



Ron Durham, owner of Spring Green Lawn Care, rides a sprayer-spreader across the lawn of a client in Clayton on Thursday. Staff photos by Jonathan West

The Moody GREENS

Horticultural therapist says lawn condition may affect your mental health

By Carly Romalis
cromalis@pressnow.com

Giving up on a summer-scorched lawn might affect more than the curb appeal of your home. According to horticultural therapist Ron Durham, mental well-being can be directly impacted by the conditions of landscapes.

"There is a very deep connection between people and the environment," said Durham, who owns a franchise of Spring Green Lawn Care. "I don't care if you live in Center City Philadelphia — the environment still has an affect on you."

Durham, a Clayton resident, has a degree in environmental horticulture from Delaware Valley College in Doylestown, Pa.

"I would say (horticultural therapy) is the use of the environment plant material with people, to help them to function," Durham said. "Relate to something outside of themselves, and to have more sense of self-esteem and control over the environment."

For 17 years, Durham worked as a horticultural therapist at Friends Hospital in Philadelphia with Alzheimer's and schizophrenia patients as well as those with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. "We design Alzheimer's safe environment, to get outside, get some sun on their face and feel the wind in their hair," he said.

"By bringing a person through their other senses — sight, sound — a fountain, some herbs, beautiful flowers, a beautiful environment, it helps center that person a little bit more and gets them a little bit focused on the here and now."

care can have as much affect on mood as the therapeutic act of nurturing living things.

Durham said some of his clients have mental health issues that is brown and dead.

"You come home and drive up to your house — weeds, and brown and dead, and you're like, 'Well, why do you take medicine when you don't feel good? It might take a while, but it will bring it back more quickly when the rain comes,'" he said.

Durham suggests weed control, watering, and aeration to help lawns regenerate into green, lush flora, amping up self-esteem.

"It can be in a public place, and it can be a thing that needs a glass of water, I'll give it my bottle watch it die," Durham said, pointing out the importance of keeping the plants hydrated during the



Ron Durham, owner of Spring Green Lawn Care, poses in front of a client's lawn.

The same principles, Durham said, can be applied to generally healthy people who need a boost, through lawn maintenance and gardening.

"Recently we have gone through a mini-depression, but I could see a change in their mood ... getting out in the weather will affect somebody's mood and how they function through the environment."

According to the American Horticultural Therapy Association, engaging in activities that tie a person to the earth can improve mood, self-esteem and the capacity for concentration.

Lawn: Condition of yard could affect your mental health, expert says



Ron Durham, owner of Spring Green Lawn Care, checks on a tree at a client's home. Staff photos by Jonathan West

"Through the nurturing of the plants and getting outside of yourself into the environment," Durham said, "you start to relate to things."