

Sensory gardens

Gardening can be wonderfully stimulating and rewarding even for those who are hearing- or sight-impaired. Water Wise shares some hints and tips for a therapeutic, sensory garden.



Many of us may know or encounter someone who is sight-impaired. By giving some thought to the planning of your garden, they will get great enjoyment out of the garden. The basic essentials are wide, non-slip, hard surface paths with a handrail along the path, no overhanging branches or prickly plants, no items left lying on the path, and seating in a cool place.

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By choosing plants that appeal to the senses, the garden can be made most enjoyable for the visually challenged.

- **Sight:** brightly coloured plants are more visible than pastel shades to people with partial sight and can act as markers and beacons in the garden (Fig 1).

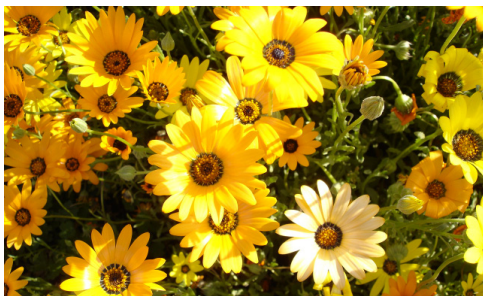


Fig 1. These bright and sunny african daisies may act as a beacon for partially-sighted people and are water wise too.

- **Touch:** raised beds on either side of the pathway make plants easier to reach and touch. The feel or texture of plants is important. Think of the enjoyment the following textures will give when touched:

- * Downy – lamb's ear, sage, peppermint geranium or helichrysum.
- * Fluffy – grasses such as natal red top (Fig 2).



Fig 2. The soft, fluffy inflorescences of natal red top provide a wonderful sensory experience.

- * Feathery – celosia, artemisia, fennel or carrot.
- * Fleshy – echeveria, kalanchoe, pig's ear or sour fig.
- * Papery – statice and everlastings.
- * Silky – poppy, lily or gardenia.
- * Leathery – bergenia or mahonia.

- **Smell:** some scents may be heavy, relaxing or invigorating, while others can stimulate the appetite. Some plants release their scent into the air, others need to be touched or bruised first. Plants with pleasant fragrances include basil, chamomile, citrus, dianthus, frangipani, freesia, gardenia, honeysuckle, hyacinth, jasmine, lavender, lemon balm, lemon-scented verbena, lilies, mints, oreganum, roses, rosemary (Fig 3), scented geraniums, stocks, sweet peas, thyme and violets.



Fig 3. Rosemary is a very pleasant-smelling cooking herb.

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Make your garden a haven for the visually challenged:

- **Taste:** vegetables, fruit and many herbs satisfy the scent of taste. Herbs, such as aromatic basil, fennel, oreganum, thyme and sage, like a sunny, well-drained environment. To be water wise and prevent over-watering, grow moisture-loving mint in containers. Avoid spraying the edible garden with chemicals.
- **Sound:** many sounds can be heard in the garden if you stop to listen – rustling leaves, whispering grasses, singing birds (Fig 4) and spraying water. A raised bubble water fountain is safe adds interest and background sound and will attract birds and insects to your garden. It is also water wise as it is no- or low-splash, so no water is wasted.



Fig 4. A simple, no-splash water wise water feature or bird bath will attract many interesting garden birds.

