

# Making Your Garden Dementia-Friendly



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## Introduction

There are now many studies that demonstrate how being outside can improve wellbeing for people living with dementia. Access to fresh air, sunshine and natural light are important for wellbeing as well as helping to maintain our body clocks and vitamin D levels.

Looking after a garden takes time and carers or friends can play an important role in keeping the garden looking good so do ask for help if you need to.

This booklet, together with Making Your Home Dementia Friendly available from the Alzheimer's Society\*, will be useful for people living with dementia who want to stay at home, and for relatives and friends who are supporting them. It is based on research evidence and the personal experience of people living with dementia, their carers and families.



[https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/making\\_your\\_home\\_dementia\\_friendly.pdf](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/making_your_home_dementia_friendly.pdf)

Connecting with and being in nature is good for everyone. Gardens can be enjoyed throughout the year, providing pleasure and opportunities for familiar activities as well as spaces for seeing friends and family. Gardens can be calming, restful, pleasurable to the senses, and can also prompt memories and provide safe areas for gentle exercise.

Keeping active and engaged can really improve your quality of life. Gardens can provide a varied range of everyday activity including space to walk, hang out the washing or do some gardening. Any views should be maximised including those from town gardens, as they can provide ever changing interest.

This booklet is designed for use by people living with dementia and their carers. It describes some of the ways that gardens can be safely enjoyed by people living with dementia and is divided into sections, each of which covers a different topic.

Each section starts with an explanation of why the topic is important and lists some practical, quick and easy things that can be done to make your garden or outside space more dementia friendly.

Everyone experiences dementia differently. You may need to try some of these ideas out to see what works best for you.

## Getting outside

Seeing the garden from the windows will encourage you to use the space. Getting outside can sometimes be difficult and the door to the garden needs to be easy to open. Uneven threshold surfaces or door mats near the door can cause hesitation, slips and trips. Any steps or slopes need to be clearly marked. A grab or hand rail by the door may help you to move between inside and outside.

- Take opportunities to get outdoors throughout the year
- Make sure that you can see the garden from indoors
- Check the door handle and locks are easy to use
- Keep the doorway clear both inside and out
- Remove any door mats that could cause trips
- Make sure that steps or slopes have an even, non-slip surface and are easy to see.



## Being outdoors

Sitting outside looking at trees, flowers and any wildlife such as birds or butterflies can be restful and calming. If possible, keep outdoor clothing, stout footwear, cushions and blankets near the door to encourage going outside. Make sure that there is a robust chair with arms in a shaded part of the garden to protect from sunburn. Having a drink or a meal outside can be very pleasurable.



- Make sure that the garden looks inviting
- Choose robust garden furniture that is made of materials that can't get too hot or cold and in a colour that it is easy to see
- Put a comfortable chair in a quiet, sheltered, shady area where you can rest
- Take a mobile phone and/or clock when you go outdoors so that you can keep in contact and remember the time
- Make the most of any views
- If you like drawing keep paper and pencils in a clear lidded container so that you can take them outside
- Remove any trees, shrubs or other planting that is poisonous, irritant to the skin or has thorns
- Use signage or a distinctive plant to remind you how to get back into the house and the toilet.

## Engaging the senses

The sight, smell, touch, taste and sound provided by gardens can be pleasurable and encourage reminiscence. Familiar plants can provide colour, fragrance and variety throughout the seasons. Contrasting colours will make flowers and foliage more visible. Planting, growing and harvesting herbs, vegetables or fruit can provide interest and exercise as well as food for the table. Fences, walls or areas of planting can help deaden external noise which can make concentration difficult.

- Use plants of contrasting heights, colours, smells and textures to provide interest throughout the seasons
- Make sure that you are able to see, touch and smell your favourite plants
- Keep a calendar to remind you when to pick fruit or vegetables
- Think about introducing gentle sounds to the garden such as windchimes or grasses
- Encourage birds and butterflies into the garden with feeders and planting.



## Plants and planting

Choose plants that are familiar and evoke good memories for you.

Planting, weeding, clearing leaves and watering can all provide exercise and a sense of achievement. Raised beds or large planters (pots) can avoid too much bending to reach plants. Make sure that pots do not block the path or patio and are not a trip hazard.

Keep paths clear of trailing plants and leaves. Make sure that frequently used garden tools and watering equipment are easy to find.



- Include some brightly coloured and familiar plants in the garden
- Use larger pots or raised planters that are easier to look after
- Keep everyday garden tools and gloves in a basket or tray so they are easy to find
- Have an outdoor brush easily accessible to clear away leaves
- Make sure that the watering can or hose are tidied away after use so you cannot trip over them.



## Enjoying the view

Even if you cannot get outside, daylight through windows will help you to be aware of the time of day. Brightly coloured seasonal flowers or houseplants, window boxes or hanging baskets, and pictures or photographs of nature will remind you of the different seasons. A bird feeder seen from the window can provide much pleasure. A conservatory or an open French window can provide a sheltered space to sit and enjoy views of the outside.



- Check that curtains or blinds, furniture, TVs or plants are not blocking the natural light from windows
- Get the windows cleaned regularly
- Place a chair (and table if needed) near the window so you can sit and watch what is happening outside
- Remove any indoor plants that are poisonous or have spikes
- Make sure you can see any bird feeders or hanging baskets from the window.

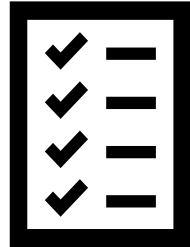
## Keeping Safe

The boundary to the garden and any gates should be secure. Paths and patio areas should be level without any cracks and slip resistant. Avoid any mirrors and shiny surfaces that can cause glare or reflections. All planting, leaves and berries should be non-toxic, non-irritant and free from thorns or prickles. Check that furniture and any washing line are safe to use. Make sure that furniture, pots and any garden features are heavy enough not to be blown over by the wind. Locked storage should be available for equipment, plant and animal feeds, liquids and sprays.

- Ask a relative or friend to help you check that the garden, paths, paving or steps, furniture and equipment are safe for you
- Consider having handrail or grab rails installed to help you get around
- Remove any poisonous planting
- Check that the washing line is the right height for you and does not trail on the ground
- Remove any trip hazards such as wet leaves or broken paving stones
- Check windy areas to make sure there is nothing that can blow over
- Make sure that all tools, feeds, compost, liquids and sprays are locked away after use.


# Checklist


**This checklist is designed to help you to remember some of the main things that you can do to make your garden more dementia friendly. You can use it to keep track of what you have already done, and make your own notes about other steps you may want to take.**





Don't feel you need to complete everything on this checklist. It's important to remember that everyone experiences dementia differently. Make the changes that you think will work best for you.




Changes to make	Tick if you are going to make this change	Date you made the change
<p><b>Getting outside</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take opportunities to get outdoors throughout the year</li> <li>▪ Make sure that you can see the garden from indoors</li> <li>▪ Check the door handle and locks are easy to use</li> <li>▪ Keep the doorway clear both inside and out</li> <li>▪ Remove any door mats that could cause you to trip</li> <li>▪ Make sure that steps or slopes have an even, non-slip surface and that you can see them easily.</li> </ul>		


Changes to make	Tick if you are going to make this change	Date you made the change
<p><b>Being outdoors</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make sure that the garden looks inviting</li> <li>▪ Choose robust garden furniture that is made of materials that can't get too hot or cold and in a colour that it is easy to see</li> <li>▪ Put a chair in a quiet, sheltered, shady area where you can rest</li> <li>▪ Take a mobile phone and/or clock when you go outdoors so that you can keep in contact and remember the time</li> <li>▪ Make the most of any views</li> <li>▪ Remove any trees, shrubs or other planting that is poisonous, irritant to the skin or has thorns*</li> <li>▪ Use signage or a distinctive plant to remind you how to get back into the house and the toilet.</li> </ul>		

Changes to make	Tick if you are going to make this change	Date you made the change
<p data-bbox="124 323 325 400"><b>Engaging the senses</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="141 451 512 635">▪ Use plants of contrasting heights, colours, smells and textures to provide interest throughout the seasons</li> <li data-bbox="141 647 553 754">▪ Make sure that you are able to see, touch and smell your favourite plants</li> <li data-bbox="141 767 530 874">▪ Keep a calendar to remind you when to pick fruit or vegetables</li> <li data-bbox="141 887 555 1026">▪ Think about introducing gentle sounds to the garden such as windchimes, grasses or water features</li> <li data-bbox="141 1038 505 1185">▪ Encourage birds and butterflies into the garden with feeders and planting.</li> </ul>		

Changes to make	Tick if you are going to make this change	Date you made the change
<p><b>Plants and planting</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Include some brightly coloured and familiar plants in the garden</li> <li>▪ Use larger pots or raised planters that are easier to look after</li> <li>▪ Keep everyday garden tools and gloves in a basket or tray so they are easy to find</li> <li>▪ Have an outdoor brush easily accessible to clear away leaves</li> <li>▪ Make sure that the watering can or hose are tidied away after use so you cannot trip over them.</li> </ul>		

Changes to make	Tick if you are going to make this change	Date you made the change
<p data-bbox="126 331 400 368"><b>Enjoying the view</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="141 413 553 596">▪ Check that curtains or blinds, furniture, TVs or plants are not blocking the natural light from windows</li> <li data-bbox="141 608 516 679">▪ Get the windows cleaned regularly</li> <li data-bbox="141 691 561 839">▪ Place a chair (and table if needed) near the window so you can sit and watch what is happening outside</li> <li data-bbox="141 850 538 954">▪ Remove any indoor plants that are poisonous or have spikes</li> <li data-bbox="141 965 538 1069">▪ Make sure you can see any bird feeders or hanging baskets from the window.</li> </ul>		



Changes to make	Tick if you are going to make this change	Date you made the change
<p><b>Keeping safe</b> </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ask a relative or friend to help you check that the garden, paths, paving or steps, furniture and equipment are safe for you</li> <li>▪ Consider having handrail or grab rails installed to help you get around</li> <li>▪ Remove any poisonous planting</li> <li>▪ Check that the washing line is the right height for you and does not trail on the ground</li> <li>▪ Remove any trip hazards such as wet leaves or broken paving stones</li> <li>▪ Check windy areas to make sure there is nothing that can blow over</li> <li>▪ Make sure that all tools, feeds, compost, liquids and sprays are locked away after use.</li> </ul>		

# Useful Organisations

## **Alzheimer's Society**

Alzheimer's Society is a United Kingdom care and research charity for people with dementia and their carers.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/>

## **Age UK**

Age UK is the leading charity for older people offering help, information and advice.

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

## **Dementia UK**

Provides specialist support to families living with dementia

[www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)

## **National Gardens Scheme**

The National Garden Scheme opens privately owned gardens on selected dates for charity.

[www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

[www.ngs.org.uk/scottish-gardens](http://www.ngs.org.uk/scottish-gardens)

## **Royal Horticultural Society**

The RHS is the UK's leading gardening charity

[www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)

See also <https://www.rhs.org.uk/prevention-protection/potentially-harmful-garden-plants>

# Acknowledgements

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