

Scents And Sensibility

If your idea of a sensory garden is a few lavender bushes spilling over paths, here's one to make you think again

Gardening for people with disabilities has always been the Cinderella of the horticultural world. Until recently, designing a sensory garden would not have been considered one of a creative challenge. But, with the high profile makeover of Grove Park, Weston-super-Mare by BBC's *Ground Force* last year – in memory of television presenter Jill Dando – the sensory garden is about to take centre stage.

Gardens for the senses: touch, taste, hearing, smell and sight – are often created in public spaces but they are full of ideas that can be adapted for domestic gardens. By their very nature they tend to include lots of scented plants, the sound of water with a pool or bubble fountain and colours that can be adapted for domestic gardens. By their very nature they tend to include lots of scented plants, the sound of water with a pool or bubble fountain and colours that can be adapted for domestic gardens. By their very nature they tend to include lots of scented plants, the sound of water with a pool or bubble fountain and colours that can be adapted for domestic gardens.

The Weston-super-Mare garden was designed particularly for the older community and includes wide paths for easy access, lots of seating to encourage visitors to linger and an all year round planting scheme rich in colour, texture, aroma and sound. It is in essence a very traditional garden, with a central formal pool, rose covered pergolas and mixed shrub and perennial borders, yet it still fulfils its function to be accessible, visible and interesting for a wide range of people.

Across the other side of the country (and coincidentally in another seaside resort) the Boston Square Sensory Park in Hunstanton – has taken the idea of the sensory garden a stage further. Here, innovative planting and the latest technology are brought into the equation and the result is unashamedly contemporary. If your idea of a sensory garden is a few lavender bushes spilling over the edge of the path, this garden will make you think again. The idea behind

the site, belonging to the borough council, was to create a stimulating environment for everyone in Hunstanton, including those with special needs. Designer Rhona Fleming says, "By talking to local people it soon became clear that raised beds were a must, along with lots of seating for people to rest and enjoy the stunning views of the sea." Taking advantage of the natural slope, the site has been terraced into three distinct areas – a "cliff-top" of waving grasses, dark red phormiums and euphorbias; a central area of undulating grassy mounds and a lower, shingle garden to mirror the beach below.



Alan Titchmarsh and his BBC *Ground Force* team created a garden in memory of the late television presenter Jill Dando in her home town, Weston-super-Mare

A special feature is the tactile nature of the surfaces – tables and stones carved with the names of local herbs and plants, with plaques for Braille readers alongside. Water also plays an important part as it tumbles off the smooth marble table tops and shoots up in jets from the "rock

pool". I particularly liked the electronic sundial which chimes as your shadow falls over the stone numerals – a device that works as well for wheelchair users as it does for walkers. As you would expect in a sensory garden, scented plants have a role to play, but the colours are quite unexpected. "The plants need to have high contrast," says Rhona, "bright golden grasses next to orange crocosmias for example. The subtle, pastel palette of traditional herbaceous borders just doesn't work at all for partially-sighted people."

Gardens like the one at Hunstanton are helping to remove the stigma attached to gardens for disabled people. "This is a garden for everyone. Children love the water and the grassy mounds, while older people enjoy sitting in the enclosed spaces. We can all enjoy touching a stone or hearing the sound of grasses rustling in the wind. A sensory garden has something for all of us," says Rhona. Certainly, it's an aspect of gardening that we're going to see more of at this year's flower shows and exhibitions. Cinderella is, at last, going to the ball.

Boston Square Sensory Park, Hunstanton, is open daily. For more information on any aspect of the design, contact Jeremy Stacy Architects, 01366 328735. Jill Dando's Memorial Garden is part of Grove Park, Weston-super-Mare is also open daily.

What's New?

This is a great month for scanning the seed catalogues for something new to grow in the garden this spring and summer. Start sowing indoors from next month and you will have an array of colourful plants to put out on the patio when winter is finally over. There's a new variety of pansy



Above: Boston Square Sensory Park, Hunstanton, where innovative planting and the latest technology create a garden which appeals to all ages, helping to remove the stigma attached to gardens for disabled people



Dobies Seeds

from Devon-based seed merchants Dobies called 'Chalon Supreme'. Bred from plants nurtured by a French gardener, it has large flowers, ruffled petals and rich colours and is bound to be a success for pots or bedding.

Looking ahead to summer, there's a lovely new dwarf fox-