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Research Question – Essay 3

### Organic Gardening for a Healthier Lifestyle

The USDA has stated our bodies are so contaminated with pesticides that if we lived in a cannibalistic society our bodies could not be sold as food under current regulations ("Why Organic Nutrition?" par. 21). This fact alone supports that our long term exposure to the many conventional gardening practices are unsafe to one's well-being. Organic gardening is about taking control of your own life and destiny. It continues to gain in popularity among society, as mothers, fathers, and families in general have a strong desire to gain the knowledge to maintain a healthier lifestyle. Organic gardening which is free of chemicals and pollutants, bestowing a cleaner and improved environment, providing mental health benefits, and better overall physical health is a way society, as a whole, can live a healthier and more enriched life.

Maintaining a cleaner and more improved environment plays a significant role in providing a healthier lifestyle for individuals. It is common knowledge that pesticides pollute the air, the earth, wildlife, and the water supply. A mere 1% of the chemical insecticides applied to plants ever reaches its ultimate destination...the plant insects. The other 99% pollute and poison the air, soil, water table, good insects, animals, and man ("Why Organic Nutrition?" par. 74). When pesticides are sprayed on gardens, the poison drifts throughout the air, absorbs into the soil, exposes insects, birds, and other wildlife to the poison, and ends up in the water supply.

This trickles down to the person or people eating the food that comes from the garden that was originally sprayed with the pesticide. Nature's Way Resources facts page asserts:

Many synthetic fertilizers now contain hazardous waste like lead, cadmium, mercury and arsenic. When these toxic fertilizers are applied to crops they are absorbed into the plant and when we eat the food produced they enter our bodies. Studies have shown that 80% of the potatoes used in French fries contain dangerous metals and is one of the causes of ADD of our children. ("Why Organic Nutrition?" par. 75)

In fact, an easy way for an individual to improve gardening practices and the environment is by composting. This concept takes up very little space, and it is a great way to have chemical free mulch and more nutrient filled fertilizer. Composting is a simple way to reduce waste, help tend to the health of our planet and at the same time produce a fabulous soil amendment for your plants and garden. The compost you produce by recycling your waste is an essential tool in improving soil ecology by returning nutrients to the earth (Elmore par. 1). Without composting, garbage is just garbage. With composting, garbage and waste can be turned into a healthy alternative commodity that can be beneficially used in a variety of ways.

In addition to the healthy environmental benefits of organic gardening, mental health benefits can also be gained. Community organic gardening can provide a higher self-esteem for participants. According to the Diggin' It project participants, the project helped boost their self-confidence, self-esteem, and ability to lead (Fleming par. 6). Organic gardening can help people with Alzheimer's and/or dementia feel more independent. Often times, a patient with one of these diseases feels like his or her independence has been taken away. This leads to anger, frustration, aggression, and other negative behaviors. Gardening can give a person with one of

these diseases a sense of independence. Gardening activities can be a beneficial addition to activity programming for individuals with dementia, and the plant-related activities in care facilities have been reported to enable residents with dementia to use their skills, maintain their functional ability, and thus raise their self-esteem (qtd. in Kwack, Relf, and Rudolph par. 1).

Once an elderly person loses his or her independence or has the perception of lost independence, it can be detrimental to his or her overall health. Loss of one's independence can lead to depression. Depression will lead to the person becoming socially withdrawn. This leads to even further health problems for the person. Stress is another major contender for health problems in America. In today's world, financial problems are the main cause of stress. Stress can be mentally challenging for a person. Organic gardening can be financially rewarding; therefore, decreasing the level of stress for a family:

In most of the United States it's entirely feasible to grow all of your vegetables for six months of the year. Based on average household income and average purchases of produce, that's an approximate savings of \$796 for a single growing season. If you are like most gardeners and grow enough vegetables to can or freeze the savings are even greater. (Moore par. 12)

Less financial problems always means less stress. Organic gardening is a mental *release* that allows the partaker to relax, be calm, and have some peace of mind.

Furthermore, engaging in organic gardening can provide better physical health. Digging, hoeing, raking, tilling, weeding, and planting are all physical exercises. These are all things that can help lower cholesterol, lower obesity rates, and improve cardiovascular health. Sweating also helps to rid the body of any toxins that have accumulated. Gardening is an excellent way to gain physical activity. Active people are less likely than inactive people to be obese or have high

blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke, depression, colon cancer, and premature death (CDC par. 7). Gardening can also be beneficial for children, as well. One study results showed digging and raking to be high-intensity, while the other activities were determined to be moderate-intensity. The data can facilitate the development of garden-based exercise programs for children that promote health and physically active lifestyles (American Society for Horticultural Science par. 4). Since the soil is free of chemicals, organic gardening can also provide an increased amount of minerals and nutrients in each of the foods that are produced. The Soil Association conducted a systematic review of the nutrient information available comparing the vitamin and mineral content of organic and conventionally grown food. It was found that, "on average, organic food contains higher levels of Vitamin C and essential minerals such as calcium, magnesium, iron and chromium ("Why Organic?" par. 5). Because food produced in an organic garden is chemical free and contains more minerals and nutrients, the food will naturally have a better taste. This is also the reason chefs prefer to use organic food. Everyone wants better tasting food on the dinner table.

As I have shown, it is imperative that more people start practicing organic gardening to improve the current eco-system, as well as the mental and physical health of society. Continuing down the current path of conventional gardening will only prove to worsen the conditions that the world is forced to live in right now. Although the popularity of organic gardening is growing, it is still not enough. More people need to be educated on the entire process of organic gardening and how it can help make life better in a variety of ways. Consider this. Hundreds of years ago, there were more bees, insects, birds, and other wildlife. Furthermore, disease like ADHD, dementia, Parkinson's, asthma, and cancer were much less rampant than they are today. Hundreds of years ago, items like pesticides and other chemicals were not used in gardens or

yards. It stands to reason that if the pesticides and chemicals were completely eliminated, the danger of these things continuing to happen in the future could be eradicated or at least greatly reduced.

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