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Mollie Moore, 82, of Southport Island feels for dead flowers on a plant at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay Harbor during a VIP session of the Therapeutic Horticulture program for people with visual impairments. Moore is fully blind, having lost both eyes to meningitis many years ago, and is learning to garden through touch.

A healing garden

Coastal horticulture therapy helps confidence bloom

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

When you stroll into the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay in August, you might be struck first by the exotic fragrance of lilies that perfumes the summer air, the sun on your skin or the low, humming sound of the bees that seem to buzz everywhere, punch drunk on pollen.

Mostly, though, you'll be bombarded by the sight of flowers in a rainbow's worth of colors, from strange top-heavy blooms that look like they have been lifted out of a Dr. Seuss storybook to banks of old-fashioned, beautiful roses. It's a sight that draws visitors from all over and can practically take your breath away.

But not if you are visually impaired.

That's the case for Marilyn Greenleaf, 86, of Southport Island, who has macular degeneration and sees less and less all the time. The vision she has left comes to her peripherally, from the corner of her eyes. Still, her failing sight hasn't seemed to slow her down much. She keeps a vegetable and flower garden at her house, and she loves coming to a weekly special therapeutic horticulture program in the Lerner Garden of the Five Senses at the botanical gardens.



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Alethe Donaldson, 77, of Thomaston raises a bundle of dried herbs to her nose in order to identify them during a Therapeutic Horticulture session for the visually impaired at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay Harbor.

"We plant, we transplant, we harvest. It's fun, and we get to meet new people," she said last week during a therapeutic horticulture session. "Gardens don't talk back to you. If you pull up

the wrong flower, it's not the end of the world. ... I really enjoy the program. You can't help but enjoy it."

Greenleaf sported oversized wrap-around yellow sunglasses and a big smile

as she dead-headed flowers planted in tall, easily accessed raised beds.

"What we're all doing is learning, being very honest with you," she said.

That is exactly the point, according to Irene Barber, who coordinates the therapeutic horticulture program at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. She works with people who have intellectual, physical and visual impairments and said that working in gardens can help people become more confident and independent in other parts of their lives. It can even be transformative, she said.

"It's not like you're a miracle worker here, but people can feel motivated to reach out of their wheelchair and grab that cherry tomato," she said. "Even those with severe dementia react to the space. Coming to the gardens provides a whole excitement back to their thought process. Sometimes it brings tears to their eyes. It gets them out from a typical daily routine, and working with the plants, they can develop more dexterity."

Working in gardens can be therapeutic for horticulture experts and for people who never gardened before, Barber said. In the weekly therapeutic session for Greenleaf and the other members of the group that calls itself the VIPs, or visually impaired people, there is a wide range of gardening experience.

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Maine teens trade summer adventure for learning

Farming program teaches sustainable agriculture

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

FREEPORT — A hot morning spills over Wolfe's Neck Farm. Six young women clad in T-shirts, tanks and shorts are knee deep in dirt. Rooting for potatoes, Maya Bradbury comes up with a spud.

"I found one," the 16-year-old cried.

It's summer vacation, and the young women could be at the beach, at the lake or cruising the outlets a few miles away. Instead, as members of Teen Agriculture: Training Farmers, Feeding Maine, a program on this working educational farm, they have other things on their mind. There are tomatoes to prune, strawberries to harvest and potatoes to unearth.

"It's total immersion farming," said Richard Hodges, the Teen Agriculture coordinator who for 10 weeks every summer teaches local teens, many arriving as green as a zucchini, the elements of full scale, sustainable agriculture.



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Allie Armstrong, a Bates College student from Yarmouth, harvests potatoes during Wolfe's Neck Farm's summer Teen Agriculture program recently in Freeport.

From weeding to crop covering to business skills, it all comes into play in this summer stint where the next generation of farmers are learning by doing.

Teenagers in the five-year program are paid to maintain crops, build trellises, stock the farm stand and deliver produce to food pantries. The young crew members who go through an extensive interview process put in labor-intensive weeks to run this organic community-supported agriculture farm, one way Teen Agriculture stays solvent.

"It's not a camp, it's a job," Piper Dumont, Wolfe's Neck Farm's director of education, said. "For some of them this may be the first time they've had to practice accountability."

Because farming differs from a temp job in an office or cramming for a test, the hands-on training is unlike other aspects in their lives.

"If you don't study for a math test that's on you," Dumont said.

At Teen Agriculture, they are all in.

And from the upbeat vibe on the 5-acre, no-spray farm this week, they were all smiles, too.

"I've had a lot of part-time jobs mopping floors and doing dishes," Liane Rolls, 18, of Yarmouth said, snacking on a juicy heirloom tomato. "Even though I am not necessarily

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How many craft breweries can Maine support?

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

SEARSMONT — These days, the Pine Tree State could practically change its nickname to the hops and barley state. It seems lately that not a month goes by without the news of a new micro-brewery that has opened its doors somewhere in Maine serving carefully crafted beers to residents and tourists alike.

And although a lot of the roughly 85 craft breweries in Maine are located in cities such as Portland, Lewiston, Bangor and Brewer, a lot of them are popping up in places that are farther off the beaten track, including Caribou, Lubec, Orono, Ellsworth, Monhegan and Searsmont.

This growth, from about 40 in 2013 to more than 80 today, is thrilling to beer fans, who love having locally sourced and made alternatives to Big Beer. But can it be sustained in Maine, a rural state with about 1.3 million people and stagnant population growth? Or have we reached what could be



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David Carlson of Marshall Wharf Brewing Co. shows some of the dried sugar kelp that he added to the first batch of Maine Sea Belt seaweed beer in June 2014.

called the tapping point, when Maine is awash with craft beer that can't find enough customers?

Sean Sullivan, the executive director of the Maine Brewers' Guild, has a ready answer to the question.

"Do I think it will grow at this rate forever? Absolutely not," he said. "There will be some natural saturation point. But I don't think we're close to that yet."

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Midcoast general store quickly becomes heart of community

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

WHITEFIELD — The Sheepscot General Store and Farm is located on a country road in the small Lincoln County town of Whitefield, but at lunchtime on a Tuesday afternoon in August it feels like it is the busiest, buzziest place for miles around.

The ladies of a local historical society gabbed and sipped coffee at one of the tables in the simple cafe while other customers ordered sandwiches, quiche and soup specials at the crowded counter. Others took a moment to check out the fresh produce that is grown at the farm behind the store, including deep green kale, rainbow chard and piles of plump red, orange and yellow tomatoes that seemed to glow enticingly in the summer sunshine.

This country store, located in a converted 1970s dairy barn on the Townhouse Road, has become a kind of de facto heart of the community during the five years that



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owners Ben and Taryn Marcus have been in business here. It hosts yoga and art classes, the local men's group meet-ups and the town's only lending library,

which tilts heavily toward gardening books.

In short, it's not exactly the usual model of a country store,

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