

It brings you in and shelters you': NHS creates 'recovery gardens' for staff and patients

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What role do you think outdoor spaces can play in people's mental and physical health?
- Can you think of any personal experiences or examples where spending time in nature helped reduce stress or improve your mood?

2 Key words

a. Match the words in bold in the article to these definitions.

1. _____ : a safe or peaceful place where someone can go to relax and feel calm
2. _____ : the ability to develop or improve in the future
3. _____ : being special or wonderful
4. _____ : to stop feeling confused or stressed and think more clearly
5. _____ : related to a city or town
6. _____ : a state of being healthy, happy and comfortable
7. _____ : a detailed plan or design that explains how to do or create something
8. _____ : placed or fixed something in position
9. _____ : positive effects or advantages of something
10. _____ : to take air in and out of your body

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. When you feel stressed, it's important to _____ slowly to help you to calm down.
2. The hotel offers many _____, such as a games room and two swimming pools.
3. The artist's work had a(n) _____ quality, making it feel like a dream.

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4. We have _____ solar panels on the roof of our house to save energy.
5. Spending time in nature can improve your _____ and reduce stress.
6. Before making a new product, engineers create a(n) _____ to plan everything carefully.
7. David needed to take a walk to _____ after the stressful meeting.
8. The new park is a(n) _____ for birds and small animals in the city.
9. Our company sees a lot of _____ in 3D printing for constructions.
10. Traffic is always a problem in _____ areas, especially during rush hour.

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Trusts work with the Royal Horticultural Society to create outdoor refuges for staff and patients

Donna Ferguson
16 March, 2025

- 1 For Hayleigh Austin-Richards, it is a place to have a cry, **breathe** fresh air and remind herself there is something **magical** about butterflies. As often as she can, she visits the hospital's "Garden for Recovery", originally created for the Chelsea Flower Show and **installed** last summer.
- 2 Austin-Richards's job can be tough, and she sees people going through some of the worst moments of their lives. The garden is a **refuge**: "It's quiet. You feel like you're in the middle of nowhere," she said.
- 3 With stress among NHS staff at record levels, growing numbers of NHS hospital trusts are noticing the **potential** of their outdoor spaces – and asking gardeners for help. In the past 10 months, 16 NHS hospitals have contacted the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to ask for help creating "wellbeing gardens" for staff, patients and visitors.
- 4 These gardens are designed to provide "hopeful" places to rest, according to RHS wellbeing garden programme manager Victoria Shearing. Instead of viewing their outdoor spaces as areas to pass through or look out on, "hospitals are starting to see these spaces as offering real health and wellbeing **benefits** for their staff and visitors," she said.
- 5 Dame Linda Pollard, chair of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, said indoor spaces where staff can find peace and quiet on a busy, **urban** hospital site are often very limited: "Staff rooms are not an environment that helps you **clear your head** because they are so busy." Pollard has invited the RHS to open a **wellbeing** garden at St James's University hospital, Leeds, in September.
- 6 The garden is part of a national network of wellbeing gardens that the RHS is creating across England for NHS staff and patients as it works to design a **blueprint** for wellbeing gardens due to be completed this year.
- 7 Pollard thinks there are benefits to be had from installing wellbeing gardens. "We've got a real mental health issue," she said. "The NHS is a stressful environment to be in, regardless of what job you do. We have to look after our staff."
- 8 The first garden in the RHS scheme opened in 2022 at University hospital Lewisham, where 70 per cent of staff surveyed by the RHS have reported that the garden improved their wellbeing and 81 per cent noted a positive impact on how people feel at work. Another garden opened last summer at Colchester hospital and one is planned in Greater Manchester.
- 9 All the gardens so far have been designed by the BBC *Gardeners' World* presenter Adam Frost. "In a hospital environment, you can experience every human emotion possible – whether that's anger, tears or a moment of joy," said Frost. "Gardens give us space. If you watch a bird land on a tree, that's a moment where you're not then thinking about something else. Ultimately, gardens are about moments – and moments are created by something new appearing on a certain day and the wildlife that comes into the garden," Frost said.
- 10 When Austin-Richards manages to take a break in the garden, she feels the benefits for hours. "I definitely feel better at the end of the day, when I'm coming home."
- 11 Some of her patients have been stuck in a hospital for months. "For them to feel, even for a few minutes, that they're not in a hospital – it makes a big difference to them."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False.

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. Hayleigh Austin-Richards visits the 'Garden for Recovery' because she wants to study butterflies. | True / False |
| 2. The garden at the hospital was originally created for a different purpose before being installed at the hospital. | True / False |
| 3. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has been contacted by more than 20 NHS hospitals in the past 10 months. | True / False |
| 4. According to Dame Linda Pollard, staff rooms provide a good environment for hospital workers to clear their heads. | True / False |
| 5. The garden at University hospital Lewisham has had little impact on how staff feel at work. | True / False |

b. Find the following information in the text.

1. two hospitals where wellbeing gardens have already been installed
2. a percentage that shows how one wellbeing garden has helped staff
3. a reason why traditional staff rooms in hospitals are not good places to relax
4. the name of the gardener who designed the wellbeing gardens for hospitals
5. when the first garden in the RHS scheme opened

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4 Key language

a. Match the words in bold to their function in the sentences.

- In the past 10 months, 16 NHS hospitals **have contacted** the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to ask for help creating "wellbeing gardens" for staff, patients and visitors. _____
- Some of her patients **have been stuck** in a hospital for months. "For them to feel, even for a few minutes, that they're not in a hospital – it makes a big difference to them." _____
- The first garden in the RHS scheme opened in 2022 at University hospital Lewisham, where 70 per cent of staff surveyed by the RHS **have reported** that the garden improved their wellbeing and 81 per cent noted a positive impact on how people feel at work. _____

- a. a completed action with a present result
- b. an action that began in the past and continue to the present
- c. an action that happened at an unspecific time in the past but is still not finished in the present or the speaker is still affected by it

b. Write the present perfect form of the verbs in brackets to complete the sentences.

- We _____ (live) in this city for 15 years.
- She _____ (travel) to 75 countries already.
- They built the recycling centre in 2021, and it _____ (help) raise awareness about proper waste management in many neighbourhoods.
- I _____ (visit) that museum several times already.
- I _____ (forget) my wallet at home, and now I don't have money to pay for a cab.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What role do outdoor spaces and nature play in your daily life?
- Do you think that wellbeing gardens could improve work environments in other industries, not just healthcare? Which ones and why or why not?

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6 In your own words

- a. Write a short story or journal entry from the perspective of a healthcare worker (e.g. a nurse, doctor or therapist) who uses the wellbeing garden during a busy workday. They should reflect on how spending time in the garden helps them cope with stress and helps them focus on their job. Include:
- a description of the garden
 - personal thoughts on the emotional and psychological benefits of spending time outdoors.
- b. Share your pieces of creative writing with your class.