

Horticulture therapy

for cancer patients:

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Gardening therapy is an unconventional, hands-on form of therapy that can provide many benefits not achievable with other forms. Children with cancer and their siblings can join one-on-one or group gardening therapy sessions at the ***Zichron Menachem House of Dreams Center*** every week.

Gardening allows the children to connect with nature, feel the soil run through their fingers, and hear the birds chirping and the beautiful sound of the rushing waterfall in the garden. The benefits of gardening therapy are limitless.

Connecting with the soil opens the hearts of these young and vulnerable children, allowing them to share their innermost thoughts and feelings. Children with cancer relish the feeling of being givers instead of takers- they tenderly care for the plants and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The children learn patience, how nature works with processes that aren't instant, and how to keep trying until you can finally enjoy the results.

Ron was a sweet 11-year-old child who was shuttled from home to home as his mother suffered through cancer. He had difficulty adjusting to his new temporary home, causing him and the family much anguish.*

Our incredible therapist invited him to take care of the strawberry plants. Ron was tasked with cutting the branches off the main plant and replanting them elsewhere so they could each grow their own strawberries.

Ron expressed similar experiences of moving away from his familiar surroundings to a different home.

When Ron noticed several weeks later that the strawberry plants were growing beautiful strawberries in their new environment, he expressed that he, too, had started to grow and flourish in his new home.

As trained therapists, they know how to pick up on anxiety, fear, anger, or betrayal felt by the children, as they are mirrored in their interaction with the gardening. A plant starting to wither or dying is an opportunity for conversation about death and loss, which the children are often eager to discuss.

At Zichron Menachem, our therapists plant potatoes, sweet potatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, lettuce, a variety of spices, lemons, melons, watermelons, strawberries, passion fruit, and anything else they'd like to plant. We also grow flowers, which the children enjoy taking home with them.

Some children get started right away, while others prefer to use gloves and a shovel before gradually removing the gloves and using their hands to dig. Children who don't connect to gardening can decorate labels or the actual plant pots. Other children prefer to weed, organize the shed, or label the plants.



Ayelet was only seven years old and battling a severe case of cancer when she joined a group of horticultural therapy at the House of Dreams Center. Her mother shared with the therapist that Ayelet was giving the doctors and nurses a difficult time, refusing to be examined or have nay medication administered.*

The therapist spoke to Ayelet, eventually determining that she was deathly afraid of needles. The therapists started filling syringes with water and guiding Ayelet to water the plants that way. She enjoyed controlling the process and being able to experiment with syringes- her biggest nemesis- on her own.

With time, Ayelet noticed how beautifully the plants were growing with the water that was syringed into the soil and eventually agreed to allow the nurses to administer her medication without making a fuss at all.

At Zichron Menachem, we believe that gardening therapy can be immensely helpful for children with cancer and their healthy siblings. There are countless benefits of children using nature to reflect on their inner world and discuss feelings they otherwise would be unable to express. Reach out to Zichron Menachem to hear more about horticultural therapy and its benefits.



To learn more about how Zichron Menachem uses gardening therapies to help children with cancer, you can visit their website, www.Zichron-Intl.org