ecology of the mind and spirit of man.” He said, “There is a mystery attached to the variety and perfection of nature, a mystery which stirs wonder in a child and gives a grown man perspective. If we help refresh the inner man, we would begin to answer such real problems as those of the inner city.”

In the ecology of the human spirit, the microclimate of a flower box or a flowerbed can contain a tremendous healing force.

Horticulture has a new and a vital challenge—to nurture and bring to fruition this potential for human good, which finds life in city gardens.

For further reading:
New York City Housing Authority, _Annual Flower Garden Competition Manual_. N.Y.C. Housing Authority, Department of Information, Tenant Program, 250 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10007.

career training in horticulture for handicapped young folks

“_I used to be retarded._”

BOB’S WORDS show the transformation in attitude that takes place within a few weeks after retarded young people start their training at the Melwood Horticultural Training Center which is in Upper Marlboro, Md.

The words were a part of Bob’s enthusiastic welcome to a newcomer to the center, which is devoted exclusively to mentally retarded boys and girls. Bob was showing the newcomer around the grounds, and wanted him to know that he, too, could find a new life there.

The first step in the transformation takes place when the young person checks in. A young man who arrives at the Center as “little Jimmie,” even though he may be 17 or 18 years old, is introduced to the other trainees as Jim. He is told he will be treated as a man, and that he will be expected to act like one. As often happens when a person knows he is expected to behave a certain way, Jim accepts his changed status and responds like a young man.

At the Melwood Horticultural Training Center, new ground is being broken in the lives of the mentally retarded—in the greenhouses, potting sheds, and classrooms—to provide career opportunities that most of the handicapped, and their families, had never dreamed possible.

Melwood was established in 1963 by a group of parents who believed that a plant-growing environment would be an ideal one in which to develop job responsibility, basic work skills, and employability in mentally limited young people. The convictions of these parents were strong; some were professional horticulturists as well as the parents of mentally retarded children.

Starting with a tent on 7 acres of land, Melwood has grown to include a complex of greenhouses, classrooms, a floral shop, and bed after bed of nursery stock to be used in landscaping jobs. This impressive growth is a direct result of a strong community involvement, especially through Lions Clubs that have actually built and financed much of the center’s physical facilities.

A 100-acre tract in another part of the State has been acquired. This is being developed as a Horticultural Training-Residential Facility, a happy extension of the center.

The center now earns approximately

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Trainees with coleus plants in potting shed.

40 percent of its total income. It is otherwise supported by funds from the State, county, private organizations, and dedicated citizens. The center’s earnings come from the sale of trees, shrubs and house plants, many of which are grown on the grounds and in the greenhouses; from services in landscaping public and private grounds and in erecting playground equipment; and from the work of the trainees in community cleanup drives.

By late 1971, some 60 trainees were enrolled, 40 boys and 20 girls, in the regular daytime program. Their I.Q.’s vary from a low of 40 to a high of 100, with an average of 60-70. There are also enrichment classes at night in driver education, crafts, cooking, and other subjects for both the Melwood students and alumni. The staff is balanced between those trained in horticulture and those with a sociological background.

We try to keep the newer boys close to the center until they get to know a little about working with the plants and learn some self-sufficiency. They are always keen, though, to go out on the truck with the experienced boys who work in the field during the spring and autumn on some of our maintenance contracts.

The center’s primary aim is to prepare these trainees for community employment—to go just as far as possible toward making an otherwise “unemployable” into a self-supporting adult. The training structure goes far beyond the natural therapeutic benefits of working with one’s hands in soil. It is a combination of community on-the-job training supported with academic, social, and recreational activities.

Trainees are assigned either to “vocational” or “work experience” courses. For young men, the vocational program is directed to on-the-job landscaping, plus grounds maintenance, playground equipment erection (at public parks
and schools), and environmental clean-up projects in the community.

Young women in vocational training participate in a program emphasizing greenhouse and floral design skills, both at the center and in the community. The center's own floral shop provides valuable contacts with customers as well as vocational experience.

The work experience program is designed for the person who requires an extensive personal and vocational adjustment. It is like the vocational program except that it is much more individualized.

To see how Melwood's training program gets started and works, let's go back to Jim.

For the first few weeks, Jim is placed in a variety of work tasks so that we can gage his personal adjustment needs, his demonstrated abilities, and his general interests. He is closely supervised . . . and given individualized instruction in how and when to water plants, what tools to use with what jobs . . . rake, hoe, shovels . . . and some of the simpler chores in the greenhouse.

During this time, one of the teachers assesses Jim's math and reading competence, since many of the trainees who come to us cannot read or write. This helps us avoid putting Jim in any embarrassing situations. Eventually, we can help create new motivations for him to learn to count, tell time, or to prepare and manage a simple personal or family budget.

One of Jim's first learning experiences is related to transportation. The center provides transportation only from certain central community pickup points. Jim's family—with the help of his instructor—teaches him to use public transportation to and from this pickup point.

When Jim achieves a certain stability within his new environment—with most boys this takes 6 to 8 weeks—he goes on a small community work crew, or he is assigned to a prevocational unit remaining at the center as part of the work experience program.

Throughout his stay, Jim is surrounded by a learning environment, which is not restricted to the four walls of the classroom. In fact, the "little red schoolhouse" (built by trainees and local Lions Clubs) serves only as a center for teachers and trainees. The learning occurs everywhere . . . in the greenhouses, tool shed, photo lab, the production of the monthly newspaper (written primarily by the trainees), the floral design shop, in community sales, and social trips.

The learning speed is completely geared to help Jim with his work tasks. Teachers go with his work crew to the field, and teach basic academic and social skills as they apply to the work.

After 4 to 6 weeks, Jim is sufficiently motivated to attend every day, although he may have difficulty in adjusting to the schedule of work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, and 12 months a year.

The length of Jim's stay is flexible, depending entirely on his needs and achievements. Eighteen months is the average.

During his stay, Jim is paid according to his level of productivity and his summer staff aide shows trainee how to use cash register in Melwood floral shop.
attitude. He soon learns that he will get paid only if he helps to earn the money. By the time he begins to earn money, he understands why he is at Melwood, and he is interested in working towards community job placement.

Melwood's past history with all of its "Jims" and "Janes" has proved the value of the horticultural environment and vocational program. Through a balance of social and work assignments, the trainees learn to meet and conquer the stresses and demands of the workaday world.

It is such an environment that helped Marie, a young lady who spent 5 years in an institution where she was thought to be capable of only very limited training. All of her work had been routine—putting plastic spoons into plastic bags. At Melwood, the creative and motivating environment opened up new levels of productivity and self-respect to Marie. After a year at the center, she learned to make corsages and flower arrangements, a much more rewarding kind of work.

Approximately 20 to 30 trainees a year attain community employment. Graduates often earn between $2.25 and $3.00 an hour. The job responsibility and work habits they acquire at Melwood also qualify them for employment in other kinds of jobs as well—like stockroom helper, labor helper, and clerical aide.

Employers have been highly satisfied with graduates from Melwood because they are conscientious, steady, and anxious to please. Employers who have hired a trainee or two come back to ask for others.

For example, the National Arboretum—a horticultural showcase of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—has been a leader in hiring the mentally retarded graduates of Melwood. It has already put 7 of our graduates to work on its grounds, in its greenhouses, and its herbarium, and has plans for hiring others, including female trainees.

One of the graduates who went to work at the National Arboretum some time ago did so well that he soon saved
more than enough money to buy a new car—for cash.

He was so pleased with his job at the arboretum, that he came back to Melwood for one of our “enrichment” evenings, bringing the Department’s movie about the Arboretum, and told of his experiences there. He made quite a hit with the girls with his new car!

The garden shop of a large Washington chain store has hired a young lady graduate to do floral design work at $3.41 an hour. And the manager of a community park in Maryland wrote recently that the Melwood student he had hired is his best employee despite his handicap.

Pam and Debbie, two young trainees, described in the Melwood Newsletter their participation in a holiday plant sale sponsored by a USDA employee group:

“At the Department of Agriculture we sold plants, arrangements, wreaths, and wrappings. Every day for three days the crowds would get worse. We worked from 10:00 to 3:00 each day. We had to pick things out for people every day. We learned how to make change at the sale. We had a lot of fun at the Department of Agriculture. We met many people there. Everybody likes the things we made. The people there were very considerate. The Department of Agriculture was very big.”

Melwood is proof that a horticultural environment opens training and career opportunities for the mentally limited. It has been so successful in its 9 years of existence that it has attracted national attention, and Melwood’s format is being copied in other communities.

Melwood has also proved that a helping hand to the handicapped can provide practical help to an industry. There has long been a national shortage of trained workers in the floral and nursery industries. The shortage of trained horticultural workers in the Washington metropolitan area has been especially acute. Many workers, without physical or mental handicaps, prefer other types of work.

So the handicapped, trained and equipped by Melwood, offer a new source of labor to nurseries and florist shops. The employers are pleased to find that in helping a person achieve self-respect and employment, they are helping themselves. They have learned that Melwood has been taking the unemployable and making them good employees, taking people who might otherwise become a public responsibility and making responsible citizens of them.

Although Melwood is devoted to the mentally limited youth, the horticultural environment it has thrived upon has proved fitting as a training ground for other types of handicapped. Many successful and innovative programs, some predating Melwood, have widened the career potentials of other groups—including the blind and the deaf.

For instance, the Nation’s forests are now being used as training camps for a variety of handicapped individuals. In Washington State, 100 disabled young men have taken part in a relatively new type of training-employment program. The men are physically strong but have varying handicaps such as deafness, mental retardation, and other obstacles to normal employment. But in the forests, they have helped in planting more than 4 million trees to aid the labor-short timber industry.

“Greenhouse and Nursery Training for the Blind” grew out of a shortage of job opportunities for blind and visually handicapped persons in rural communities. Set up in 1955, this project was sponsored jointly by the Office of Rehabilitation, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Department of Education at the Georgia Academy for the Blind at Macon, Ga. It was their purpose to invent special techniques and provide special training to enable sight-handicapped persons to achieve the same horticultural objectives as persons with unimpaired sight.

The amazing thing about this project is that those sight-handicapped persons learned, physically and psychologically, to become useful employees for many of the usual tasks in greenhouses and nurseries. They learned that they would be competing with sighted persons, and
could not expect preferential treatment. In less than 2 years, six adult trainees had been placed with commercial flower growers and nurserymen.

This pilot project proved that it could be done, and it has now become a continuing program for the young students of the Georgia Academy for the Blind. Besides, it serves as a model for other institutions wishing to offer courses leading to horticultural careers for the blind and partially sighted.

Jean Marie Fisher of Tuckerton, N.J., is also proof of the value of horticulture as a training environment. She is a 1949 graduate of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf in Trenton, N.J., where she received her horticultural training. She began work for a commercial florist in the greenhouse, then moved on through work in retail shops as a designer, and now operates her own florist shop.

Miss Fisher is not the only success story from the Katzenbach School. Other graduates have found placements with universities, retirement villages, and other campus style industries. Some have been placed with large commercial growers.

Use of horticulture as training, career opportunity, and therapy for the handicapped is on the increase. The success so far has been great. The present trend must continue so that more handicapped are given the opportunity to achieve their career potentials through horticultural training.

older citizens bring young thumbs to a wide range of gardening

SOME RETIRED PERSONS are born gardeners; some learn gardening after they retire; still others have gardening thrust upon them.

No one knows how many million retirees dig and delve in everything from a window box to a half acre; to say nothing of the countless others past 55 who, although still employed, garden for a hobby. The 1970 census shows that 38,631,990 Americans are 55 or older.

Some of these senior-citizen gardeners work in groups; others go about it on their own.

Many retirees have moved to places where they must learn about new soils, new climates, and even new types of plants. For born gardeners the new environments present an interesting challenge.

Those who have never gardened before—or thought their gardening days were past—have become gardeners as the result of encouragement by neighbors, friends, or relatives. And then there are those who have had gardening thrust upon them; either as a way to pass the time, or because social pressure has demanded that they “keep the place looking nice.”

If you asked these senior disciples of Demeter why they worship at her shrine, they would probably say because they like growing things, because gardening takes them out of doors and gives them exercise, or because it’s just something to do.

Not all retired persons are affluent. In recent years many have been established in publicly supported housing centers. Public programs have been set up for retired persons on welfare or with low incomes.

One of these is the Golden Age Center of the Welfare Federation in a downtown Cleveland, Ohio, low-cost apartment house for the elderly.

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