

Treasures from Nature

Accessible and motivating horticultural activities for older people

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Stichting Natuurlijk Genieten

Stichting Natuurlijk Genieten is a Dutch foundation, founded by Jeannette Bolck, and dedicated to stimulating the development of a more natural living environment for older people living permanently in residential care centres.

Many older people, in particular people with Alzheimer, are dependent on activities and facilities in or in the immediate surroundings of these centres, for example because of restricted mobility and /or lack of resources, staff or volunteers to allow for going out.

Over the past decade Natuurlijk Genieten took many initiatives bringing back nature into the daily lives of older people and their carers, for example:

- The Four Seasons Game stimulating older people to engage with their memories of early childhood (reminiscence) and sharing them with their peers. Making use of the features of the game of goose, people were encouraged to answer all sorts of questions about their personal experience with nature, thus reliving, for example, a harsh winter when they were young, or preserving fruits and vegetables they used to grow themselves.
- The Spiral Project seeking to encourage teams of volunteers and occupational therapists working in residential care centres throughout the Netherlands to integrate horticultural and gardening activities into their daily work. It proved of added value to have combined groups of volunteers and professionals. They discussed the potential benefits of horticulture for the people with whom they work and worked out new activities collaboratively, focusing on sensory stimulation, bringing memories alive, getting the outside world in, hands on activities which fit the potential of their clients, and raising awareness within the residents of the actual season and its many manifestations. Examples of good practice were collected and made available through the foundation's website (www.natuurlijkgenieten.nl).
- The publication of a brochure called Green with Care (in Dutch: *Groen met Zorg*) informing the management of residential services for older people of the benefits which may occur when residents engage in horticultural and gardening activities, stimulating them to identify the barriers which may prevent the development of such activities, and offering sound advice as to how to overcome these barriers in a sustainable and cost-effective way. The brochure presents a clear theoretical underpinning of the beneficial effects of horticulture and gardening, in particular for older people; sound advice regarding garden design, garden lay-out and supportive facilities; and suggestions to engage family and friends and people living in the surrounding area. The brochure was sent to 3000 residential care centres and a national conference offered a platform for all involved to engage with new ideas and innovative practices.
- Training programmes and workshops on site, focusing on staff and volunteers, introducing examples of good practice, demonstrating innovative and stimulating activities for older people, and challenging the participants to develop and try-out innovative approaches and activities.

Treasures from Nature

Treasures from Nature (in Dutch: *Natuurschatten*) is the latest initiative of Stichting Natuurlijk Genieten. For the first time older people of residential care centres are offered the opportunity of discovering a huge diversity of treasures from nature within arm's reach and on a daily basis.



Treasures from Nature consists of a wooden box which contains a rich sample of products from nature and many ideas of how to allow people to engage actively with these treasures. Treasures from Nature is educable, relaxing and surprising. It seeks to challenge the senses, presenting colours, fragrant and textures. It stimulates people to look, talk, listen, smell, touch, think and remember. It literally gives the opportunity of having the treasures of nature right in front of you on the table, in your hands, or resting on your lap. Counting the annual rings of a log, making a conker shine again by rubbing it, or cherishing the feather of a peacock. Pictures, slides, CD's with sounds from rural life and the books of the great Dutch naturalist and author of illustrated thematic books about the nature of our country side and rural communities, Jac. P. Thijsse, may trigger the participants' memories 'of days long gone by' thus enriching their meetings and conversations.



The content of the box

The collection of natural objects, materials, photographs, Cd's, books and so on, is the outcome of two basic assumptions, informed by our experiences in residential centres for older people:

- Small, well chosen objects and materials, related to nature, can be effectively used to evoking emotions, amazement and curiosity, triggering memories, and raising awareness and alertness.
- Volunteers and staff need a good, affordable and easily accessible collection of good ideas and materials to guide their work. Therefore, apart from the hands-on materials they find a well worked out portfolio of texts, background information and suggestions to add activities.

The top section of the box contains:



- 1) From wheat to rice, from oat to brown beans: discover how these seeds grow and how people put them to use.
- 2) Pine apples are great to touch but they scent as well.
- 3) Use this back to put things into and try to discover what it is with using your fingers.
- 4) A block of peat, pebbles from the river IJssel or cockles from the Friesian Lakes. This compartment can be used for objects from the local environment.
- 5) Natural sponges and shammies. Used in every household, but do you know what they are made of and how they used to feel like?
- 6) Look at a honeycomb and invite a bee-keeper to demonstrate his craft and talk with the participants.
- 7) Some natural objects are made to last forever. Look at shells, touch them and imagine where they are from.
- 8) We all know flowers but have you ever hold onto a desert rose?
- 9) Chestnuts, acorns and beechnuts. Let them slip through your hands and tell us what you did with them when you were young.
- 10) Except for their fruits and leaves it is possible to identify a tree from its bark.
- 11) These days you may easily forget that rope was made of natural fibres. Learn all about knots and show which knots you still remember from your boy or girl scout years or your experience as a fisherman.
- 12) A marrowbone guarantees a good traditional soup. But in what other dishes did you use them?

Digging deeper into the box participants engage with:

A unique pack of cards inviting participants to let their thought go and come up with all kinds of associations.

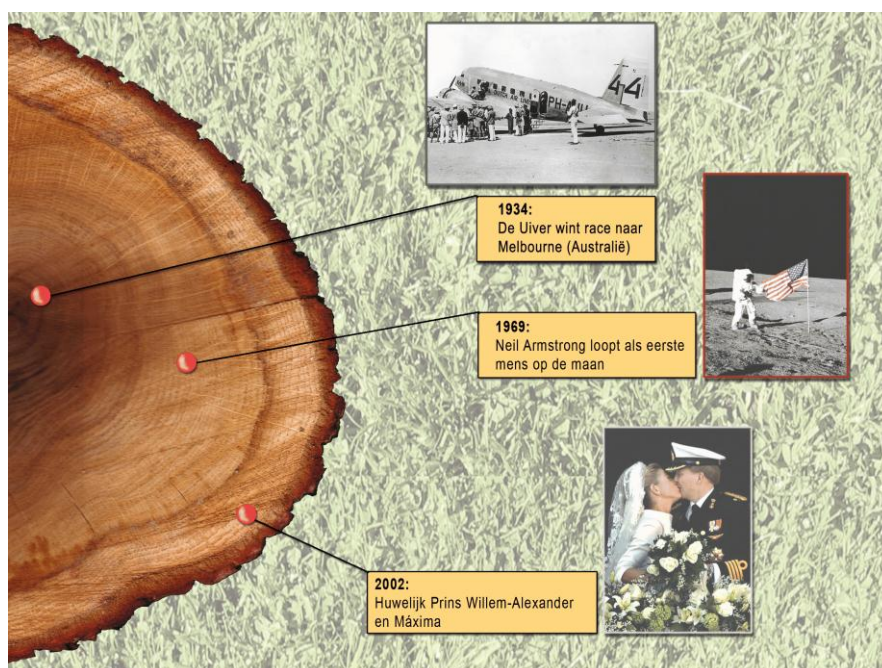
A box containing thirty different perfumes.

Nature à la carte, containing a compilation of ideas for seasonal activities.

Ten large photographs of very ordinary natural sceneries but with much out-of-the-ordinary facts and information.

A textbook providing volunteers and professionals with up-to-date information regarding working with the target group and undertaking horticultural activities.

A magnifying pot, the books of Ja. P. Thijsse, a slide show of the life of the stork and lots of other interesting materials.



The use of Treasures from Nature

Treasures from Nature offers lots of supporting objects and materials to stimulate horticultural and gardening activities with older people in day care centres and residential settings. It does not intend to be exhaustive. Rather, it provides a basis to work from. It materialises ideas which have proven of added value in working with older people who often face complex challenges and show little interest in what was going on around them. Creative occupational and horticultural therapists as well as volunteers, find an abundance of ideas, objects and materials upon which they can build.

The feedback we got underpins this. Staff and volunteers add to these suggestions, collect additional objects and materials and build their own collection of treasures from nature, anticipating the specific characteristics and interests of the people they work for.

Twenty five boxes of Treasures of Nature were produced. They are available through twenty public libraries and environment protection agencies spread over the whole of the Netherlands.

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