

SCOPING THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF GARDENING LARIMER COUNTY

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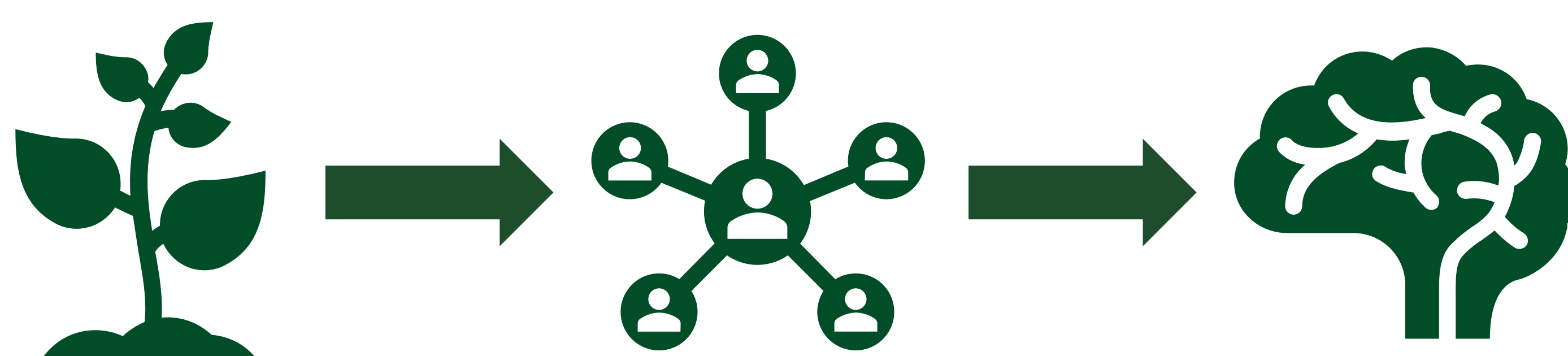
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INTRODUCTION

- Research suggests regular gardening and nature exposure may:
 - **Lower risk** of cognitive decline and dementia¹
 - **Improve** memory, attention, and mood²
 - **Reduce** stress and **promote** mental stimulation³
- The U.S. population of older adults needs **non-pharmacological methods** to support cognitive health.⁴
- Gardening combines physical activity, sensory engagement, and social interaction – **all linked to brain health!**⁵
- The full scope of evidence of gardening’s cognitive benefits for older adults remains **underexplored.**

OBJECTIVES

- Conduct a **scoping review** to map existing literature on the cognitive benefits of gardening for older adults
- Interview **Larimer County Master Gardeners** to document experiences and perceptions of cognitive health
- Create a **fact sheet** to be used statewide
- Gather insights to inspire **future research**



METHODS

Scoping Review Preparation

- Research focus – **cognitive benefits of gardening and nature exposure for older adults**
- Identified relevant databases (PubMed, Science Direct, PsycINFO)
- Created inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Collected **1,150 articles** for review

Master Gardener Interview

- Recruited from **Larimer County Master Gardener program**
- 7 semi-structured interviews (20-30 min.)
- Discussed cognitive and health benefits, fond memories, and experiences



Photo from CSU Extension

PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS

- Master gardeners frequently described gardening as **mentally stimulating and rewarding.**
 - Improved focus and attention
 - Enhanced memory recall
 - Lifelong learning
 - More social interaction
- **Increased activation** in prefrontal cortex (EEG studies) and in cognitive control and error monitoring brain areas (fMRI studies).^{6,7}



“The classes keep my mind sharp with new things to learn, I’m active in the garden, and I find joy in helping my community.”
- Larimer County Master Gardener

NEXT STEPS

- Complete and **publish scoping review** in peer-reviewed journal
- Develop a **fact sheet** from review results for statewide distribution
- Encourage **more research** on this topic

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