plenty of plants and nature. Consider a survey conducted at four San Francisco Bay Area hospitals. In the survey, 79 percent of patients said they felt more relaxed and calm, 19 percent felt more positive, and 25 percent felt refreshed and stronger after spending time in a garden.

Flowers also evoke positive emotions. For example, in a 2005 study, women who received flowers reported more positive moods three days later. Elderly patients who received flowers also

reported brighter moods and improved episodic memory.

While you may only need to place a plant on the windowsill at home to help create a more soothing environment, you can increase happy feelings even more through gardening.

Gardening reminds us of our connection to nature, and helps us focus on the bigger picture, which can alleviate symptoms of depression. Also, the physical aspect of gardening releases feel-good chemicals in the brain such as serotonin and dopamine.

Finally, working with soil makes us happier. A 2007 study found a bacterium in soil called *Mycobacterium vaccae* triggers the release of serotonin, which lifts mood and reduces anxiety.

2. Relieves Stress and Anxiety.

Looking at plants and flowers, whether indoors or outdoors, is a peaceful activity free of worries or conflict. It encourages living in the present moment and engages the senses. When you take time to smell the sweet perfume of a magnolia tree, for example, your cortisol levels drop.

Consider a study published in the "Journal of Physiological Anthropology." In this study, one group of participants worked on computer tasks, while



another group transplanted indoor plants. After completing their assignments, the groups switched.

The researchers found the subjects felt more comfortable and relaxed after the transplanting task, rather than the computer task. The study concluded individuals could reduce psychological and psychological stress by interacting with plants.

Another study, published in the “Journal of Health Psychology,” compared the effects of outdoor gardening to indoor reading. The study reveals both gardening and reading decrease cortisol levels.

However, stress levels decrease significantly more with gardening. Likewise, the study participants enjoyed a fully restored positive mood after gardening.

3. Prolongs Attention Span

Gardening and being around plants strengthen the attention span, which can aid concentration and learning.

For example, a study published in the “American Journal of Public Health” examines the impact of green or natural settings on children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Researchers found activities carried out in green settings significantly reduce symptoms of ADHD compared to other settings.

Many children can benefit from spending time in nature. According to the CDC, an estimated 6.1 million children in the U.S. have received an ADHD diagnosis.

Gardening also helps children to achieve academically.

A study published by the American Society for Horticultural Science demonstrates the impact of gardening activities as part of a science curriculum. Students who gardened scored significantly higher on a science achievement test than students who studied science in a traditional classroom setting.

Terri Loftin operates The Plant Fairie in Fairhope. You can visit her and learn more about the benefits of gardening at 21085 Jubilee Trail in Fairhope.



Springtime and honeybee swarms are around the corner



BY CHRISTEL HIXSON

Hillcrest Farm, Elberta

Just as a new year is beginning for us human beings in this very different and somewhat unpredictable time of our lives, honeybee colonies here in the Southeast are beginning to build up population and their annual cycle of reproduction via swarming. Swarming is the honeybee colony reproduction and the main goal of every colony, whether it is living in a hollow tree, in a beekeeper's stack of hive boxes in the backyard or in a new, old or abandoned structure.

Because of this natural instinct of reproduction, spring is a very exciting and busy time for beekeepers. Although we do not have much of a winter here in this part of the United States, honeybee colonies do slow down their foraging activities during winter as there are few blooming flowers for them to gather nectar and pollen. The queen therefore, does not lay as many eggs.

As daytime temperatures then begin to slowly climb, beekeepers start seeing more flight activity outside of their hives. Foraging bees begin transporting more and more pollen in their pollen baskets...yes, honey bees have little built-in baskets on their hindlegs for transporting pollen back to their hive to feed developing larvae in the broodnest. This is a sure sign that spring is right around the corner!

Now, as exciting as it may be to observe a colony in the act of swarming and settling on a tree branch or landscape structure, catching that swarm and successfully getting it into a hive box, beekeepers usually do not want to see their own hives swarm. This is because roughly half of the colony will leave with the "mother" queen and the other half of the original colony's

population is left behind with a queen cell from which a new, young queen will soon emerge.

This usually happens when the beekeeper least needs them to as the spring buds are getting ready to burst open into beautiful blooms which provide the sweet nectar for the main honey production. For this reason, beekeepers are almost as busy as the bees implementing management techniques to try to prevent their colonies from swarming. However, as hard as they may try, bees can still outmaneuver beekeepers and swarm anyway!

This is where you, as part of the community and hopefully, as one who appreciates the fascinating and necessary existence of these creatures, will call a local beekeeper, county extension agent or local beekeeping club if you ever spot a colony of bees clustered somewhere they should not be.

Beekeepers who are interested in retrieving swarms usually put their names and contact information on a swarm removal list with their club. They will gladly collect swarms if easily accessible from a tree limb or landscape structure but often will charge a fee, especially if a colony has moved permanently into a gap or cavity in a building, for example, in a soffit or behind the wall of a building. When swarms take up residence in such places, it often requires a lot more time, effort and expertise to remove them safely and completely so that no trace of comb or scent is left behind to attract a future swarm.

A few good things to know about honey bee swarms is that when they are in that cluster, which can range from just a very small fist-size ball of bees to a much larger (think two to three times the size of a football) cluster, and when seen on a tree limb, shrub or maybe a fencepost, this is usually a temporary resting place.

Then the swarm begins complex decision-making that helps them locate and then travel to their new chosen home. The swarm can fly away within a few hours or possibly the following day. Also, these swarms are generally



very docile as they have no “home” yet to defend.

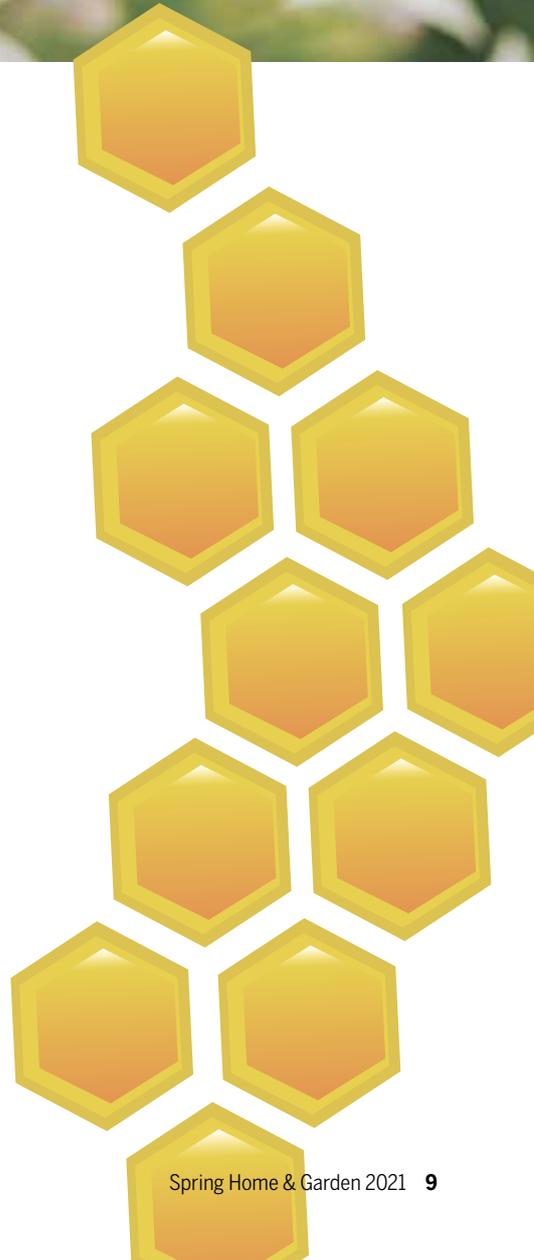
It is still best to stay on the side of caution and keep a reasonable distance away. If possible, it is often helpful to snap a photo of the swarm to send to the beekeeper whom you can hopefully communicate with so that he or she can confirm that it is definitely a honey bee swarm and bring the correct size box and equipment in order to successfully capture the swarm.

If possible, try to observe the beekeeper collecting the swarm as it is an interesting and fascinating procedure! You might be surprised at how easily done it can often be. It may even trigger your curiosity so much that you may think about becoming a future beekeeper! This would be wonderful as there can never be enough beekeepers in the world.

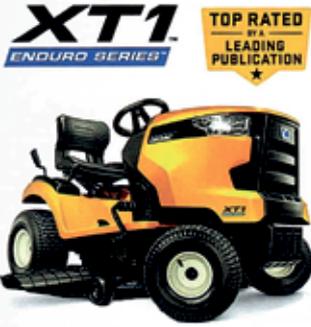
Let’s look forward to springtime showers, bees and flowers!

The Baldwin County Beekeepers Association website includes a list of local beekeepers to contact for removing swarms: www.baldwinbees.com

Christel Hixson has been a beekeeper for six years at Hillcrest Farm in Elberta. You can contact her at 251-269-5642 with any beekeeping questions.



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8 tips for a successful home

RENOVATION

STATEPOINT

Thinking of remodeling your home? From safety and security to product and contractor selection, there are many factors to consider.

Follow these eight remodeling tips to help minimize hassles during a renovation:

- 1. Create a budget.** Create a project budget and set a spending limit. Whether you plan to utilize savings, home equity loan, line of credit or free up funds through refinancing, now is the time to identify how you will finance the project, and how much you want to spend.



- 2. Prepare the house.** Before work starts, clear all spaces where professionals will be working, as well as walkways they will use to access these areas. Remove valuables and breakables to avoid damage and cover furniture in areas where paint or dust could harm upholstery. Keep other considerations in mind. For example, if you're renovating the kitchen, you may need to create a temporary food prep area.

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- 3. Work with reputable professionals.** When selecting a contractor, be sure they have references, certification and an understanding of the project. For example, when tackling window and door projects, Andersen Windows, Inc. recommends hiring an Andersen Certified Contractor to do the job. These contractors receive product training, installation resources, offer an exclusive 2-year limited installation warranty, and their expertise and experience in an extensive range of residential projects means they're able to capture your vision for your home and work with you to provide the right products.

BOTTOM LINE: working with reputable professionals makes all the difference in the quality of the work and the materials used to complete the project.

- 4. Address safety.** Talk to your contractor about what COVID-19 measures they practice to help keep customers and employees safe. Find out whether they're following CDC guidelines for businesses, including always wearing a mask, social distancing whenever possible and frequent hand washing. Also, ask if they offer virtual consultations that allow you to start the process contact-free.



5. Schedule wisely. Choose a timeframe for your home renovation that best fits your busy schedule. Keep in mind that unforeseen circumstances can sometimes cause delays. Build this into the timeline so you're not taken by surprise.

6. Add or update your security system. With professionals frequently coming in and out of your home, a home renovation may be a good time to add or update your security system with reprogrammable smart locks. Offering more convenience and greater control, the Yale Assure Lock for Andersen patio and entry doors for example, is a sleek, key-free entry lock that makes it easy to grant access to contractors for limited periods of time, lock and unlock doors from anywhere and monitor from afar.



7. Communicate openly and effectively. If a renovation is done correctly, you may never need to repeat the process. This makes open and honest communication with your home renovation team essential. Be sure to share your vision and to ask questions as they arise. At the same time, expect the professionals working with you to communicate regularly and address all your concerns.

8. Get a return on your investment. Prioritize projects that will potentially raise the resale value of your home. According to FortuneBuilders, the top 10 greatest returns on investment for home renovations include bathroom and kitchen remodels, landscaping, replacing entry doors and replacing windows. It also helps to select products that come with transferrable warranties. This will give your property a tangible leg-up on the market when it's time to sell.

Homebuilders Association plans silent auction

The Baldwin County Homebuilder's Association plans to hold a silent auction and crawfish boil on April 15 in Fairhope. Proceeds from the evening will benefit the Baldwin County Homebuilders Association annual scholarship fund.

Tickets are \$15 each and can be purchased by visiting <http://www.bchba.com>

Forms to register donation items for the silent auction can also be found on the website.

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Corner Copia Garden Center expands at new site in Fairhope

Once upon a time not too many years ago, folks in Baldwin County could indulge their gardening fantasies by browsing and shopping for quality plants at Wilsey's Nursery, where Highway 181 meets Highway 98 in Fairhope. The owners made the decision to close up shop at the lovely property a few years back.

However, synchronicity was at work. Master Gardener Michelle Prouty had been running her successful, small nursery, Corner Copia, in Silverhill for several years, but realized she needed more space for her burgeoning business. Prouty approached the Wilseys, they reached a mutually beneficial decision, and the grand opening of Corner Copia is happening now!

Prouty and her knowledgeable staff have been busy relocating her many plants, as well as buildings, chickens,



DOOLEY BERRY
Beyond the Garden Gate

gift shop offerings and a wide variety of pots and containers to their new home.

"All of the space we have here is my dream come true," she says. And the nursery itself is only the start of development at the 30-acre property. "In the future," Prouty said, "we plan some big doings. There

is already an Airbnb on the property that will be available this spring. We have beautiful walking trails and we plan to tag the native trees on the hilly land behind the nursery. Eventually, we will build an educational center to host plant and gardening classes. We want to host events, such as small weddings and birthday parties, which we already do. Once we get the property cleared of hurricane damage, we will proceed with these plans."

Prouty and her sales staff are not just salespeople like you find in the big box stores. Prouty comes from a family of "plant people," is a master gardener and is willing to take the time to educate her customers on what to buy for a particular area in their gardens, where and how to plant and explains the particular requirements of chosen plants. When you visit Cornia Copia Nursery, you will not only leave with



beautiful plants, but also with detailed knowledge of how to care for them.

Under Prouty's guidance, the staff will find and order any requested unusual or hard-to-find plant material and will set new gardeners up with all the information they need to be successful. They will also give assistance with

We plan some big doings. There is already an Airbnb on the property that will be available this spring. We have beautiful walking trails and we plan to tag the native trees on the hilly land behind the nursery. Eventually, we will build an educational center to host plant and gardening classes.

– Master Gardener Michelle Prouty





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As Baldwin County gets ready to re-plant gardens trampled by hurricanes the garden center has plenty of consistently popular varieties of camellias, fiddle-leaf trees, pink and red geraniums and fine ferns. Corner Copia also offers less common plants such as the coffee plant, which makes a fine houseplant, tea camellias and olive trees.

Prouty will also custom design arrangements and deliver them for birthdays, anniversaries, funerals-”wherever there is a need for a gift,” she says.

Roses, bedding plants and vegetables are all beginning to make their appearance at this magical nursery.

“Our gift shop is so much bigger than our old location,” Prouty says. “We have the Original Pot Head containers which you can do so much with. We offer unique garden containers, birdhouses, statuaries, pottery and fountains. If you need a gift for any occasion, you can come in, find a nice gift and be on your way in five minutes.”

As our early spring weather drifts gently upon us, do yourself a favor, leave Covid worries behind for a bit, and pay a pleasant visit to Corner Copia Nursery at 13477 State Highway 181 in Fairhope. The phone number is 251-517-0453 and hours are Tuesday-Saturday 9-5 and Sunday from 12-5. They are closed on Mondays.





Tips to improve indoor air quality and breathe better at home

STATEPOINT

With more of life centered at home due to cool weather and social distancing, it's time to ensure the space where your family spends the majority of its time is healthy and safe.

What many people don't know is that concentrations of air pollutants can typically be up to five times higher inside one's home than out, and sometimes far more, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. However, there are many simple actions you can take to breathe better in your home:

Monitor carbon monoxide

This potentially deadly gas can be emitted by a faulty gas-burning home appliance. Monitor for carbon monoxide using detectors placed in major areas of the home, especially the bedrooms.

Make the switch to VOC-free

Most paints and stains, along with aerosol sprays, air fresheners and other household products, contain Volatile

Organic Compounds (VOCs), which emit gases that can result in respiratory problems, headaches and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat, among other health problems. Take a cue from forward-thinking institutions like the Getty Museum and Google and swap out conventional paints in your home interiors for an eco-friendly, non-toxic alternative such as ECOS Paints. The brand, which has a 35-year history of offering VOC- and odor-free paints and stains in virtually any color, uses sustainable ingredients and can deliver directly to a home or business. To learn more, visit ecospaints.net.

"We want people to feel good about what they are bringing into their homes. This is why we are transparent about ingredients and VOC testing results," says Julian Crawford, ECOS Paints CEO.

Keep airborne dust to a minimum

Dust carries a variety of contaminants, including bacteria and allergens. Mop and dust often using a wet mop and dust cloth. Vacuum often as well using a



vacuum with a HEPA filter, which traps small particles.

Eliminate moisture from the air

Moisture promotes mold, which can cause serious health problems when left unabated. Reduce moisture by eliminating sources of water leaks, installing exhaust fans in kitchens, using air conditioning, and positioning dehumidifiers in high-moisture rooms such as bathrooms, laundry rooms and basements.

Reduce airborne particles

Install an air purifier to trap irritating particles, including mold, pollen and pet dander, which are particularly bad for people with respiratory problems like asthma. Brush pets often — outdoors if possible — and give pets regular baths.

Decrease dirty air

Replace HVAC filters regularly. While the optimal frequency that you perform this task depends on the type of filter, the number of pets at home and other factors, a good reference point is the manufacturer's guidelines.

When it comes to creating a healthy home sanctuary, taking steps to manage the most common indoor air pollutants should be a top priority.



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CALCIUM, BORON, ZINC, MANGANESE, IRON, COPPER

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