

Garden Designing Tips For People With Disabilities

Please Note: We Cannot Offer Specific Ideas For Specific Disabilities In This Article. Therefore, The Ideas In This Article Are Given In A General Sense. Also Many Of The Ideas Here Could Incorporated Into Any Garden Design.

Gardening, not only for people with disabilities but also in general can have wonderful results both in improving motor skills and in reducing stress. Just a relatively short amount of time in the garden putting about, watering and generally tending to plants produces measurable feelings of calm in both body and in mind.

For people with disabilities, gardening must rate highly in the top hobbies that can actually improve the quality of life. The activity of gardening, together with perhaps expanding new knowledge and applying oneself to a little more physical activity than usual, must lead to a healthier way of life; not only with improvements with physical benefits, but also to sleep, diet, emotional well-being and so forth.

It may not be too surprising that gardening as a therapy was started following both World Wars. Hospitals made increased use of gardening as therapy in the treatment and re-education of disabled soldiers.

As a therapy, gardening is one of the few hobbies where interaction with a living medium is used. In the same way as interaction during horse-riding for people with disabilities and other such therapies, so too can gardening have a similar effect. With gardening, people with disabilities get a hands-on connection with the natural environment and life cycle. With gardening there is always something to look forward to, something to plan, something to learn from, and obviously where they may be an emotional disability, such a hobby as gardening could prove invaluable.

The most important step of planning a garden for people with mobility impairment is to recognize the needs and abilities of the gardener. It is best to start with a small area and increase the dimensions as and when necessary.

What Features Can Be Introduced To A Garden Intended For People With A Disability?

Vertical Wall Gardens

Pots from walls, shelves with pots or troughs.

Raised Beds For Easier Access

There are many designs available for raised beds. You can install raised beds or containers (i.e.: plastic troughs or pots) to minimize bending and stooping. Ensure that they are moveable, so they can be easily relocated. Raised beds or planters can be put virtually anywhere; in the front or back garden, on the balcony of a high-rise apartment, on the roof of a hospital or in the grounds of a retirement home.

Truck tires, wheelbarrows, wine casks (even old toilets and bathtubs!) have been used with great success to create raised garden areas for the disabled - both for children and adults.

Elevated Beds

For the wheel-chair bound, the best designs are those where the raised beds are supported on legs or columns at regular intervals. With these types of raised beds, knees and front wheels can actually get under the bed and provide better wheelchair access.

Terracing and Retaining Walls

A terraced garden is a series of small retaining walls or raised ground beds forming steps. The lower levels of these steps can be easily adapted to provide access for the disabled gardener by building up brickwork to the height required to tend plants.

Hanging Baskets

The ideal solution would be baskets with a pulley system where the basket can be lowered easily for watering. A mechanically-timed watering system could also be implemented.

Visual Aided Planting

Plant against contrasting colors. Example: planting tomatoes against a white fence background which makes it easier to see when the fruits are ripe. Use dark versus light colors to differentiate between areas of a garden, including pathways. An example is to use light stone as a path material with 4-6 rows of bricks perpendicular to the pathway in various spots to denote a rest area, start of the path, end of the path, etc.

Paving Access

Careful consideration should be given to such walkways. Handrails may need to be added. Ensure that such walkways provide grip and ease of use in all weathers (Non-slip).

Adapted Tools

There are all sorts of tools available on the market to help disabled gardeners achieve their full potential.

These include ergonomically-designed short and long reach trowels, forks, spades, weeders, cultivators, support cuffs, ratcheting pruners and loppers, to aid everyone whatever their disability - whether wheelchair-bound or suffering from limb amputation, arthritis or other physical impairment.

Oscillating hoes, which relieve pressure on the back, are particularly helpful for people with diminished strength and endurance - and one-handed flower snips are designed for people with bending difficulties.

Creating Rest Areas Within The Garden

A garden should be "*enjoyed*" and there are times when we should just "*be*" in the garden. A restful place in any garden is a welcome addition.

Selecting Plants For Fragrance Color And Textures

The garden is a veritable world of sensations for anyone; smells, sights, sounds and so on. Also, most gardeners enjoy getting dirty hands and "*feeling*" their garden, particularly when planting and pruning. Make your garden stimulate all the senses.

Have Edge Guides On Paths

Edge guides are not only for wheelchairs. It is also good for preventing feet, crutches, canes, etc. from getting onto slippery soil and grass. Keep in mind that the guides must be safe themselves to prevent tripping. Don't allow the guides to extend too much above the adjacent terrain as a trip hazard may ensue.

You can also incorporate color and/or texture changes to differentiate between the path and the

garden, lawn, or other area. An example would be to have a gravel path bordered by bricks. You can also use bricks or another material to delineate the start and end of the path, etc.

Get Your Garden To Stimulate

As mentioned earlier, all the senses can be awakened and stimulated naturally in our gardens. How about a bubbling water feature or fountain? Wind chimes come in all sorts of materials and colors - sparkling with crystals and glittering metals - a perfect addition to such a sensory garden.

General Advice

Make the area accessible, with at least a three-foot wide walkway for wheelchair users. If ramps are required, the slope should be no more than 8 per cent and it should be edged to prevent the wheelchair from rolling off the side. All surfaces should be non-slip and have a 2 per cent slope for water drainage, made of porous material. If possible, install handrails or handgrips and use foam pads if you are able to kneel.

Do not try to create your adapted garden around a traditional lawn, because the surface will probably be too uneven for a person in a wheelchair or someone with impaired walking to negotiate. If a grassy area is desired, open-work paving stones that incorporate holes for the grass to be seeded through are widely available.

Select plants carefully, according to your wants or needs. Consider the plant's height, life span and the amount of attention it will require, including watering and spraying. If you have limited reach, it is advisable to choose plants or vegetables that do not grow beyond the height of two feet. Adapted beds are best suited to annual flowers, fruits and vegetables, because permanent plantings are more vulnerable to frost. However, rock plants grow well in compact conditions, as do certain varieties of dwarf fruit trees. Your local garden center will advise you.

Try incorporating some or all of these ideas into your garden.

You'll be glad you did. Great enjoyment awaits you.