

Garden Friendly

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Hey all you community gardeners! How many of your gardens accommodate someone in your neighborhood that is physically handicapped? I'll bet you didn't think about making your gorgeous community garden accessible to those of us who have physical difficulties. Why not offer a chance to enjoy the love of gardening to someone who is handicapped? The famous garden writer Gertrude Jekyll wrote, "The love of gardening is a seed once sown never dies ..." So let us offer a garden experience to someone less mobile in our community. No matter what our physical condition, what guides us to our gardens is the ability to grope the earth, and revel in a bed of melons while admiring our dirty fingernails.

A garden indulges our senses. It offers unlimited creativity, and a chance to learn. Gardening builds a better understanding of nature, and this learning often leads to a healthier garden. It is gratifying to grow, and tend something. You can not fail to wonder about how a tiny seed can sprout and develop into colorful blooms, tasty salad fixings, or a delicious melon? Here is how to increase accessibility.

Accessibility



Raised Beds. If you or a neighbor is physically challenged, then make gardening accessible. For folks who can't crawl around in a garden the answer is for you to help get the dirt to them. What you need to do is set up some raised beds, and paved path. You now are letting the handicapped have accessibility to your fun. Raised beds bring plants closer for observation and crops closer for harvesting. This is important for folks using wheelchairs. The raised beds can be made of brick, cinder blocks, stone or wood. They should be no more than four feet across for easy access from both sides and 2 feet high. Fill the beds with good top soil and compost. Incorporate seating throughout the garden. You can also provide arbors and grow plants vertically. Raised gardens bring the plants up to the people. Some points to remember in planning a raised bed are:

- Place beds in places where they will receive full sunlight for at least 6 hours per day, or, if space in sunlight is unavailable, use shade-tolerant plants;
- Water regularly as raised beds require more watering than traditional gardens, be sure to keep plants well hydrated;
- Incorporate fertilizer into the soil when the beds are first filled;
- Mulch well to cut down on evaporation of water and rain splash on the soil that will deposit diseases on the plants; and
- Avoid the use of chemicals in pest control.



Containers. If a raised bed isn't an option, develop a container garden. Containers can be made from a variety of things such as large pots, planters, barrels, milk jugs, and recycled Styrofoam coolers, pieces of drainage pipe or cinderblocks. Treat the containers like you would a flower pot. Make sure they can drain water.

Care. When the raised beds or planters are planted, they will require some care. When it is dry, or very hot out, give the raised bed a good soaking in the morning or evening, but never during the hottest part of the day. Once a month add a little fertilizer to your beds so they keep producing lots of flowers and vegetables. Dead-head your flowers as they start to fade. Take off the old, dead flowers and your plants will continue to make new ones.



Paths. Next, you need to decide what type of paths to build between and around the raised beds or containers. Garden pathways for the handicapped are a must. They provide an easy way in and out of the garden. A more permanent path is made of a brick or patio stone. This keeps weeds down, doesn't need to be replaced, and wheelchairs can easily get around on it. A disadvantage to this is that it is more labor intensive and expensive to install. Garden pathways should:

- Be firm, level and smooth;
- Have grades not exceeding a 5 percent rise in elevation (i.e. 5 feet rise in 100 feet of length);
- Have an accessible width for someone in a wheelchair or using the assistance of a walker to easily turn around (i.e. 4 feet);
- Be clear from the beginning and end to your pathway;
- Have a textured surface for better traction;
- Have seating areas along the pathway for rest breaks; and
- Have ample drainage off your pathway so water doesn't puddle.

Gardening is a wonderful activity for individuals with disabilities. Why not decide today to make your community garden more accessible. Your reward may only be a smile, but at least you know you have helped enrich your neighbor's life.

Source: Maryland Cooperative Extension.

<http://extension.umd.edu/local/BaltimoreCity/files/Garden%20Friendly%2007.doc>