



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Feature

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Churchill Fellow urges horticulturalists to apply

Receiving a 2015 Churchill Fellowship to research the development, use and management of therapeutic gardens in healthcare settings in Singapore, the UK and the USA was a turning point for Melbourne nurse and horticulturalist, Steven Wells.

Three years later he's now a guest presenter on ABC Television's Gardening Australia program, and has been instrumental in establishing a new national body focused on therapeutic horticulture.

Churchill Fellowships enable Australians to travel the world to access knowledge not readily available locally and have influenced some of the country's foremost horticulturalists including long-time Gardening Australia host, Peter Cundall, citrus grower and expert Ian Tolley and rose petal industry pioneer, Sarah Sammon.



Caption: Steven Wells. Photo Credit: Greg Briggs

In an exciting development for the nursery industry, a new partnership with Hort Innovation will see three Churchill Fellowships valued at \$26,000 offered annually for the next four years, specifically for international research on horticulture.

The successful recipients will need to propose a study topic that is aimed at delivering real benefit to the Australian horticultural industry and, more broadly, demonstrate how the skills and learnings gained from their experience abroad can be shared at home.

Steven applied for a Churchill Fellowship to investigate therapeutic gardens and how they could be sustained for the long term, and is encouraging those with a strong interest in, or passion for, Australia's nursery and garden industry to prepare a study topic and apply.

He designed and implemented the therapeutic gardens for patients with acquired brain injuries at Austin Health's Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre in Melbourne, which he still maintains, and his passion is for using plants and landscaping to provide respite and recovery for patients, their families and staff.

"One of the aims of my Fellowship was to establish a national therapeutic landscapes network that represents professionals involved in this field," Steven said.

"Through the new national body, Therapeutic Horticulture Australia, we can share ideas, facilitate future projects and research, and advocate for the inclusion and value of therapeutic gardens and their benefits."

Steven said therapeutic gardens introduce a different element to garden design that horticulturalists should take into account.



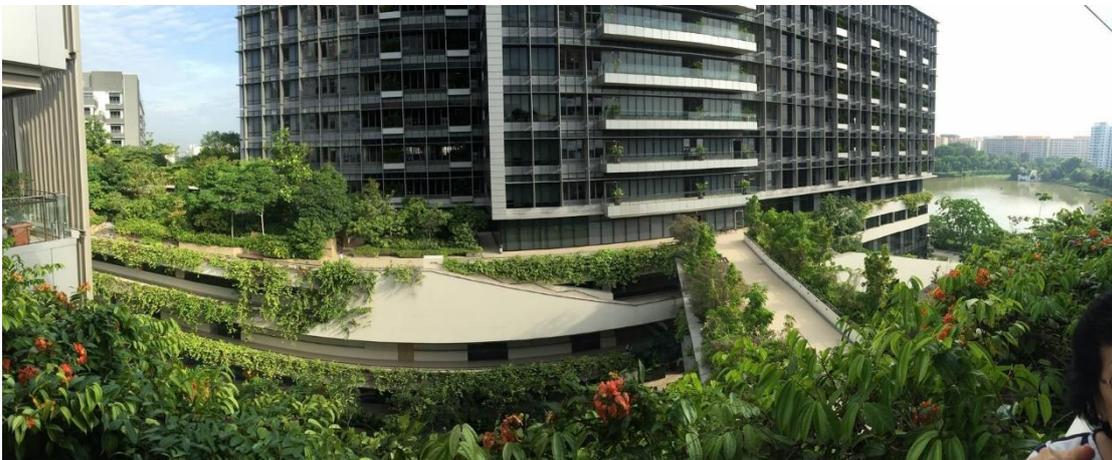
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“Planting a garden is often about the aesthetic, but the designer should also ask how you want to feel when you’re in the garden, how you want to live in that space, which impacts on plant selection and design,” Steven said.

“Where gardens are planted at the entrance to a hospital, for example, people’s perceptions of the level of care they’ll receive inside are more positive than when they enter through a built environment like a concrete car park.”

A highlight of his Churchill Fellowship was a visit to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) in Singapore, an award-winning 550-bed public facility designed entirely as a therapeutic healing environment based on the philosophy that ‘nature will nurture’.



Caption: A highlight of Steven Wells’ Churchill Fellowship was a visit to 550-bed Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in Singapore, designed as a therapeutic healing environment with planter boxes throughout patient wards and a rooftop ‘farm’ that supplies food for the hospital kitchen.

KTPH’s facilities incorporate three towers that overlook a large central garden courtyard, with rooftop gardens, the main entrance landscaped with gardens, and patient wards with planter boxes.

Balconies along the buildings incorporate climbing plants that fill the large inner courtyard with a mass of greenery. As well as patients getting benefits from the gardens, members of the local public come to the hospital to exercise and enjoy the environment.

The rooftops accommodate productive urban farming spaces where vegetables, herbs and fruits are harvested for use in the hospital’s kitchen and the surplus sold to staff, patients and locals.

Steven was the only person with a horticultural connection out of 103 Churchill Fellows in his intake, and says he’s very excited by the news that Hort Innovation is co-funding three Fellowships over the next four years.

He’s noticed that in the past few years, interest in the health and wellbeing benefits of green spaces and horticulture has grown, and he says communicating these benefits to city and country people is important.

“More Churchill Fellows from horticulture will bring some momentum to our capacity to connect people with green spaces and nature in all sorts of ways,” he said.



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He also has some advice for those applying for a Fellowship.

“Just because your field of interest may be obscure and different, it doesn’t mean it won’t be supported and funded. The Churchill Trust supports an impressive diversity of topics and you have a great opportunity to improve our industry,” Steven said.

Applications for the 2018 Churchill Fellowships close on April 27th 2018 and Fellows travel from February 2019.

The Fellowships are open to all levy payers or employees of a levy paying business in the Australian horticulture sector, including those in the nursery industry, who have an idea for a research project that can benefit the broader horticultural sector.

More information:

- <https://horticulture.com.au/hort-innovation-churchill-fellowships-return-for-2018/>
<https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/application-process/how-to-apply/>
- <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellows/detail/4085/Steven+Wells>

The Churchill Fellowships are supported under the Hort Frontiers Leadership Fund, part of the Hort Frontiers strategic partnership initiative developed by Hort Innovation, with co-investment from the Winston Churchill Memorial Foundation and contributions from the Australian Government.

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