

Next week marks National Allotment Awareness Week, a fitting tribute I thought as we are just about to harvest our first crop of this year's green beans in our garden.

On reflection, I have always enjoyed my time gardening, a place of solace and contemplation – a little escape from the so often busy lives we all lead – somewhere for relaxation and respite. A little food for the soul, a time to be mindful and an opportunity to bring mental and physical wellbeing back to a level footing.

It is with this in mind that I was delighted to hear that an increasing number of doctors are prescribing gardening to patients, because of its benefit for the body and mind.

The leading health think-tank, the King's Fund, have supported this in a recent report encouraging the NHS to prescribe gardening far more often for patients with cancer, dementia and mental health problems. Social prescribing like this that focuses on mental health and wellbeing as much as physical health can have a profound impact, including through reducing social isolation among older people and strengthening community bonds.

We know that dementia patients report a huge impact from social prescribing through the arts, and music and interaction with animals. In fact, I read in one source that a report found a 19% reduction in violence in patients staying in garden sites and a sevenfold increase in violence in the non-garden sites during one year alone.

Gardening reduces levels of anxiety and stress, relieves symptoms of depression and loneliness, and has benefits for a range of conditions including heart disease and obesity too. So as you and your loved ones next enjoy a meal with yummys from your allotment or garden, you'll be benefitting in more than just taste! Maybe take a relative or friend along too.