

# BLUE ZONES

**“To ensure good health: eat lightly, breathe deeply, live moderately, cultivate cheerfulness, and maintain an interest in life.” – William Londen**



Gardening covers at least three of the Power 9 principles. GETTY IMAGES

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There are certain activities that are good for you. Then there are those activities that are “really” good for you.

Gardening just so happens to be one of those activities. In a July 2020 interview with Well + Good, Blue Zones Dan Buettner said that “gardening is the epitome of a Blue Zone activity because it’s sort of a nudge.”

“You plant the seeds and you’re going to be nudged in the next three to four months to water it, weed it, harvest it,” he continued. “And when you’re done, you’re going to eat an organic vegetable, which you presumably like because you planted it.”

His statement notes that gardening covers at least three of the Power 9 principles shared by people who live the longest and healthiest in the world. The good news is that it covers at least five.

For starters, gardeners move naturally meaning that they are spending time outdoors in the fresh air and incorporating simple movements that can add up to just as much exercise as being in the gym.

Gardeners are also benefiting from the down shift principle to help alleviate stress and boost mood. In fact, a study published in the journal Landscape and Urban Planning found that the level of emotional well-being, or happiness, reported while gardening was similar to what people reported while biking, walking, or dining out.

Literally enjoying the fruits (and vegetables) of your labor is a benefit of gardening, and is a great way to follow the plant slant principle. If you have ever grown your own food, it always tastes better. Perhaps it has something to do with its freshness compared to a fruit or vegetable you get from a supermarket that may have been picked before it has ripened, or is already days or even weeks old before consuming.

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida organizations like VillageWalk Bonita Springs and Calusa Gardens Club on Marco Island have managed to add two more to the Power 9 list of longevity principles with right tribe and purpose. They organized gardening Moais. Moai (mo-eye) is an Okinawan term that describes a group of people that meet together regularly for a common purpose.

What started out as just two small gardens tended by a couple of volunteers in 2013 has blossomed onto 10 expansive butterfly gardens and 50 volunteers at VillageWalk Bonita Springs. “They are designed to provide a



VillageWalk garden volunteers plant new trees during the pandemic. SUBMITTED

healthy habitat for the Monarchs and a beautiful, relaxing and informational place for our residents,” says Barb Swendiman, VillageWalk resident and wellness coordinator.

The garden has also served as a saving grace for many of the VillageWalk garden volunteers throughout the pandemic. “I just immersed myself into working as much as possible in the gardens, weeding, planting, trimming and mulching,” said Nina Iraggi, garden volunteer. “The gardens gave me something tangible to hope for when I needed it.”

Over twenty species of butterflies have been documented in the VillageWalk gardens which has also been certified by the National American Butterfly Association and The Monarch Watch Association.

The Calusa Garden Club of Marco Island who recently joined Blue Zones Project, meet regularly to build and maintain butterfly gardens along a one-half mile winding pathway for walkers and bikers to enjoy. They have also placed seating benches along the path for quiet observation of the Monarch butterflies and Swallowtails.

“Calusa Garden Club’s group of like-minded

people have common interests in gardening, the environment, and floral design, are socially connected, and they work together for common goals,” said Chante Pemberton, organization lead at Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. “They are a perfect fit for well-being.”

For club information, visit [calusa.org](http://calusa.org), or visit the Club’s Facebook page at Calusa Garden Club.

As the weather remains favorable, look for ways to get involved in gardening. If you don’t have backyard or balcony space available for planting, look to join groups like Calusa Garden Club or within your HOA community. You can also find gardening workshops and volunteer opportunities at Naples Botanical Garden. Visit [napleesgarden.org](http://napleesgarden.org).

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida’s well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information, visit [southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](http://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).