



## HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NSW

### FACT SHEET 6

## GARDENING WITH IMPAIRED VISION

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'Many people think that vision impairment will prevent them from enjoying their gardens. Not so! The French painter, Claude Monet, was an avid gardener who loved flowers almost as much as he did painting. Although Monet eventually lost most of his vision, he did not stop painting, nor did he ever lose his love for gardening. Vision impairment does not have to spoil your enjoyment of gardening, either' (Kaplan, 2007).

### **Moving around the garden:**

Ease & safety in moving around the garden is the first thing to consider. Provide accessible routes to the garden from indoors and to tool sheds. Design the garden so that ground surfaces that are smooth, firm, with good traction & level. Grass & loose materials (loose gravel, mulch) are not ideal as they can hide uneven ground. Timber decking and boardwalks can be slippery when wet.

Design pathways with clearly defined beginnings and ends. Offer detours to features of interest. Auditory cues from water features, or chimes can provide a means of orientation in the garden.

Path edges should have a distinct difference in texture, (e.g. smooth concrete to grass) to indicate their presence. Avoid raised edging which can be a tripping hazard.

Use a strip around 30 to 50 cm wide with a change in texture to indicate the presence of a seat, a patio or a feature of interest.

Garden structures such as raised beds, containers, planter boxes & vertical elements (e.g. trelliswork) can make gardening easier by bringing the soil & plants to within easy reach. Ideally these structures should be stable & heavy enough for gardeners to lean against. In particular the edge of a raised bed may be wide enough for gardeners to sit on & work.

### **Tools:**

Select tools that are lightweight, durable, safe & easy to use.

### **Plants:**

The layout of the plantings can help the visually impaired gardener locate & care for plants. For example, plant vegetables in evenly spaced rows. To assist spacing them, run a rope with evenly spaced knots and plant a seedling at each knot.

### **Planting Seedlings:**

- Feel the size of the root-ball with your hands. Dig a hole of matching size, with your trowel or hand & insert the root-ball. The top of the root-ball should be the same level as the rest of the garden soil.
- When sowing small seeds, lay them in a row, and then gently cover with a light layer of soil. When planting large seeds, push the seed into the soil to the depth 2-3 times the size of the seed. Seed tapes make it even easier (available from some nurseries & seed order companies). Lay the tape in a straight line & gradually the paper tape will biodegrade.
- Tag plants with label to help you identify them. Waterproof labels that can be printed with large letters are available, as are labelers that can imprint plastic tape in Braille or large print.

### **Watering Plants:**

Group plants with similar watering needs together. Use a hose (taking care to keep the hose off paths as they can be a trip hazard) or a lightweight watering can. Feel with your hand along the rim of the container plants to make sure you do not over-water. Insert your finger into the soil to feel how moist or dry it is. Drip irrigation tubes can be run along the garden.

Time how long it takes for water to reach the base of the root system, then you can set the irrigation system on automatic.

### **Weeding:**

There are several strategies to help identify weeds. For example planting in evenly spaced rows as anything growing in between spaces is probably a weed. Mulch the soil surface (e.g. with leaf litter, bark chips) to suppress weed growth (this also improves soil structure & moisture retention).