



## CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

### **Using Therapeutic Horticulture to Introduce Accommodations to Low Vision**

According to the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three million people in the United States age 40 and older have low vision. People with low vision find that they have difficulty seeing well enough to complete everyday tasks, even with eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery. As our population ages, the number of Americans with low vision will continue to grow dramatically, from 2.9 million in 2010 to 5 million in 2030 according to the National Eye Institute. Clearly, many people will have to adjust to diminishing vision.

The adjustment process includes both psychological and physical accommodations. The diagnosis of a progressive vision problem can be frightening, depressing, or even difficult to accept at all. While it may be easiest to learn new methods to perform activities of daily living as soon as the issue is discovered, denial and other emotions may get in the way of engaging in that type of learning.

The Chicago Botanic Garden's horticultural therapy services partnered with the Low Vision Focus team at the Hadley Institute in order to design some activities involving plants and gardening that also include an adaptive technique that could be helpful to someone adjusting to their new reality. The joint project was funded with a generous grant from the Abra Prentice Foundation.

Working with plants, cooking with vegetables, and arranging flowers are therapeutic horticulture activities that are enjoyable and non-threatening. Each lends itself well to working toward a goal beyond the plant-based activity. In this manual are the ten



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activities that got the most positive and beneficial response when tested with three separate group of individuals with low vision. The activities as they are written are designed for a leader to engage a group of 15 participants. Alternatively, simply by adjusting the quantity of materials required, each activity plan can be led with a smaller group of participants or even self-led by one person. This whole endeavor can be learned through following the series of video presentations that were created by the Hadley Institute. These videos can be found on the Chicago Botanic Garden website as well as on the Hadley Institute for the Visually Impaired site. [URLs] Both organizations have enjoyed the process of creating these lessons and are happy to share them with the public.