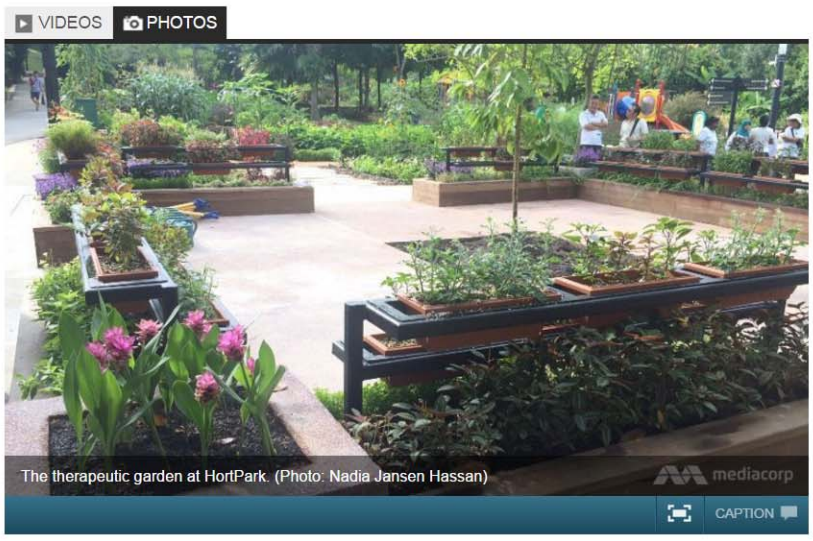
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New therapeutic garden opens in HortPark

Located at Hyderabad Road, this is the first time a therapeutic garden has been developed in a public park in Singapore.

By Nadia Jansen Hassan
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VIDEOS PHOTOS



The therapeutic garden at HortPark. (Photo: Nadia Jansen Hassan)

CAPTION

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SINGAPORE: In a bid to improve the well-being of residents and to help seniors age gracefully, the National Parks Board (NParks) launched a new therapeutic garden at HortPark on Saturday (May 14).

Located at Hyderabad Road, this is the first time a therapeutic garden has been developed in a public park in Singapore. It features elements of horticultural therapy, which is the use of plants and nature to benefit and stimulate the human mind.

Every detail in the garden is said to be strategic. Vibrant-coloured flowers were chosen as an uplifting visual stimulant, while there are also pastel-coloured flowers on display to give a calming effect. Pandan leaves were also planted to activate the sense of smell.

"We have even chosen plantings such that they attract butterflies and birds, so that when people come in here, they can basically uplift their mental well-being through looking at all these things," said Mr Lim Liang Jim, group director of the Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology at NParks.



The National University Health System had also given input into the design, based on a study it had conducted with NParks on how the elderly benefit from horticultural therapy.

"The rate of depression drops," said Professor Kua Ee Heok, a senior consultant at the Department of Psychological Medicine at the National University Health System. "We did a blood test assessment, a kind of blood chemical we call cytokines; they are the ones that influence our immune system. We found that the cytokine levels also fall, which means that it builds up the immune resistance of old people. This is important, it prevents them from having a lot of illnesses, depression, even cancer."

The garden is also wheelchair friendly with plenty of shade for visitors, and NParks will also work with homes and senior activity centres to provide gardening programmes for the elderly.

The statutory board is hoping to develop more therapeutic gardens to benefit the public. Ten more are expected to be implemented in more public parks.

Senior Minister of State for National Development Desmond Lee, who was at the opening, said the garden will "serve as a prototype" for the rest of the upcoming network.

"NParks will start with two upcoming therapeutic gardens in Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park and Tiong Bahru Park," he said. "NParks will also partner with Ministry of Health and explore partnerships with other agencies to develop therapeutic gardens in their premises. NParks will support these efforts by developing a set of guidelines and design principles for therapeutic gardens."

- CNA/av