OBJECTIVES
The objectives of the study were to investigate the perceived effects and meanings related to garden visits among the older individuals living in long-term nursing care and to assess whether there are associations between experiences from garden visits and self-rated depression.

DESIGN IMPLICATIONS
Visiting the garden was associated with enhanced emotional well-being. Therefore, it can be beneficial when designers incorporate gardens in the design of nursing homes.

Effects of Garden Visits on Long-Term Care Residents as Related to Depression

Rappe, E., Kivela, S. L.
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Key Concepts/Context
Depression is a major health problem among the elderly. It impacts negatively on the quality of life, and major depression increases somatic morbidity and mortality. The prevalence of clinical depression among the elderly in long-term care is high. Studies suggested that experiences from garden environments and depression are associated among the elderly living in long-term care. Experiences from garden environments may affect depression positively by reducing stress, fostering exercise, enhancing emotional and psychological well-being, and providing access to social support.

Methods
The study was conducted in Kustaankartano in Helsinki, Finland. Kustaankartano is a nursing home and service center for elderly people, with accommodation for more than 600 in either short- or long-term care. The data were gathered from 30 residents living in two residential blocks in July 2001. The study investigated the frequency of garden visits, perceived effects the residents related to visits, ratings of the importance of elements of garden, social interaction, and activities and associations of all these factors with the occurrence of self-rated depression.

Findings
Prevalence of self-rated depression was high: 46 percent of the participants were depressed. Both being in the garden and seeing it from the balcony and observing nature were of great significance for most of the participants. Visiting the garden improved mood, quality of sleep, and ability to concentrate; it also generated feelings of recovery and promoted peace of mind. Effects of visiting the garden
tended to be more pronounced among the depressed than among those not depressed. The depressed did not consider social interaction and participation in social activities very important for their well-being. Depression tended to be related to perception of the residents that they experienced hindrances and distresses associated with visiting the garden. Although there were indicative differences between the depressed and non-depressed participants in garden experiences, the results suggest that visiting the garden may affect the subjective well-being of both groups positively.

Limitations

No limitations have been discussed in the study.