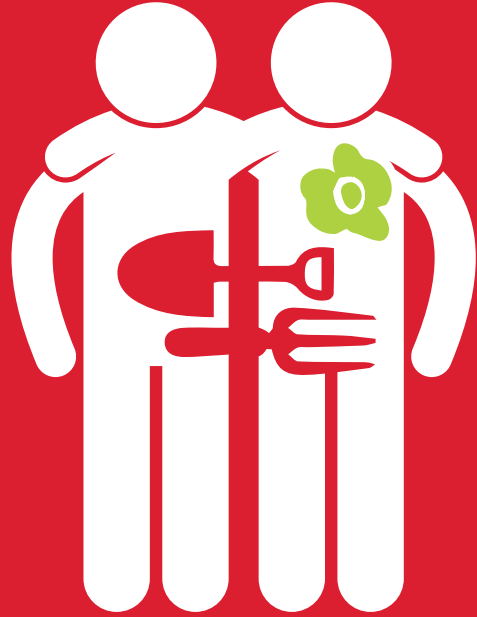




Quick
Tips



LEAFLET 2: INDIVIDUALS

Gardening Tips for older people



Garden Buddies is a project by Outside the Box which helps people of all ages and abilities to enjoy being in gardens. Sometimes being in the garden is about planting and digging, sometimes it is about spending time chatting and drinking tea in beautiful natural surroundings. Just because a person is getting older or less able, this does not mean they have to stop doing these things. Even if a person has memory issues, they can enjoy being in a green space and perhaps rekindle memories through the sights and smells of a garden. It has also been shown that being in green spaces can help with mental health, as well as improving our memory and ability to think.

Garden Buddies have been speaking to people in different gardens around the country, getting some ideas and tips for making the most of gardens for everyone, no matter their age or ability.

Spending time in nature is good for everyone. It can help you physically and keep you feeling well and happy. If you spend time in gardens with other family members this can help you strengthen relationships, enjoy sharing time and experiences together and learn from each other. You can remember good times together and have more good times.

“The garden is just an extension of my house – on a nice day I take my knitting outside.”

These tips were developed by older people in early 2020 just as COVID-19 restrictions happened. A lot of what is here will still apply, but you may need to take account of current arrangements.

What do you want from the garden?

You could start by looking at some pictures with friends and family, to get some inspiration and ideas. Maybe you want to grow vegetables, maybe you want to be able to walk round the garden easily, maybe you want scents and sights you can enjoy...or a nice place to sit. All this can easily be made more manageable for you.

“I got the garden securely fenced so that I know I can let the dog out in it for a run around.”

“We got the pond filled in so that nobody would fall into it.”

Making life easier

Older people who are perfectly fit can do any aspect of gardening, but if joints are sore or stiff, adjustments have to be made.

- If you can't manage to mow the garden have you thought about getting artificial grass?
- Pots can be more manageable than beds.



TIP Dress for the weather! Good warm waterproof gloves and lined wellies, to keep you cosy.



TIP Get equipped! Kneelers can help, especially the kind with handles to help push up from kneeling. For those who can't kneel at all, long handled tools can help, and of course raised beds are wonderful!

Raised beds

A raised bed is easy to access, both for people who are unsteady on their feet and for wheelchair users. We talked to people who showed us a raised bed at waist height – they said this was ideal for everyone who used the garden. They also said the bed should not be too wide – so that they could reach across it comfortably.

Why not ask a local joiner to build a raised bed from old railway sleepers? Then you can enjoy easy, waist-height gardening without having to bend and stretch.



TIP Plant vertical walls of plants. This is a great way to make plants easier to reach. You can buy simple kits which attach to a fence or wall – or make your own!

Paths

Paths should ideally be wide, flat and level. Gradual slopes or wide steps are better than conventional steps. Handrails could also be installed if necessary on slopes or wide steps.

Bird feeders/other wildlife

Gardens are places to share with nature. It is easy to grow herbs and flowers to attract bees and butterflies. You can leave flower stalks for insects and woodpiles for hedgehogs and frogs – this gives you less work too! Bird feeders and nesting boxes will encourage more birds to come to the garden.

It's very easy to make some 'homes' for creatures using piles of sticks, stones, etc...if you have visiting grandchildren this is a fun activity for them.

Sturdy, comfortable seating/shaded areas

Gardens are not all about work! They should be a place to enjoy resting in, chatting, reading or eating. A suitable sturdy bench/table in a shady spot, maybe with comfy cushions, provides a welcome break for everyone. You can always sit with a cosy blanket to keep the chill off. If there is no natural shade see if you can get a gazebo or simple tarpaulin as a canopy.

“We need shelter from the sun and from the rain.”

“We have two seating areas – planned for the way the sun moves round – one is shaded, the other catches the late afternoon sun.”

“We got some fleecy waterproof blankets – now we can sit out in all weathers!”

Finding a landmark

If someone is beginning to feel confused about finding their way around a garden, try pointing out an easily recognisable landmark. This could be a unique tree, a scented herb bed or other feature.

You don't need expensive equipment!

You can make an excellent kneeling pad out of an old hot water bottle filled with scraps of cloth. Or go easier on the weeding – it's kinder to the wildlife!

Special tools

If you are struggling with your usual tools, there are special easy-grip ones available from sites like www.nrshealthcare.co.uk. You could always ask for some for a birthday present... or find some willing, more able volunteers!

The herb garden

People we spoke to told us how they love herbs. A walk round a herb border was always a delight for them, not just the smells but the sensation of brushing their hands against delicate herbs. Herbs can be planted in pots or raised beds – or even indoors.

“Smelly plants...and old-fashioned ones to spark memories.”



TIP Lazy gardening! You don't have to spend hours sweeping or raking up every single leaf – they will soon mulch down to provide nourishment for next year's growth, and shelter for wildlife. The same for old plant stalks – don't be too obsessive about cutting everything back. Bees and beasties will love sheltering in them over the winter.



TIP Plant hardy perennials (plants which will die back and flower every year) rather than annuals or bedding plants which need constant replanting. Good hardy perennials include lilies, hydrangea and red hot poker.



TIP Cut down on weeding! We spoke to people who suggested having low ground-cover plants which will spread, to avoid the need to weed. You could also cover ground around border plants with bark chips to suppress weed growth.

What can we plant?

Fragrant plants such as lavender, known for its soothing qualities, lemon sage, mint, lemon balm, jasmine or heritage roses are easy ways to bring scent to the air and stimulate the senses. All of these will also help encourage bees and butterflies too.



TIP Herbal tea. You can make some lovely infusions and teas with some of the herbs from the garden. Snip a few mint leaves and leave in hot water for 5 minutes (Always be sure you know what you are taking, and watch out for interactions with medication.)



TIP Share your garden. Sometimes as we get older, the garden can become too much for us. At the same time there may well be a local person or family who would appreciate the extra gardening space. Some areas have a 'Lend and tend' scheme, where suitable gardens and people are matched up. Ask around in your local area – make sure people are approved before you let them into your garden.



TIP Downsizing. Often as we get older it makes sense to move to a smaller, easier to manage house or flat – or sheltered housing. This shouldn't mean the end of your gardening career. You can still enjoy window boxes, pots or other small-scale, manageable beds.

Sharing memories

Seeing and smelling certain flowers and herbs can help people remember happy times, songs or old recipes. You could try old-fashioned cottage garden flowers – many of these will bloom every year with little maintenance. Plants like honesty, lavender, teasels and hydrangea can all be dried for year-round pleasure in a vase indoors.

“My gran always made lavender bags...the smell still reminds me of her garden.”

Avoid large dark areas

Dark paths or shady areas of dense planting can be difficult to see for some, and may seem uninviting and gloomy. Think about getting areas of big, looming bushes trimmed back to give a feeling of space and light.

“What a difference when we got the huge hedge cut back – I feel so much happier now I can see what’s beyond it!”

Avoid poisonous/thorny plants

This could include foxgloves, yew and other non-edible plants. If you do have them, try to keep them to the back of a bed, out of reach.

Cutting the grass

Sometimes people have to accept they are no longer able for the jobs they used to manage – you don’t want to punish yourself! Take a step back – pay a handyman, or find a willing neighbour, child or grandchild.

“After I’ve worked I sit on my outside chair with a comfy cushion and have a cup of tea.”

Other activities

There are so many interesting activities you can do in the garden! If you are no longer able for digging, you can still enjoy picking raspberries, feeding the birds, making lavender bags or dried herbs. You could also take part in a birdwatch or butterfly count. See below for details.

Picnics

It seems obvious, but you don't need to go far to enjoy a picnic. Food always tastes so much better outside – pack a flask, a sandwich and a comfy chair or cushion into the garden – and enjoy!

Indoor gardening

If you have a sunny window or sunroom, this is the perfect place to have a go at growing tomatoes and other greenhouse-friendly plants.

“I spend time every day transferring the pollen between the plants with a paintbrush – doing what the bees do!”

Labels

Sometimes it is easy to forget what you have planted where, whether this is in beds or in pots. You can use labels with a permanent marker, and clear writing with plant name and date planted.

“In the Secret Garden we've got slates with lines of poems 'planted' in the beds.”



TIP Find a local community garden. This can be a place to volunteer, enjoy a garden space, meet new people and share some chat. If you have recently downsized and miss your garden, why not find a community garden you can visit?

Garden Buddies

Are you a Garden Buddy? Would you like your group members to receive a certificate and badge in recognition of their efforts in a growing space for older or disabled people, or people living with dementia?

Please get in touch with ruth.n@otbds.org

Useful links and contacts

How to make a garden easier/dementia-friendly

Trellis (therapeutic gardening) https://www.trellisscotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/dementia_gardening_factsheet_2013_bw_0.pdf and tend.com for local garden sharing opportunities

Gardening for wildlife

Big Butterfly Count (July/August)

<https://www.bigbutterflycount.org>

Big Garden Birdwatch (January)

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/>

Froglife information on wildlife gardening

<https://www.froglife.org/info-advice/wildlife-gardening/>

Gardens to visit

Dawyck garden has an accessible route round some of the beautiful exotic plants and trees.

Community gardens

Peebles area

Community gardens There are many accessible or dementia-friendly community gardens in and around the Scottish Borders, here are a few:

Peebles CAN Garden, behind Victoria Park Day Centre – all welcome, to volunteer or just to sit and enjoy the garden.

The Secret Garden, Peebles – behind the British Heart Foundation – all welcome.

St Ronan's Wells Garden, Innerleithen – all welcome.

Community gardens in Peebles area, downloadable leaflet here: <http://www.tweedgreen.org.uk/community-garden>.

Abundant Borders Borders-wide garden projects for all, <http://abundantborders.org.uk/> for more information

Further afield

Edinburgh Botanic Garden of Tranquillity

<https://www.rbge.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/current/garden-of-tranquillity-a-sanctuary-for-dementia/>
or phone 0131 248 2956

Dumbarton Dementia-friendly Garden A beautiful allotment space in Dumbarton, with dementia-friendly layout and beds. Contact LCumming@Alzscot.org



Outside the Box

admin@otbds.org
www.otbds.org

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