As a writer, I find gardens essential to the creative process; as a physician, I take my patients to gardens whenever possible. All of us have had the experience of wandering through a lush garden or a timeless desert, walking by a river or an ocean, or climbing a mountain and finding ourselves simultaneously calmed and reinvigorated, engaged in mind, refreshed in body and spirit. The importance of these physiological states on individual and community health is fundamental and wide-ranging. In 40 years of medical practice, I have found only two types of non-pharmaceutical “therapy” to be vitally important for patients with chronic neurological diseases: music and gardens.

I cannot say exactly how nature exerts its calming and organizing effects on our brains, but I have seen in my patients the restorative and healing powers of nature and gardens, even for those who are deeply disabled neurologically. In many cases, gardens and nature are more powerful than any medication.

My friend Lowell has moderately severe Tourette’s syndrome. In his usual busy, city environment, he has hundreds of tics and verbal ejaculations each day — grunting, jumping, touching things compulsively. I was therefore amazed one day when we were hiking in a desert to realize that his tics had completely disappeared. The remoteness and uncrowdedness of the scene, combined with some ineffable calming effect of nature, served to defuse his ticcing, to “normalize” his neurological state, at least for a time.

An elderly lady with Parkinson’s disease, whom I met in Guam, often found herself frozen, unable to initiate movement — a common problem for those with Parkinsonism. But once we led her out into the garden, where plants and a rock garden provided a varied landscape, she was galvanized by this, and could rapidly, unaided, climb up the rocks and down again.

Clearly, nature calls to something very deep in us. Biophilia, the love of nature and living things, is an essential part of the human condition. Hortophilia, the desire to interact with, manage and tend nature, is also deeply instilled in us. The role that nature plays in health and healing becomes even more critical for people working long days in windowless offices, for those living in city neighborhoods without access to green spaces, for children in city schools or for those in institutional settings such as nursing homes. The effects of nature’s qualities on health are not only spiritual and emotional but physical and neurological. I have no doubt that they reflect deep changes in the brain’s physiology, and perhaps even its structure.

This is a short excerpt from an essay printed in the New York Times on April 18, 2019, which in turn is taken from “Everything in Its Place,” a forthcoming collection of writings by Dr. Sacks, a neurologist and author of many books.

To read the full excerpt, including more examples of the healing power of gardens from Dr. Sacks’s patients and from his own life, please visit www.nytimes.com.