Gardens That Care:
The Importance of Garden Environments in the Care of People with Dementia

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The Benefits of Garden Environments

Self-esteem  Appreciation  Self-control
Hope  Teamwork
Independence  Choice
Social Interaction  Self-confidence
Increased Decision-making Abilities
Gardens that Care:
Planning Outdoor Environments for People with Dementia

Helping Australians with dementia, and their carers
What is Dementia?

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of illnesses which cause a progressive decline in a person’s functioning. It is a broad term used to describe a loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and normal emotional reactions that are often reflected in a person’s behaviour.

Some of the most common types of dementia are:

- Alzheimer’s disease
- Vascular dementia
- Lewy body dementia
- Frontotemporal dementia
- Parkinson's disease
- Traumatic onset dementia
- HIV-related dementia
- AIDS-related dementia

Some of the most common changes are:

- Depression and withdrawal
- Wandering and BPSD
- Sleep disturbances
- Repetitive actions or questions
- Verbal disorientation
- Physical agitation
- Hallucinations and/or delusions
- Reality testing problems

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What to Consider When Planning a Dementia-Specific Garden

During the formulation of this guide a committee of dementia experts from Alzheimer’s Australia independently reviewed a variety of dementia-related gardens looking for specific design elements that through research were reported to support the quality of life of people with dementia and were used in their therapy programs. These design elements were then adapted to form a matrix of culturally and behaviourally beneficial. From this process a list of key design principles were determined.

The key design principles are:

- Sensory stimulation
- Navigation
- Accessibility
- Varied activities
- Meaningful activity
- Relaxation
- Sensory stimulation
- Safety

In the following pages each of these key design principles are explained and broken down into detailed instructions aimed at aiding organizations in the planning and designing of their dementia-specific gardens.
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**Sustainability**

The longevity of a dementia-specific garden is dependent on the understanding of its therapeutic value, activity programs and maintenance regimes.

- The garden's success is very much dependent on the staff's understanding of the design. By recognizing the different dynamics and their functions and use, staff will find more opportunities to develop activities that encourage the use of the garden.
- Ensure that gardens are well cared for, providing staff with the necessary training to look after the plants. Training in landscape maintenance can be done by external providers.
- Ensure the garden is suitably designed by including a reception area and seating areas for relaxing and socializing.
- Encourage the garden to be self-sufficient by including a rainwater harvesting system for watering the garden.

**Orientation**

A person with dementia often forgets where they are going and why they've come. This can be comforting and induce them to explore outdoors. By designing a garden that enables users to orientate themselves through visual cues, they will gain a sense of control and in turn self-confidence.

- Locate gardens where they can be clearly seen from inside to encourage people with dementia to venture out.
- Ensure the garden entrance has a sign to clearly communicate that the garden is located on the premises.
- Locate a garden door in or near the garden for easy maintenance.
- Locate a garden door near the garden to ensure that residents can find their way back inside.

**Socialisation**

Enhance the quality of life of people with dementia by creating opportunities to socialize and interact with friends, family, children, pets and nature.

- Encourage interaction gardens that will bring people together such as pet and dog visits, music garden areas, flower gardens, bird feeders and butterfly habitats.
- Include interactive garden features that will bring people together such as pet and dog visits, music garden areas, flower gardens, bird feeders and butterfly habitats.

**Accessibility**

Accessibility affects people with dementia on both a physical and mental level. Ensure your garden is accessible to people with dementia by removing physical and mental barriers.

- Ensure gardens are safe and accessible by incorporating safe pathways, safe planting and safe furniture.
- Provide gardens with amenities for people with dementia such as safe pathways, safe planting and safe furniture.
- Include areas for relaxation and contemplation for people with dementia.
**Meaningful Activity**

"People with dementia still have the energy and desire to remain active and involved in the world around them. Throughout our lives, we develop activities and interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes, skills and talents, that give our life structure and meaning and provide a sense of worth. These activities whether recreational or activities related to ordinary household tasks, establish a routine, provide opportunities for socialisation, and help define who we are." (Brower 2005).

**Sensory Stimulation**

Sensory stimulation is important to the overall mental well-being of people with dementia. It can convey emotional support, affection and respect and also play a major role in helping people with dementia communicate. Sensory stimulation is the engaging of any of our five senses – sight, sound, taste, touch and smell.

**Reminiscence**

For people with dementia, encouraging the act of reminiscence can be highly beneficial to their inner wellbeing and their interpersonal skills. Reminiscence involves exchanging memories with others and the passing on of information, wisdom and skills. By incorporating reminiscence elements and activities, people with dementia are able to engage with the world around them and retain feelings of value, importance, belonging and peace.

**Safety**

Safety can be the defining factor in whether a garden is allowed to be used or not. Ensure that all potential safety issues are addressed in the planning process of the garden.
Resthaven Paradise

International Dementia Excellence Award Winner 2012
Resthaven Paradise

Project: Resthaven Paradise
Aged Care Facility

Location: 61 Silkes Road, Paradise, SA

Client: Resthaven Incorporated

Constructed: Jan 2009 to Dec 2011
1. Entrance
2. Sensory Garden
3. Dementia Garden
4. Atrium Garden
5. Rose Garden
6. Mobility Garden
7. To River Torrens
The Dementia-Specific Garden is designed in such a way that residents are drawn outside and then taken on a journey of discovery. A journey that doesn’t require them remembering why they are there or where they’ve come from but one that involves the strategic placement of passive and active activities along a loop path system that draws the visitor from one place to the next by pure individual interest rather than aided and directed way-finding.

Each part of the garden either offers:

- An opportunity to physically engage with it
- A meaningful daily activity
- Or actively and passively engages the five senses
A secure, yet safe and welcoming setting, the Dementia Garden offers:

- A horticultural therapy/gardening activity zone equipped with a fully equipped garden shed, raised garden beds semi-planted out with miniature fruit trees, vegetables and herbs; and a rainwater tank for daily watering activities.

- 2 undercover multi-use activity areas for diversional, art and horticultural therapy programs as well as family or facility barbeque and outdoor dining.
• A bird and butterfly attracting garden with specifically selected plants to encourage native birds and insects into the garden and a bird feeder for daily bird feeding.

• A letter box for collecting of the mail.

• Sensory gardens and water features throughout for sensory stimulation and seasonal change.
• A scented jasmine covered arbour walk.
• A heritage styled rotunda for time out or conversations with friends.

• An interactive sensory green wall planted out with scented, textured and edible plants. A great way to enable the garden to be accessible to all residents as they can engage with the plants as they walk past.

• A bus shelter and street sign that are located next to a future decommissioned car are strategically located together for reminiscent bus and road trip stories and activities. The car whilst not yet installed will create a great activity zone, especially for the male residents who will be able to wash and polish the car.
This garden was designed specifically to encourage reminiscence amongst the residents. In an area accessed by residents both with and without dementia, the rose reminiscence garden acts as a very affective communication tool. The rose species chosen were common in the gardens of the 1950's, a time when the majority of the residents would have had them in their own gardens. Each garden bed is labeled with the name most commonly known to the residents. The residents of Resthaven Paradise love roses and this garden has been very successful in drawing them outside to admire the blooms, to stroll with friends and to sit and enjoy the sunshine.
The Eastern Community Services support seniors who live in the community by providing day therapy services including physiotherapy, podiatry, social work, speech pathology and occupational therapy.

The physiotherapists and occupational therapists running the community therapy services centre required an outdoor mobility/rehabilitation garden to use in their therapy programs.

Many of their clients were rehabilitating from strokes or had lost confidence in walking. The therapists wanted an interactive garden that offered features encountered in everyday life. These included uneven and sloping grass and garden areas, easy to difficult paving surfaces including gravels of increasing diameters, steps of varying heights and ramps. They also wanted an area that would emulate a typical road and car park setting including a kerb, speed hump and dish drain.

Each of these items, now built, are used as tools for the rehabilitation and confidence building therapy programs by the Eastern Community Services therapists.

In their words “the rougher the surface, the steeper the slope, the more uneven the ground and the patchier the lawn the better for their programs.”
The entry landscape draws on and aims to showcase elements of its surrounding River Torrens setting. A rock water feature, creek bed, native plantings and a flock of ibis are the eye-catching centre piece. Each bird brings life to the entry sculpture as it drinks, feeds or starts to take flight. Vibrant red and yellow kangaroo paw surround the drop off road and are popular with the residents when in flower.
These gardens are designed to stimulate the five senses – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Garden arches, bubbling urn water features, garden sculptures and plants of seasonal change engage residents as they stroll or sit.
French doors offer an extension of the residents’ dining rooms into these lush and colourful atrium gardens. Colourful and textured plants offer interest even when the weather is wet.
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Dementia Therapeutic
Garden Audit Tool

Supporting people in their garden environment

Landscape Architecture & Urban Design
Aged care, Healthcare, Education, Community Housing, Infrastructure, Civic, Open Space,
Project Management, Contract Administration, Community Consultation
Specialist Area: Healing & Therapeutic Design
Dementia-Specific, Special Needs, Rehabilitation, Play, All Access, Community Gardens
Registered Landscape Architect: Tara Graham Cochrane AILA

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