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

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COMMON ENVIRONMENTS
COMMON SCENARIOS

DISABLED
ENABLED
Garden Environments and Health

Research indicates that physical as well as visual access to nature:

• Reduces stress and lowers blood pressure
• Helps people recover from illness quicker
• Helps a person maintain circadian rhythms (the sleep/wake cycle)
• Aids in the natural absorption of vitamin D which is important for maintaining strong bones
• Creates changes in behaviour, emotional expressions and feelings of self-esteem and independence
• A great tool for communication
• Is used as a tool for therapy – horticultural, physiotherapy and occupational therapy
Design Principles

- Orientation
- Accessibility
- Socialisation
- Meaningful Activity
- Reminiscence
- Sensory Stimulation
- Sustainability
- Safety
Orientation

04. Locate garden elements where they can be seen from numerous vantage points to encourage users to explore and also to orientate themselves.

05. Edge paving and paths with a contrasting colour or raised edge. This will support way-finding and define the change from paving to garden.

06. Screen fences with plants to make them less obvious. This will minimise feelings of enclosure.

07. Use signs that lead users to entries and key locations.
Accessibility

A1. Offer a range of garden beds at differing heights for ease of access.

A2. Intermittently placed handrails or low height structures to enable users to rest or balance themselves as they move throughout the garden.

A3. Ensure there is plenty of shade for sunny days and warm sitting areas in the winter as people with dementia will not venture out if there is a large change in temperature.

A4. Locate seating at regular intervals for resting.

A5. Supply tools that are designed specifically for limited-strength and mobility.
Socialisation

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

So1 Include interactive garden features that will bring people together such as men’s shed, raised garden beds, flower gardens, bird feeders and bird baths.

So2 Include elements that encourage interaction between family members and people with dementia such as child-friendly elements, areas for pets and easy conversation pieces.
Meaningful Activity

M2: Include home-like activities in the garden to engage users in daily chores as they would have in their own homes such as posting a letter, making a telephone call, washing the car, gardening, sweeping, hanging out washing, watering the plants, feeding the birds and tending in the shed.

M3: A level and safe walking route will encourage people with dementia to exercise. Design the route so it loops both inside and outside for a more stimulating experience.

M4: Include garden features that require daily interaction such as a bird feeder, herb garden, bird activity or fish pond.

M5: Incorporate raised vegetable gardens, herb gardens and fruit trees to engage people with dementia in the task of food production. Use the produce in activity programs, daily meals or social talks.

M6: Work with staff to develop horticultural therapy/outdoor activity programs that are supported by the garden and its design.
Reminiscence

R2 Plant the gardens with plants that are familiar to the age and culture of the users.

R3 Ensure garden elements are of an era, style and material familiar to the users.

R4 Work with the support staff to develop outdoor activity programs that evoke memories for people with dementia.
Sensory Stimulation

Se1: Include gardens of differing heights to enable users to easily touch, smell, and taste the plants.

Se2: Include garden elements that are interactive and engaging to people with dementia.

Se3: Ensure that gardens can be viewed from inside so that watching the rain or wind in the trees can be enjoyed by people with dementia even when it's too cold to go outside.

Se4: Incorporate lighting for night-time use or viewing from indoors.

Se5: Include nature attracting elements to attract native birds, animals, and insects.

Se6: Work with the support staff to develop outdoor activity programs that focus on stimulating the five senses.
Sustainability

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

Su1: Use predominantly low maintenance plants except in interactive garden beds used for horticultural therapy activities.

Su2: Ensure the garden is self-sufficient by including a rainwater tank specifically for watering the garden.

Su3: The garden’s success is very much dependent upon the staff’s understanding of the design. By recognising the different elements and their functions and use, staff will feel more empowered to develop activities that encourage the use of the gardens.

Su4: Ensure that gardens are visible to staff. Staff should feel relaxed enough to allow people with dementia unrestricted access to the garden. If this is not possible then users will not gain the maximum benefit from the garden.

Su5: Organise a regular gardener or gardening group to maintain the garden. Locate a garden shed in or nearby the garden for ease of maintenance.

Su6: Collect garden and kitchen scraps for a compost bin. Use the compost to feed the garden.
Safety

- Ensure that there is ample shade.
- Follow safety instructions on potting mixes.
- Don't forget to slip, slop, slap.
- Shelter building thresholds to allow resident's eyes time to adjust to the change in lighting levels.
- Ensure that garden features are strong and sturdy. Secure features where necessary so they cannot be lifted or thrown.
- Ensure that all plants are non-toxic.
BEFORE

AFTER
BEFORE

AFTER
Resthaven Paradise
Resthaven Mt Gambier
St Basil’s Homes
Resthaven Port Elliot
Dementia Therapeutic Garden Audit Tool

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