



Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria

Gardening for people with disabilities

Gardening is a fun and healthy activity for people of all ages and abilities. It can have many health benefits. People with disabilities may also enjoy spending time in the garden tending plants and growing their own food.

With a little planning you can create an accessible, interesting, productive and pleasant space that can be used as an edible garden. You'll need to keep in mind the group or groups of people who will be using the garden and build the garden around their needs.

Gardening provides new skills

Everyone receives rewards from gardening but for people with disabilities it provides particular benefits. Gardening may help to improve:

- **Communication and social skills** – as a result of being involved in group and community activities.
- **Fitness** – gardening is a great form of physical activity.
- **Confidence** – provides an opportunity to develop a range of new skills.
- **Well-being** – gardening is a great way to relax and reduce stress levels.
- **Physical ability** – improved motor skills
- **Nutrition** – provides an opportunity to learn about eating healthy home grown food
- **Knowledge** – about the environment and nature.
- **Enjoyment of life** – a wonderful leisure activity in which tasks and routines can be varied and shared.

Create an accessible garden

Equipment, garden structures and plant materials need to be carefully designed and selected to accommodate people with disabilities. Vertical gardens and raised containers are alternatives that can make a garden accessible to people with disabilities

Tips to make the garden easy to use

To provide easy and safe access and manage varying disabilities you may need to make the following modifications when planning your garden:

- Raise garden beds to assist people with physical restrictions from bending and stooping.
- Provide tables that are wheelchair accessible where people can work on potting and planting together.
- Use pots, window boxes, wheelbarrows and raised containers to make gardening more accessible and can be used when space and sunlight are issues.
- Provide retractable hanging baskets that can be pulled up and down so they are within easy reach
- Use containers with wheels, like old prams, which can be moved around easily to catch the sunlight.
- Keep paths smooth, accessible and level
- Have a handy water supply and place plants together according to their water needs.
- Have an equipment storage area or shed nearby
- Provide shade for working in the garden in summer.
- Make sure the toilet is nearby.

Equipment modifications

Garden equipment can be adapted in many ways to suit people with varying disabilities. Consult an occupational therapist for expert advice. Suggestions include:

- Use tape, foam padding, bicycle grips and PVC pipe to improve grip and handle length on tools.
- Find specific ergonomic and enabling tools which are available at some hardware shops.
- Use gloves that have a sticky surface or gloves with gripper dots
- Use of splints and supports (consult an OT)

Look for lightweight tools that are easier to handle

Plant selection

An edible garden is a garden that contains flowers, herbs, seeds, berries and plants that you can eat. You should consider using varieties of plants that have sensory and textural qualities as well. Sensory plants include those that have special sound, smell, taste, touch and sight qualities.

Garden activities

There are a variety of gardening activities that people with disabilities can be involved in including:

- Watering
- Digging, planting and sowing
- Pruning and clipping
- Weeding and mulching
- Flower picking and arranging
- Making crafts from the garden
- Harvesting and preparing fruits and vegetables
- Cooking food from the garden.

Where to get help

- Community or local garden groups
- Occupational Therapists Victoria Tel. (03) 9481 6866
- Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria (03) 9836 1128
- Cultivating Community Email. info@cultivatingcommunity.org.au

Things to remember

- Gardening is a healthy, stimulating activity that can be enjoyed by people with a range of disabilities
- Gardening equipment and tools can be modified to suit people with disabilities
- An edible garden should be landscaped so that garden beds are easily accessible and safe.

