



Sensory Garden Design

Hardscape Elements

Hardscape elements are the components of the landscape not composed of living plants--paths, benches, arbors, walls, etc. Paving materials for garden paths can vary throughout the garden, to provide desirable challenges for wheelchair users. Block paving, timber decking, mulch, and stone are some options, but may become slippery when wet. Pathway width should be a minimum of 48 inches, with an ideal of 60 inches for wheelchair access.

Raised planting beds can provide easy access to plants for all garden users, and are especially helpful to the vision impaired and wheelchair users. Beds placed at lower heights that are comfortable for children will encourage them to explore the plantings.

Seating in the sensory garden should be placed strategically for functionality and to maximize enjoyment of the space. Seating can be an opportunity for sensory experience. Consider the options, from grouping a circle of large, rough-textured tree stumps, to placing a smooth metal bench that becomes warm or cool depending on the position of the sun. Seating with pergolas and gazebos can incorporate fragrant plants.

Signage is a key element of a sensory garden. Visitors will be more inclined to interact with plants if they are prompted by clear labeling. One approach is to use color coded signage that highlights the different senses associated with each plant. Braille plant labels placed at accessible locations, such as the backface of a handrail, are typically used in gardens for the visually-impaired. A recorded audio system can provide information to the visually-impaired who do not read Braille. A sensory garden brochure with photographs and a plant list can serve as a guide during the garden visit, and as a take-home educational piece.



Sensory Garden Hints

The ill or weakened can be enlivened and renewed physically, mentally, or spiritually by sensory gardens. Individuals with impairment of one or more of their five senses may find special enjoyment because they may have enhanced perception in their other senses.

Sight

Color, visual texture, form, movement, light and shadow stimulate the sense of sight. Contrasts of these elements add to the experience.

Sound

Many plants offer sounds with a small amount of wind or jostling. Seed pods of some plants make natural maracas, or sound shakers. Sounds of animals enliven the senses. Accessories for bringing sounds to the garden include waterfalls, fountains, water harps, wind chimes and music piped in through outdoor speakers.

Smell

The sense of smell is deeply emotional and associative. Scent in the garden can create a lasting sensory experience. This can be especially meaningful for the visually impaired. A fragrance can evoke long-buried memories.

Touch

In a sensory garden, people should be encouraged to touch plants. Plants should be chosen that are durable enough to withstand frequent brushing or handling. Tactile delights can be found in soft flowers, fuzzy leaves, springy moss, rough bark, succulent leaves, and prickly seed pods. Even sticky fruit and gooey plant saps can stimulate the sense of touch and give children an educational thrill.

Taste

In a sensory garden, the tastebuds can tingle from edible fruits, vegetables, herbs, and spices. To ensure that everyone gets a taste, include plants that can produce a large number of edible parts over time, such as mint leaves, strawberries, or edible flowers, rather than species with more limited production, such as cantaloupe.

SIGHT

USE WHITE, SILVER, PASTEL	EVENING "COLOR" FOR SUN-SENSITIVE GARDENERS
LARGE BLOCKS OF ONE COLOR	PARTIALLY-SIGHTED VIEWERS
SEE "TOUCH" SECTION	VISUAL TEXTURE
WEEPING, CASCADING, COLUMNAR, LEAF SHAPE	FORM
USE ORNAMENTAL GRASSES	MOVEMENT
DESIGN IN DAPPLED SHADE	LIGHT & SHADOW
USE VARIEGATED PLANTS	FOCAL POINTS
USE RED, ORANGE, YELLOW	WARM COLORS
USE GREEN, BLUE, VIOLET	COOL COLORS

SMELL

OLD ROSES, LILIES, HERBS	FRAGRANCE
MANY WAXY FLOWERS	EVENING FRAGRANCE
CONIFERS; MULCH; SOIL	WOODSY
BRUSHABLES: SCENTED PLANTS ALONG PATHWAY	AMBULATORY TRAFFIC;
CRUSHABLES: CREEPING THYME	WHEELCHAIR; FT TRAFFIC
AIRBORNE SCENT: NEWLY MOWN LAWN; BOUQUETS	APPRECIATED FROM INSIDE BUILDINGS
CANDLES, TORCHES; POTPOURRI	INCENSE/SCENTED OILS
BURNING LEAVES; WOOD	SMOKE

TOUCH

CONEFLOWER, TREE BARK,	ROUGH OR BUMPY PARTS
FENNEL, DILL, GRASSES	FEATHERY PARTS
LAMB'S EAR, ARTEMISIA, MOSS	SOFT, FUZZY PARTS
HOLLY, OREGON GRAPE, HOSTA	SLICK, SHINY PARTS
SEA OATS, MONEY PLANT	PAPERY FLOWERS
PEONY, POPPY, ROSE	SILKY PETALS
PETUNIA, NICOTIANA, PINE SAP	STICKY PARTS
SEA HOLLY, GLOBE THISTLE, ROSES, CACTUS	PRICKLY PARTS

SOUND

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES, SEED PODS LIKE BAPTISIA PODS	RUSTLING
BAMBOO & PINE TREES IN WIND	KNOCKING
FALLEN LEAVES; GRAVEL PATHS	CRUNCHING
WIND THROUGH TREE LEAVES; POND WATERFALLS	"RUNNING RIVER" SOUND
WILDLIFE HABITAT: TREES; NATIVE SEED, BERRY AND NECTAR PLANTS, BIRDBATHS	CHATTERING/SCRAMBLING SQUIRRELS; BIRDSONGS
WIND CHIMES, OTHER GARDEN ART, WIND THROUGH FENCES	MUSICAL
NECTAR PLANTS, ESPECIALLY YELLOW BLOOMS	BEE BUZZING

ALLERGENS

Thomas Ogren has some suggestions for reducing the [airborne] allergens in your landscape:

- Choose dioecious, female plants because they will produce no pollen. Ask your nursery or garden center for female ash, willow, mulberry, juniper, and maple trees.
- Plant a diverse garden to keep allergen production low.
- Select plants that are low-allergen producers. If you choose a high-allergen plant for some reason, install it at the edge of your property, away from windows and doors.
- Choose plants that are well-adapted for your area and maintain them properly. Stressed plants are attacked by pests, such as aphids, which produce honeydew. Mold quickly grows on the nutrient-rich honeydew, producing spores that are allergenic. "Also, a stressed male plant will put out 2-3 times the normal amount of pollen before it dies in an attempt to reproduce itself," states Ogren.

TASTE

LOW GROWING/DWARF PLANTS PICKED/EATEN BY GARDENER ALL SEASON LONG, TOMATOES, BERRIES, LETTUCE, RADISHES	FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
FALL HARVESTED, LIKE APPLES, PUMPKINS,	
NASTURTIUMS, VIOLAS, ROSES	FLOWERS
MINTS, BASIL, ROSEMARY	HERBS
HARVEST PARTIES USED TO CREATE MEMORIES:	
BARBEQUED/GRILLED FOODS, INCLUDING SELF-GROWN VEGS.	ICE CREAM/SORBETS WITH SELF-PICKED FRUIT
LEMONADES, KOOL AID, ICE TEA, ESP HERB TEAS W/LEMON BALM	CONDIMENTS, INCLUDING HERBED BUTTERS, VINEGARS, OILS, HOT SAUCE

<http://www.allergyfree-gardening.com/articles.php>

<http://www.garden.org/subchannels/health/health?q=show&id=1904>