



CULTIVATE
HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NSW
FACT SHEET 7
SENSORY GARDENS

What is a sensory garden? The world is a sensory garden.

Our senses allow us to perceive & experience the world. There are five traditional sensory modes: sight, smell, touch, taste & sound. But there are other senses, less commonly talked of, just as powerful, if more subtle: the haptic sense (awareness of our body in space), gravity, temperature, space & enclosure.

All gardens simulate the senses, to a greater or lesser degree. You can design your garden to enhance this sensory panoply (the quality & nature of its spaces, boundaries, climate, materials, plants & fauna). If one of your senses is limited, you can explore other ways of making the garden full of sensory pleasures & curiosities.

A sensory trail provides a similar but more a structured sensorial journey, compared to a sensory garden. Along a sensory trail, different senses are sequentially stimulated & aroused (often encouraging you to explore texture, listen acutely for sounds, experience smells & a variety of spaces).

The following list, by no means complete, suggests ways of enhancing the sensory dynamics of your garden.

Visual attributes:

Colour, contrast, luminosity, form, shape.

- Colour can be used to create the mood and sense of spaciousness of your garden, as well as for accent. Colour contrast (opposite on the colour wheel), colour harmony (close on the colour wheel), and colour temperature (cool or warm colours), colour intensity are all variables that can be explored.
- Colour is not the sole preserve of flowers. Plant foliage & bark are just as important.
- Plants with interesting foliage colour include:
 - Acacias (dark green to glaucous)

- Grasses (Poa, Festuca glauca, Stipa).
- Cordylines (red, variegated)
- Bromeliads (many colours)
- Deciduous species such as Melia, Acer.

Shape & form:

The shape of garden spaces, whether linear, geometric or curved and flowing have an impact on how one moves through space and the apprehension of it. The shape of garden elements, including the built structures such as paths, boundaries, garden beds as well as plants all contribute. Build smooth or abrupt edges, minimalist or curlicued, all these can be played with.

Texture:

Plants with interesting textures include:

- Rough & smooth barked barked Eucalyptus
- Lagerstroemia indica = crepe myrtle
- Gordonia axillaris =
- Melaleuca = paperbarks
- Succulents

Plants with interesting seed heads, pods, fruit:

- Casuarina = she oaks
- Banksia serrata = old man banksia
- Banksia robur = swamp banksia
- Stachys lanata = lambs ears
- Callistemon = bottlebrushes
- Pelargonium = geraniums
- Mosses

Taste:

There are many edible ornamental plants. Some obvious examples are vegetable, fruit & herbs. These plants are highly decorative as well as productive. Edible plants are rewarding to grow. Some do not require too much care and are very decorative. Examples are:

- Beetroot

- Lettuces
- Rhubarb
- Shallots
- Silverbeet
- Syzygium = lillypillies

Aromatic Plants:

Flowers are not the only sources of garden scents. Many plants have aromatic foliage, culinary herbs being just one example. Examples of plants with fragrant flowers and/or foliage are given below:

Herbs for scent:

- Thymus =thyme
- Majorum = marjoram
- Mentha = mints
- Nasturtium
- Lavandula = lavender
- Rosmarinus = rosemary

Trees and shrubs for scent:

- Backhousia citriodora (lemon-scented leaves) = lemon scented myrtle
- Darwinia citriodora (lemon-scented leaves)
- Eriostemon myoporoides = waxflower
- Eucalyptus species e.g. peppermints
- Gardenia sp.
- Heliotrope arborescens = cherry pie
- Leptospermum petersonii (lemon-scented leaves) = lemon scented teatree
- Murraya paniculata (fragrant flowers)
- Pelargonium (many with scented foliage)
- Plumeria rubra (fragrant flowers) = frangipani
- Prostanthera sp. = native mint bushes
- Thryptomeme saxicola
- Tulbaghia
- Viola odorata = violet

Plants with Movement:

- Grasses
- *Poa labillardieri*
- *Isolepis nodosa*
- *Stipa*
- *Themeda australis* (Kangaroo Grass)
- Perennials (tall, wispy varieties):
- Cosmos (especially chocolate scented *Cosmos atrosanguineus*)
- *Salvia patens*, *S. uliginosa*, many others

Interesting Climbers:

- *Akebia quinata* (chocolate scented flowers)
- *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (scented) = star jasmine
- *Hoya carnosa* (waxy pretty flowers)

Fauna attracting plants:

Butterfly attracting plants include:

- *Austrodanthonia* = Wallaby Grass
- *Chrysocephalum* (*Helichrysum*)
- *Lomandra*
- *Pimelea* = Rice Flower
- *Poa*
- *Stylidium graminifolium* = Trigger Plant
- *Themeda australis* = Kangaroo Grass
- *Xanthorrhoea* = grass tree

Birds are attracted to small leafed native plants including:

- *Acacia*
- *Callistemon*
- *Correa*
- *Grevillea*
- *Hakea*
- *Correas*
- *Banksias*
- *Callistemon*

Plants to propagate:

Succulents are easy to propagate from cuttings, & frequently require minimal care or watering. There are many varieties with extraordinary textures & forms, well worth experimenting with in the garden.

Suggestions for getting started:

- Begin with easy care plants & seek advice from local nurseries.
- Native Plants: Try planting species indigenous to your area, as they are often well adapted to the climatic conditions.
- Poisonous & Dangerous Plants: Avoid plants with thorns, and toxic parts, especially if children visit the garden.
- Weeds: Always consider consulting a garden designer or your local nursery to assist with plant selection suitable for your climate, location and needs. Some species grown outside their natural habitat are considered noxious or environmental weeds. Consult your local council for information on weed species in your area.

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