

## SENSORY GARDEN

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A sensory garden is a garden or other plot specifically created to be accessible and enjoyable to visitors, both disabled and non-disabled. The purpose of such a provision is to provide individual and combined sensory opportunities for the user such that they may not normally experience.

A sensory garden may contain features plants and other design elements are selected with intention to provide experiences for sight, smelling, hearing, touching, and tasting. Some sensory gardens are devoted specifically to one sense, such as a fragrance garden. Others may focus on several senses, with separate sections devoted to each sense. A third approach is a blend that enlivens all of the senses throughout the garden.

An objective in sensory garden design is to encourage users to interact with the plants, often directly, for instance by breaking off leaves to smell or taste. Therefore, plants that would require pesticide applications in order to do well should not be selected for sensory gardens. Poisonous plants also should be avoided. Some plant species can serve multiple roles in a sensory garden. For example, mints provide both scent and taste opportunities.

**Sight:** Plants with interesting visual texture add to the sensory garden experience. Excellent additions for sensory gardens include smooth, rough, ruffled, fuzzy, or lacey-textured plants. The overall texture of a plant is another consideration. For example, a fine-textured plant has small leaves and a somewhat sparse appearance, while a coarse-textured plant has large leaves and a fuller appearance. Plants come in many forms, including upright, open, weeping, cascading, or columnar. Individual parts of plants, such as leaves or fruit, have their own forms, such as round, toothed, and spherical.



**Sound:** Opening the ears in a garden expands the senses and broadens the garden. Opportunities can be provided in a sensory garden for sitting under a tree to hear the sound of wind rushing through the leaves. Many plants offer sounds with a small amount of wind or jostling: bamboo stems knock together, grasses rustle, palm fronds sway. Seed pods of some plants make natural maracas or sound shakers. Leaves can be left on the ground to crunch underfoot.

**Smell:** The sense of smell is deeply emotional and associative. Scent in the garden can create a lasting sensory experience. This can be especially meaningful for the visually impaired. A fragrance can evoke long-buried memories. Crushing and smelling a plant part is also a classic method of plant recognition and identification. Many edible species also have strong fragrance, such as tomatoes, citrus, and of course, herbs and spices.



**Touch:** In a sensory garden, people should be encouraged to touch plants. Plants should be chosen that are durable enough to withstand frequent brushing or handling. Some species offer a variety of textures within a single plant. A classic example is the rose, with its delicate petals and thorny stems. Others include silver buttonwood, with its rough bark and soft grey leaves or southern magnolia, with its leaves slick, shiny and dark green above and soft, felted brown beneath.

**Taste:** In a sensory garden, the taste buds can tingle from edible fruits, vegetables, herbs, and spices. To ensure that everyone gets a taste, include plants that can produce a large number of edible parts over time, such as mint leaves, strawberries or edible flowers, rather than species with more limited production, such as cantaloupe.