

# Accessible Gardening: Access-orize!

## What is Accessible Gardening?

Accessible gardening is matching how you garden with what you can do and how you can do it. It takes physical barriers out of gardening. It reshapes traditional gardening to fit how a person can garden and in the ways that are most comfortable for the gardener. It creates gardens that people of all ages and abilities can enjoy. Accessible garden designs are based on who will be using it, what for, and why. Accessible gardening aims to be inclusive, meaning that designs try to make gardening as comfortable as possible for as many people as possible. Its goal is for everyone to enjoy the garden, even with changes and adaptations.

For example, if you have trouble stooping or bending over, you may want to consider using raised garden beds or trellises. In this case, your goal may be to redesign your garden for easier movement. Some designs and adaptations are very specific to individuals, like plant ID tags written in Braille. Others make gardening more enjoyable for everyone, like putting foam on tool handles so that any person using the tool can grip it more easily.

There are different types of accessible garden designs that fit different abilities. To design an accessible garden, think about what you can do; what is challenging for you to do; what assistive devices you use, such as a cane, wheelchair, walker, hearing aid, eyeglasses; what changes are needed to make gardening possible and comfortable; and what gardening technique fits your capabilities.

- Do you have limited mobility, such as trouble walking, keeping your balance, arthritis, bad knees? Consider putting wide, hard walkways in your garden. Accessible walkways for wheelchairs should be three feet wide (36 inches). To turn a wheelchair completely around comfortably, consider widening your pathway to five feet. For two way traffic, the rule of thumb is to make your walkway at least seven feet wide.



## What is Accessible Gardening? (continued)

- For anyone who has poor balance or difficulty walking, walkways are best built out of a hard, smooth, and flat material. Concrete and brick are good materials to use because wheelchairs and walkers can smoothly roll on them. These surfaces are also easier for people with poor balance to walk on. Walkways made of brick and concrete lessen the chance of tripping, especially for those with low vision. Stay away from wood if you can. Wood can be slippery when wet.
- The slope of your walkway can also affect how easy it is for people to get around your garden. A safe grade to keep your walkways at is between five and eight percent. Walkways can include areas between garden beds and rows, and paths to, from, and around the garden. If you have ramps in your garden, keep slope in mind. Five percent grade is the steepest that most people using wheelchairs find comfortable and safe.
- Do you have low vision or are you blind? There are several things you can include in your garden that can help people with low vision or blindness get around and enjoy it. Plants with bright flowers or strong fragrances placed around the garden can help people orient themselves while in the garden. Wind chimes and foundations can help, too. Large print for plant identification tags and signs around the garden are easier to read for people with low vision.





- Is it easier to garden while sitting down? Raised beds and containers bring the garden to you. Lifting raised beds and containers three and one half feet off the ground makes it easy to fit chairs under the container's edge. This lets the gardener reach into the middle of the bed to tend to the plants while sitting. You can also garden while standing by raising raised beds and containers to a comfortable waist height.
- Are general gardening chores, like weeding and watering, becoming harder to do? Think about making your garden bed dimensions smaller. You will not have to do as much

weeding and watering if your garden beds are narrower. Consider making your beds two of your arm lengths wide. This width lets you reach every spot in the bed comfortably without having to step into the bed. Most people can reach the middle of beds that are four feet wide without having to lean or stretch too far. If a two foot reach is uncomfortable, then measure how far you can reach without feeling pain. Make your bed twice the length of your comfortable reach so you can garden from either side of the bed.



## Time and Body Saving Tricks

Simple changes can make a big difference in making gardening more comfortable.

- Plant your garden closer to your house. Store tools and supplies near by.
- Raise your outside water spigot two to three feet above the ground. This will cut down on having to bend over.
- Replace round handles on spigots with hand levers. This will make turning on and off water less painful, especially if you have arthritis in your hands and wrists.
- Use mulch to cut down on how much you have to water and weed.
- Bring the garden to you. Every chore is easier on your lower back when your hands stay between your

shoulders and waist. The closer your hands stay to your body, the better it is for your back.

- Have plenty of seating in your garden. Put benches, stools, or chairs throughout the garden. This is especially important in a public garden, or a garden that has a lot of visitors, such as senior and community centers and high-rise apartments.
- Consider wearing a whistle while gardening. This is a great way to call for help, especially if you are gardening alone.



All printed materials are available in braille, electronic format, CD and large print.

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## Resources

For more design ideas and information on all of the accessible gardening suggestions found in this fact sheet, check out:

- *Accessible Gardening: Tips and Techniques for Seniors and Disabled*, a book by Joann Woy
- *Enabling Garden*, a book by Gene Rothert
- Visit **[www.gardenforever.com](http://www.gardenforever.com)** for articles and tips on designing and caring for gardens for people of all ages, abilities, and lifestyles.

If you would like to talk to someone about accessible gardening, or would like a garden assessment done, call Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints at **800-841-8436**.