

Garden

Gardens have the potential to provide an opportunity to enjoy the outdoor elements whilst being in a safe, interesting and accessible area. They are places that can encourage exploration; provide calming, pleasurable and social activities, and sensory stimulation. To feel the grass under your feet, smell the scent of flowers and the wind against your skin all inspire a sense of freedom in a world that might be seem otherwise confusing.

However, due to 'physical, psychological, and cognitive frailties, many people may not be able to enjoy the outdoors in an open or unprotected space'.¹ These feelings are largely caused through feelings of physical frailties along with fears of being exploited by those with 'devious intentions' in an exposed position. Therefore, it is important, especially for those with cognitive impairments who may become disorientated, to define outdoor spaces. Definition is created through careful design that can significantly contribute to its success.

Consider the garden.

- What does it remind you of if you were looking out onto it?

Ideally residents should be able to see garden from their main living areas, with clear indication of how to access the garden and clear visual guides to pathways.

- How do you access the garden? What level?



For the garden to be accessed easily it should ideally be located off the main living spaces on the ground level. When the living space is not located on the ground floor, an alternative outdoor balcony can offer quick access to fresh air, seating and potted plants, however, access to the main garden should also be encouraged. The adjacent

photograph (McKillop Gardens) illustrates the use of balconies; adequate safety precautions have been taken with bowed balustrades to prevent climbing, with a glazed overhang in the roof to allow maximum daylight whilst offering protection from the elements.

- Does the garden seem familiar?

Familiar layout and objects to the individual are essential in the space being fully utilised; this may include items such as a wooden benches, bird tables, shed, greenhouse etc.

■ What can you hear?



Sounds experienced in a garden include those either found in nature or those introduced and triggered. Sounds in nature include, birds singing, water trickling, wind rustling through leaves/grass etc. Those triggered include wind chimes, interaction with water and even sound sculptures.

Introducing sound elements into a garden can provide stimulating spaces, particularly for those who have poor hearing. Sound can be very therapeutic and calming, offering a variety of natural and triggered sound elements for different people with different abilities which will enable wider enjoyment of the garden.

■ What can you smell?

The obvious choice in accessing smells in a garden is through scented plants. Various plants produce different aromas and can be experienced in different ways, some you can smell from a distance (honeysuckle, varieties of rose), others you need to get in closer proximity to experience their delicate smells, and others you need to touch and crush the leaves (variety of herbs/fruits that can also be tasted). It is for this reason that it is imperative that gardens designed for those with cognitive and sensory impairments should not include any plants that are spiky or poisonous.

Other areas of the garden can produce interesting smells, such as bark and cut grass to name a few. It is worth noting how elements smell in different conditions such as when its wet or dry, hot and cold, and according to what season or time of the day it is. All of the above stimulate the senses and when adapted to suit individual needs create meaningful contributions to the garden.

■ What do you see?



Throughout the seasons of the year the garden can attract a spectrum of colours and shapes that create a change in mood and atmosphere. In nature there are a wide variety of plants that provide colour and shape (shape through leaves such as a sycamore) a selection of contrasting varieties should be considered to balance areas and create interest.

Man made objects can also create areas of visual curiosity; these include murals, brickwork, sculptures and mosaics. When used on the ground, in carefully selected areas of the garden, it can benefit many people with dementia as they often keep their eyes to the ground. The photo adjacent illustrates a sculpture that has been used by Landscape architect Anne Pollock at the Iris Murdoch centre in Stirling.

Go for a walk in the garden.

- Do you notice the boundaries of this space?
- Do you feel confined?

Gardens symbolise a place where you can escape and feel free from the constraints often experienced indoors. This is especially true for those with cognitive impairments such as dementia, as they are often very active people and can feel restricted in enclosed environments. This is true of the garden space, it is important for the garden to be a place of enjoyment and relaxation whether that is through active stimulation or through a calming place to rest. Therefore, it is beneficial to have a space which feels private and secure yet not confined and restrictive.

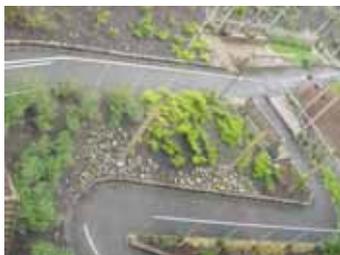
- How are the boundaries made?

To avoid a sense of confinement unobtrusive boundary treatments are needed. In order for users to be unaware of boundaries subtle barriers need to be made. This can be created through fencing that is painted green to merge into planting and a selection of soft and hard landscaping that creates distance from garden and fence. Low boundary walls should be avoided as some individuals may be tempted to climb over when visual contact is made beyond, therefore designing the garden to maintain concentration and interest within the safe and controlled perimeters will prevent potentially dangerous situations.

- Do you see an exit?

If it is unsafe for individuals to exit the garden unaccompanied, then exits from the garden should be camouflaged; doors might be painted to match the rest of the boundary treatment and paths created to avoid interception.

- Is there an obvious path to take?



A path in a garden creates an obvious cue for an individual to follow. As those with dementia may not know where the path leads, it is preferable to have a destination point which can be seen and recognised. Such a place might include a simple wooden bench (as seen adjacent at Burnfield Care Home), gazebo or pergola.

■ Do you find yourself back at the door?



It is helpful for the door entering and exiting the garden to be located off the same route. Objects may be used as landmarks to signify the correct door, a person might not remember where the door is but they might remember it was the yellow one with the snail.

■ What are the paths made from, is there any over-hanging planting?



Many people with cognitive impairments, such as dementia, experience kinesthetic problems (the relative position of neighbouring parts of the body). These problems require paths to be of a decent width, made from non-slip materials, evenly laid, and from using contrasting colours. It is important to keep pathways clear of any overhanging planting, but close enough to trees and planting to touch.

■ Do you feel safe?

For those with poor vision, stair edges should be clearly marked and pathways kept clear. A combination of building layout and site design can enable spaces such as courtyards to be created; these are ideal as they offer privacy and security, allowing passive observation from others. Tor Nursing home, in the case study section of the website, illustrates a dynamic and overall successful application of a courtyard.

■ Does the garden offer protection from the wind, rain or sun?

As sense of judgement, attention and awareness can be altered with cognitive and sensory impairments, it is important to provide areas in the garden that offer protection from rain, wind, snow and sun in various parts of the garden.

■ Do you recognise the furniture and various objects in the garden?



Furniture should be in the style that is most familiar to the occupant. Historical objects can be introduced which may trigger memories from the past.

■ What activities take place in the garden?

‘The creation of purposeful outdoor places provides opportunities for people to partake in familiar and therapeutic activity that stimulates the mind and body. Outdoor activity, particularly activities such as planting and tending a garden, help to orient people to time of day and year, and provide opportunities for socialisation and purposeful experience’.ⁱⁱ

■ Could you grow things, hang out your laundry, sit in the sun, work in a shed, observe a bird table, and put out your bins?



This photograph was taken at Croftspar Place (see case studies section); here the back garden is used for bin storage, with a clothes wheel and an individual grass area. These defined spaces allow for familiar domestic activities to take place.

■ Are there raised planting beds, so you don't need to bend down?



A garden should be a place that enables both passive and active activities. It can be a place where you can participate in gardening. By designing raised beds users can enjoy planting and caring for plants without having to bend down. The adjacent photograph (Tor Nursing Home) has enclosed the pond with raised beds within a wooden

deck and topped low walls, this enables residents to sit beside plants and water at a comfortable height.

■ Is there any lighting at night?

For those who wish to explore the garden in the early evening, soft warm lighting should be installed, with particular attention given to areas of level changes to provide an even illumination.

ⁱ Brummett, W. (1997). *The Essence of Home: design solutions for assisted living housing*. P64

ⁱⁱ Brummett, W. (1997). *The Essence of Home: design solutions for assisted living housing*. P89