

Gardens With the Wonderful Power to Heal



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My lovely wife, Vicky, has been ill these past several years. Some days are better than others for her. Her best days are when the warm spring sun draws her into her garden. These are the days she slips out of our home to weed, prune and move purposely and quietly among the colorful spring bloomers. I don't disturb her in her garden.

As busy as you are in your day-to-day worlds, I'm not sure how important the concept of *gardens* are to most of you—at least in terms of being a service offering. I don't often hear the word "garden" used when talking with landscape contractors or green industry pros, although admittedly I might be splitting semantic hairs.

Bruce Zarestky and his design partner Sharon Coates speak in terms of gardens and often in an emotional context. Zarestky founded [Zarestky and Associates, Inc.](#), in Macedon, New York, in 1989. His award-winning landscape company has established an enviable reputation designing and installing landscapes of all sorts, including "healing gardens."

Zarestky shared great information about healing gardens earlier this year at [CENTS2016](#) in Columbus, Ohio. Healing gardens are becoming more common at hospitals, nursing homes, halfway houses and other facilities where individuals are suffering from physical, emotional and mental disabilities. And for good reason: The benefits that healing gardens provide are well documented to both those individuals suffering from ailments and to the facilities where they are being treated.

Read More: [Landscape's Healing Powers](#)

"There is a pattern of evidence that suggests that well-designed gardens can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and relax people," says Dr. Roger Ulrich, a behavioral scientist who is widely known for his research on the

impacts of healthcare facilities on medical outcomes. "There is also research that shows experiencing nature and looking at gardens reduces pain. Nature seems to reduce pain by blocking stress and reducing the extent to which patients focus on themselves and their discomfort."

Not only do healing gardens benefit patients by reducing the amount of time they remain in a facility, lowering their stress and reducing the amount of medication they require, they also benefit hospitals and other care-giving facilities in that they result in faster bed turnover, more positive patient outcomes and less infection.

Zaretsky's company has designed and built many projects geared towards the physically disabled and emotionally impaired, including healing gardens and sensory gardens, and have completed the certification program in [Healthcare Garden Design at the Chicago Botanic Garden](#).

As a starter on the subject, Zaretsky offers these things to consider when designing a healing garden:

- Know your patients (Alzheimer's patients, stroke victims, etc.)
- A place for quiet conversations or private moments contemplate or cry
- A place to de-stress
- Movable chairs
- A place for horticultural therapy
- A place for gathering
- A place to experience nature
- Signage
- Fragrant plants with identification tags
- Sound (moving water, birds, etc.)
- Touch (plants, textures, water)
- Shelter

Several organizations offer valuable information on healing gardens. They include the [American Horticultural Therapy Association](#) and the [Therapeutic Landscapes Network](#).

Also, check out the incredible gardens, including [healing gardens that Zaretsky and Associates have designed and installed](#).

Read more: [The Healing Power of Gardens](#) from Turf Design Build Magazine