

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HORTICULTURAL THERAPY CONTINUES TO GROW AT BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS

BIRMINGHAM, AL – While a great deal of the spotlight shines on the wonderful events and fundraisers at Birmingham Botanical Gardens, there is one program that goes relatively unnoticed. The Horticultural Therapy program is The Garden's best kept secret. Susan Grimes, Horticultural Therapy Coordinator, works with people of all needs and all backgrounds to improve their quality of life and help the healing process along.

Through a partnership with Children's Health System (CHS), Susan is able to work with the children in the oncology and psychiatric wards at Children's Hospital. Since the kids in oncology are not able to work with plants, dirt, or other outside materials, Susan visits them and offers services such as plant crafts and workshops. For example, do you know why some ladybugs are red and some are orange? You may not have a clue, but the children at Children's Hospital can tell you.

"We love our partnership with the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Each month our patients look forward to the horticultural therapy sessions," said Laura Caudell, Community Action Coordinator at Children's. "Many of our patients with both emotional and physical disabilities have benefited from this wonderful form of therapy. Working with plants and learning gardening techniques has improved our patients' spirits and quality of life."

In addition to the children from Children's Health System, Susan does outreach with assisted living facilities like Kirkwood by the River and The Oaks on Parkwood. We also have visitors to the Gardens from other assisted living facilities such as Independent Living Resources. She works with other special needs clients like the group from United Cerebral Palsy too, for instance.

During the school year, Susan has been working with the Exceptional Education students at Hewitt-Trussville High School. The students were paired with residents from The Oaks in order that they may be mentored by these elderly, but very knowledgeable gardeners. In the first week of May, the students completed the first phase of a flower garden at the Galleria Oaks for the residents. The students, under the guidance of these elderly master gardeners, will create an herb garden as their project next school year.

Susan says "Horticultural Therapy is the one program here at The Gardens where we can truly say we made a difference in someone's life." Whether these individuals need healing for body, mind, or spirit, through Horticultural Therapy they can enhance their social interaction skills, improve valuable motor skills, and take advantage of the undeniable positive benefits of being outdoors and physically active in nature.

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As this program continues to grow, it is amazing to consider the impact it makes on the lives of people, young and old, in the Birmingham area. According to Susan, one of the greatest needs, aside from greater resources, is more volunteer support. The Gardens hopes to one day offer Horticultural Therapy services to any person or any agency who seeks them in the region.

About Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Birmingham Botanical Gardens is Alabama's largest living museum with over 10,000 different plants in its living collections. The Gardens' 67.5 acres contains over 25 unique gardens, 30+ works of original outdoor sculpture and miles of serene paths. The Gardens features the largest public horticulture library in the U.S., conservatories, a wildflower garden, two rose gardens, the Southern Living garden, and a Japanese garden with a traditionally crafted tea house. Education programs run year round and over 11,000 school children enjoy free science-curriculum based field trips annually. The Gardens is open daily, offering free admission to over 325,000 yearly visitors.