



Garden Activities in a Care Setting



Created by Rosemary and Time CIC



This guide has been prepared in order to assist you as an Activity Co-ordinator to plan and run inclusive gardening sessions for your residents.

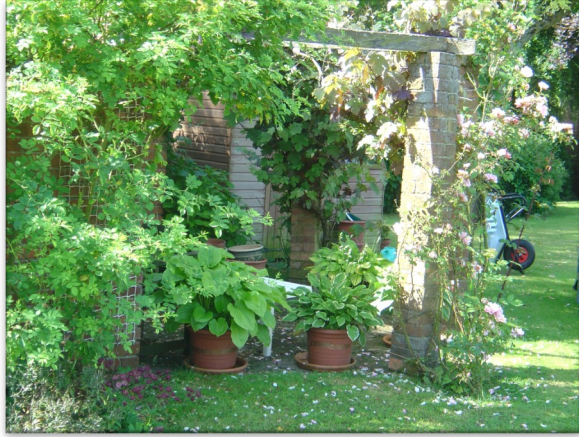
Running an effective gardening activity session within your care home can be challenging. Your residents will have a range of interests, ability levels and skills. Your staff, while appreciating the value of gardening, may lack the confidence in their own skills to deliver such an activity.

Hopefully this leaflet will help to make the task less daunting and more fun for all involved.

Why Gardening?

1. Gardening is often a hobby that has been part of a person's life since they were young. By continuing to garden it helps to maintain confidence in what they are able to achieve, it may need adapting, but it is still possible .
2. Many plants, vintage tools and the sensory experience of gardening can be a great reminiscence tool.
3. Gardening activities can be stimulating, calming , encourage conversations and be completely inclusive.
4. The activity prompts people to go outside, even just for a few minutes to check on what they have planted.





Gardening is not a spectator sport. No matter how small, some level of active engagement by your residents will have significant impact on their wellbeing. The sensory experience of having your hands in the compost, of smelling roses, lavender or herbs, or quietly listening to the birds in your grounds are just as valuable as physically gardening.

The temptation to take over an activity if someone is going slowly or not doing it precisely correct is natural.

Encourage those you are supporting to have a go at even just a small part of the activity, be it putting the soil into a pot or digging a small hole using the adapted trowel in a raised bed and popping a bulb in.

You will know each of your residents so well, and will have an idea of what they can achieve given a little time and flexibility in outcome. Remember that the garden session is not about producing the best hanging basket or the biggest tomatoes, it is about giving your residents the most engaging and rewarding time they can have.

A combination of garden based and table top activities will make it possible for you to engage with nature related all year round.



Quick Tips

- Break the activity down into simple steps, only putting on the table the supplies for that step.
- Engage as many of a residents senses as possible, take time to feel, look at and smell as many elements as appropriate.
- Focus on what a person can do for themselves or with minimal intervention, let them have this achievement.
- Keep the task small and simple so that you have time to really take it all in and enjoy the time spent together.
- Planting into pots inside that can be placed around the garden helps to not only include as many people as possible, but encourages a feeling of belonging. Where possible encourage residents to help maintain those pots, watering, dead heading, and harvesting flowers or food from them.
- Wherever possible ensure any containers planted up by the residents are visible from the window so that they can enjoy them.
- Use the session as a conversation starter - it may start to be about gardening but can move onto other topics quite easily.

- Use things like old seed catalogues and tools, photographs and traditional plants as a reminiscence session.
- Create a gardening display board with a combination of progress photos of your home's garden and sessions, along with pictures collected from residents or their family showing them in a garden in their childhood or as adults.
- Use plants that are more likely to evoke a memory or a feeling of recognition. I have included a list of suggested plants at the back of the leaflet.
- Include families wherever possible, ask them to send in pictures, share memories and stories of their loved one gardening, maybe even copies of certificates they may have one at flower and produce shows.
- Dry out your lavender flowers to make lavender bags for your residents to give to their family as a gift.



Not all activities have to be carried out indoors, at the table. It is beneficial to spend as much time outside as appropriate. Careful planning of your outside space, the use of adapted tools and realistic expectations of each session will make gardening not only possible, but enjoyable for your residents.

Adapted tools do not have to be expensive, and can often be made in house.



A simple garden cane with the planting distances of various crops marked on them. (these are beans, carrots and onions, but can be used for flowers too) Have some fun making these sticks together.

Use lighter versions, such as plastic rather than heavy wooden handled tools. Tools with ergonomically shaped handles or wrist cuffs can be helpful.



A litter picker can have so many uses in the garden, and longer handled versions of hand tools can aid reach for those gardening from a sitting position.

Other tips -

- Using a bulb planter for planting out small plants
- Covering tool handles with pipe insulation to aid comfort and grip
- Use a light coloured washing up bowl as a compost tray, it makes it easier to see the dark compost in it.
- When planting into pots, use lighter coloured ones to make it easier to see the level of compost in there.



- Use tools with bright coloured handles, or paint those you have, so they are easy to find when they have been put down in the garden.
- Do one task a number of times, such as taking cuttings or sowing seeds. The repetition can be calming and the routine can prompt independent completion of the task.
- Take your time and celebrate each achievement. Gardening is not about the results, it is about enjoying the activity itself.

Plant Suggestions

- Peonies
 - Heather
 - Forget-Me-Nots
 - Geraniums
 - Pelargoniums
 - Marigolds
 - Sweet Williams
 - Strawberries and raspberries
 - Rosemary
 - Herbs
 - Pinks and carnations
 - Lily of the valley
 - Lilac
 - Fuchsia
 - Lilies
 - Apple Tree
 - Primroses
 - Snap dragon
 - Lavender
 - Roses
 - Bluebells
 - Daffodils
 - Tulips
 - Sunflowers
 - Snowdrops
 - Honeysuckle
 - Sweet peas
 - Pansies
- Easily picked vegetables

 - Carrots, especially the miniature varieties
 - Radish
 - Cherry tomatoes
 - Salad leaves
 - Beans & peas

Dignity in Dementia is an award winning Cumbrian Community Interest Company that was set up in 2014. Our work focuses on enhancing the emotional and physical wellbeing of individuals with dementia in order to help them (and their family carers) live as normal and positive a life as possible. We believe that with the right support and opportunities, individuals can continue to live an enriched life, even as their dementia progresses.

In order to make this happen we have produced a range of Dementia Guides, including one for Care Homes and have also developed a range of innovative initiatives that include :

- Dementia Care Programmes for family carers that combine stress reduction strategies with practical dementia care guidance - both in person and via zoom.
- Dementia Care Programmes for professional care givers, both in person and via zoom.
- A Behaviour Support Service for family carers, that seeks to identify the triggers that can lead to challenging/unusual behaviours that may be exhibited by individuals with dementia and suggest solutions to reduce/remove them.
- The setting up and managing a range of dementia embracing community groups e.g. Singing, dancing, walking and reading groups that enable people with dementia to come together with people from their local community with a shared interest.

Since Covid we have continued to offer singing and poetry by zoom, together with one-to-one walks from a person's own home, a zoom gardening club and a weekly activities programme, which includes a mix of film clips, music and poetry. We also make regular telephone calls to those that are unable to access zoom and also provide a regular letter writing service, which involves sending friendly and chatty letters.

We also facilitate:

- Two Zoom support groups for family carers
- A monthly Care Home Managers Zoom Support Group
- A monthly Zoom group for Care Home Activity Co-ordinators



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