

Creating a sensory garden

Sensory gardens - quiet and relaxing, a place to go and be lulled to sleep on a sunny day or bright, bold and interactive.



Planning a sensory garden

Whatever atmosphere you decide to create, they're great fun to plan and plant and are the perfect way to [get kids into gardening](#).

Before you get too carried away stocking up on sweet-smelling flowers and rough, rustling grasses, have a think about what you want from your sensory garden. How big are your ambitions? Are you hoping to transform the entire garden or would it be more effective to just focus your efforts on a smaller section or trail?

Who's it for? Little ones will love bright colours and interesting textures but steer clear of thorns and spiky plants. Older children, adults (and even pets!) might like somewhere to sit and enjoy the garden, while those with reduced mobility might benefit from having a path or paved area.



How will it be used? Will you just pass through for a quick explore from time to time, or would you like little projects like growing herbs, fruit and veg to keep you coming back regularly? You may only want to use it in the warmer months. Or perhaps want plants flowering and providing interest all year round.

How will it be maintained? Do you need low-maintenance plants that look after themselves or are you keen to carefully watch and nurture some special varieties?

Sight

Whether it's the colour of flowers, the shape of leaves or patterns of light and shade, sight is usually the first sense by which we enjoy gardens.

Colour

There's more to colour in the garden than flower petals. Shrubs, trees and even things like berries, bark, lichen and moss can add a splash of colour to your sensory garden. Footpaths, fences and benches can also be decorated or varnished in interesting shades. Think about how all these things look wet and dry, too.

For the biggest impact, choose contrasting colours from opposite sides of the colour wheel - for instance putting bright golden marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*) in the same bed as dark purple pansies (*Viola*).

Otherwise, choose a central colour and add complementary tones, for instance a bed of pink geraniums dotted with purple petunias, or perhaps a mix of pinks (*Dianthus*) with common harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*).



Remember colours are said to influence mood, so decide if you'd like hot, energetic colours like reds, oranges and yellows, or cool, calming ones like blue, green and white.

Pattern and shape

As well as creating patterns with your planting or paving, variegated plants and shade from overhanging branches will add to the mix. Garden ornaments and containers can also bring another dimension to patterns and shapes.

Leaves

Maple (*Acer buergerianum*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) trees all have easily identifiable leaves which are perfect for pressing or tracing. The chameleon plant (*Houttuynia cordata*), pictured below, has stunning three-toned leaves (but keep an eye on it or it'll over-run the garden) while Swiss chard (*Beta vulgaris subsp. cicla*) 'Bright Lights' is as tasty as it is beautiful with its rainbow-coloured stems.



Flowers and petals

Planting a mixture of daisies (*Bellis perennis*), alliums, bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and snapdragons (*Antirrhinum majus*) will give you a great variety of shapes and colours to enjoy.

Seeds

Sycamore seeds, conkers and pine cones are fun to sketch or play with.

Touch

Soft, smooth and silky or rough, spiky and even sticky, there are so many textures to explore in the garden you might have trouble narrowing down your choice of plants. Think about touch when you add other details too - from paths and seats to water features and ornaments.

When you choose your plants, don't just think about flowers and foliage - how about berries, bark, seeds and twigs, too? Try to get a good mix of textures.

Hard

The tightly-wound flowers of the houseleek (*Sempervivum*) 'Commander Hay' are rigid to the touch.

Soft

The leaves of silver sage (*Salvia argentea*) are covered in a soft cotton wool-like down.

Rough

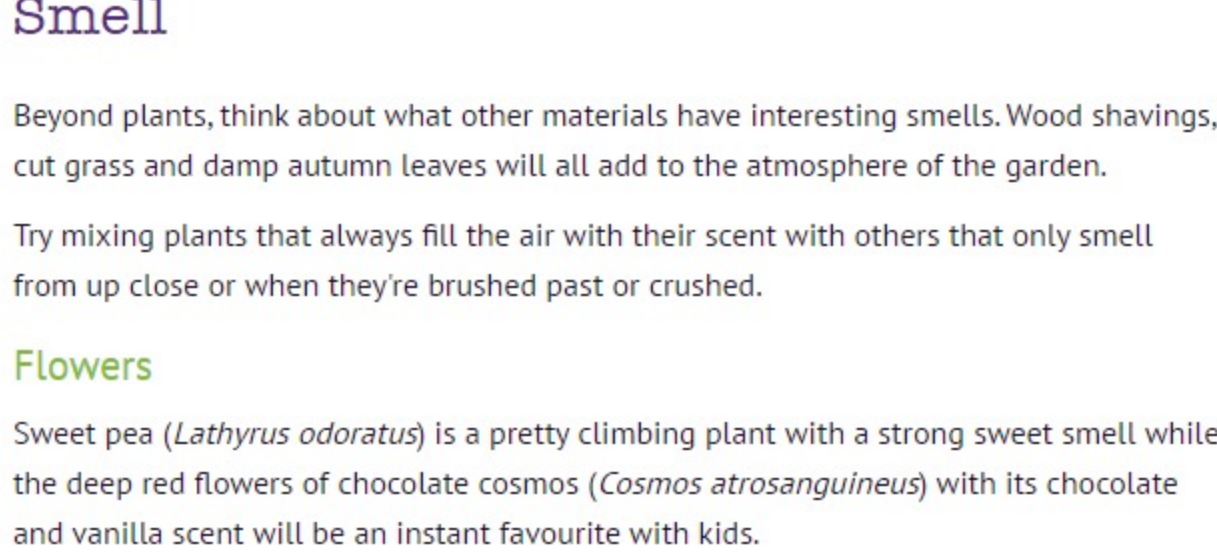
The shaggy, peeling bark of the paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) is lovely and scratchy.

Smooth

Lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantine*) has smooth silky leaves and is covered in soft hairs.

Sticky

The carnivorous African sundew (*Rosera capensis*) catches prey with its sticky leaves.



Smell

Beyond plants, think about what other materials have interesting smells. Wood shavings, cut grass and damp autumn leaves will all add to the atmosphere of the garden.

Try mixing plants that always fill the air with their scent with others that only smell from up close or when they're brushed past or crushed.

Flowers

Sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*) is a pretty climbing plant with a strong sweet smell while the deep red flowers of chocolate cosmos (*Cosmos atrosanguineus*) with its chocolate and vanilla scent will be an instant favourite with kids.

Shrubs

The smell of lavender (*Lavandula*) drifting by on the breeze will make warm, summer days even more relaxing and bright yellow deciduous azaleas (*Rhododendron luteum*) are beautifully fragrant.

Herbs

Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*), lemon thyme (*Thymus citriodorus*) and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) all give off distinctive aromas on warm days or when the leaves are gently rolled between your fingers



Taste

Fruit and veg are the obvious contenders when it comes to choosing tasty plants but there are plenty of edible flowers and leaves around too.

Just be careful if you're planting for children and be sure to explain which plants they can eat and which they mustn't touch. Creating an edible area like a herb garden can help avoid any confusion, otherwise go for instantly recognisable crops like tomatoes and strawberries.

If in any doubt at all, please ask at one of our garden centres before planting anything you plan to eat.

Fruit

Small wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*) are perfect for foraging little fingers while tomatoes come in all sorts of sizes and colours from sweet juicy cherry tomatoes like 'Sweet Million' to the aptly named 'Tigerella' (Mr Stripey) variety.

Vegetables

Carrots, potatoes and runner beans are great for growing with kids, while radishes are ready to eat within a month - perfect for impatient types.

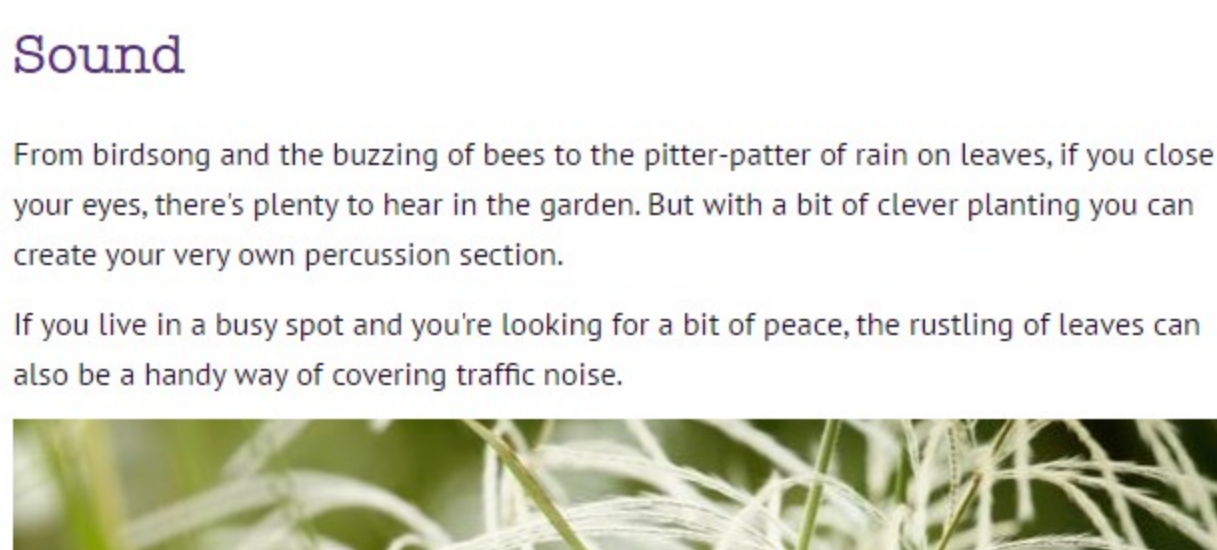


Flowers

Bright, peppery nasturtiums add a lovely splash of colour to salads and don't forget to pick the flowers when you gather your chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) - the pretty purple pom-poms also have a delicate onion-y flavour.

Leaves

Herbs and spices like mint (*Mentha spicata*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) and garlic mustard (*Alliaria officinalis*) will all taste familiar but how about nibbling the young leaves (be careful, they get bitter as they age!) of lawn daisies (*Bellis perennis*), cowslips (*Primula veris*) or nasturtiums?



Sound

From birdsong and the buzzing of bees to the pitter-patter of rain on leaves, if you close your eyes, there's plenty to hear in the garden. But with a bit of clever planting you can create your very own percussion section.

If you live in a busy spot and you're looking for a bit of peace, the rustling of leaves can also be a handy way of covering traffic noise.



Swish

Tall grasses like *Miscanthus* and greater quaking grass (*Briza maxima*) make a lovely rustling sound, even in gentle breezes, as do fine-leaved trees like birch (*Betula papyrifera*) and *Robinia*.

Rattle

The pretty blue flowers of love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*) transform into seed-filled pods that rattle when shaken.

Clunk

Bamboo (*Phyllostachys*) makes a lovely hollow knocking sound when it bumps together and bigger canes can be turned into wind chimes.

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We think you'll like...



Gardening with children

Whether they're two or twelve, gardening with children can be great fun. And the best thing is, you don't have to be an expert yourself to get the kids exploring outdoors.



Create a kitchen garden

A kitchen garden gives you a regular supply of cheap, great-tasting and healthy food. And you can have one of your own even if you've only got a small space.



Planting for winter scent

Plants that flower in winter are always a joy. They're often beautifully scented and attract any insects that brave the winter cold.