

## Creating an accessible and inclusive station garden

Creating and tending to gardens and green spaces is a common activity for station friends' groups across the rail network, and nurturing these activities accounts for thousands of volunteer hours every year. Research has shown that involvement in gardening can help to improve people's physical and mental health, as they feel better from being outside in the fresh air, being in touch with nature, and socialising with others.

This bitesize resource offers some practical tips you might consider to make your garden or green space as accessible and inclusive as possible, allowing everyone to get involved.



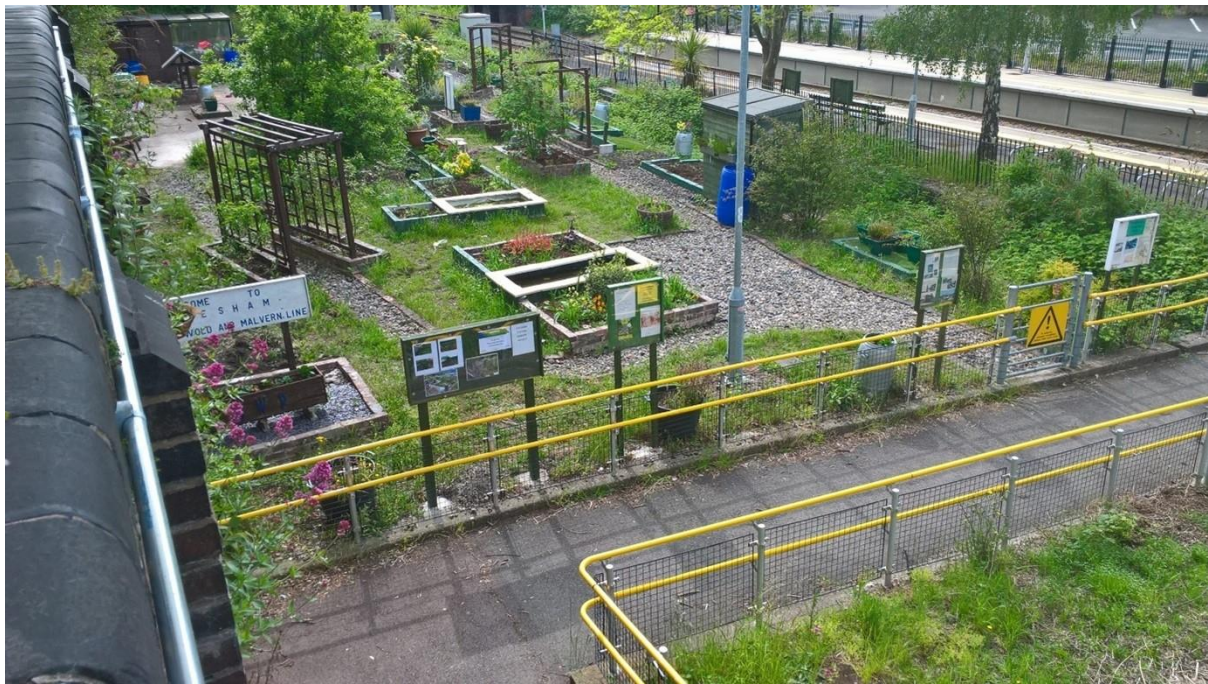
### Tips for 'enabled' gardening and accessible garden design:

- When considering pathways and routes through a garden or green space, try to ensure the surface is smooth, stable, even, and non-slip to allow comfort and ease of access. Avoid loose materials such as gravel. Make pathways wide enough – somewhere between 1-1.5m – to accommodate wheelchair users or people to walk side-by-side;
- If your garden or green space is on different levels, use ramps, gradual slopes, or shallow, deep steps to allow people to navigate different areas. Where there are changes in levels, think about installing handrails for guidance and support. Try to position these at least 1m before the start of a first step or start of a ramp;
- Highlight the edges of paths/steps/ramps and borders to create boundaries between different areas and surfaces. This can provide useful guidance for those with sight issues or limited mobility;

- Have plenty of seats to allow people to take regular breaks, and where possible, try to incorporate both sunny and shaded areas;
- Use raised beds to allow people to easily access them without having to elevate or lower themselves. In terms of dimensions, plant beds should be between 24 and 30 inches in height to cater for wheelchair users and people who have difficulties bending and reaching. Beds should generally be between 3 and 5 feet wide, and 10 to 20 feet long. You could consider adding seating to the edges of the beds if possible to improve ease of access. Alternatives to raised beds include tabletop gardens (essentially shallow raised beds on legs that allow for easy wheelchair access) or container gardening, which can suit gardeners with more limited mobility;
- Try vertical gardening, where plants are grown up walls and/or fences, to reduce the need for reaching down and bending over, and to limit floor space clutter. Creating these 'living walls' is a great way to accommodate a range of climbing plants. If you choose pots or hanging baskets, you could also incorporate a very simple pulley system that allows gardeners to lower and raise them for watering and pruning;
- Think about the tools you need, and try to make them as safe and easy-to-use as possible. Go for tools that are lightweight, easy-to-grasp, with a comfortable grip. You could also modify tools to make them easier to use, e.g. by placing foam tubes over handles to aid grip, or attaching cord to handles to prevent dropping. Also consider how tools can easily be moved around the garden, e.g. by a lightweight wheelbarrow or gardening trolley.



## Think sensory



Gardens can not only be environments that foster activity and interest, they can also be therapeutic places where people can come to relax, de-stress, and enjoy some quiet time in the outdoors. All gardens appeal to the senses in some way, but some groups responsible for creating and maintaining station gardens are now incorporating elements to maximise their sensory appeal and have a positive impact on the wellbeing of visitors and volunteers alike.

Sensory gardens include features, surfaces, objects, and plants that stimulate the senses through touch, sight, scent, taste, and sound. Some ideas to make your garden appeal to the senses include:

- Touch – make the most of different surfaces and textures, and incorporate contrasting elements that are hard, soft, smooth, rough, solid, or fluid. The options here are hugely varied, such as rough twigs, stones, bark, smooth petals, slate, leaf, fluffy grass flowers etc. Also think about plants that can be touched often without any irritation, and elements such as water features, which can be wonderful for engaging touch and offer a real contrast;
- Sight – think about colours, textures, shapes, sizes, movement, light, and shadow. Blocks of vibrant colour allow visual pleasure even for those with sight loss conditions, with yellow said to be the most visible shade those with limited sight. Select specific colour schemes to create different ambiances, e.g. bright oranges, yellows and reds for energy and stimulation, and blues, greens, and whites for more calming areas;
- Scent – Enhance the sensory experience by using a wide variety of different plants and flowers, ranging from strong scents that fill the air and can be smelt without

touching the plant, to more delicate scents where the flowers need to be investigated and smelt up close. Also consider other familiar garden smells that can stir the senses such as pond water, wood shavings, autumn leaves, and freshly cut grass;

- Taste – consider whether your garden could incorporate fresh herbs, vegetables, fruits, or edible flowers. Many varieties can be grown in small spaces such as pots or hanging baskets, and fresh herbs can be grown for large parts of the year, offering gentle scent as well as taste;
- Sound – consider both sounds that occur naturally and those that can be activated by people. Natural sounds could include rustling leaves, swaying plants and trees, or running water, while artificial sounds could include elements such as wind chimes and sound sculptures/fences. Also consider wildlife, and add elements that encourage interactions with your garden, e.g. the planting of pollinators to hear the buzzing of bees, and bird boxes, baths, or feeders to encourage birds and birdsong.

## Think community



Think about how you could make your station garden an inclusive and welcoming environment that encourages social interaction and is appealing to all sections of the

communities it serves. What could instil a sense of pride in the garden, link it to the community, and ensure it is a place where people may want to spend their time, even when not catching a train. The best way to do this is to effectively engage with people to see what they want from the garden and/or green space, but some ideas you might consider could be:

- Community food growing – community gardens can offer a great way of demonstrating where food comes from and showing the link between growing and eating. Consider whether you could incorporate some sort of community food growing scheme, or get involved with something like the ‘Incredible Edible’ movement;
- Educational space – could part of your garden be used as an educational space, e.g. a learning zone full of exciting things that stimulate the senses and can be used by a whole host of community groups;
- A space for nature and wildlife – could your garden help to support local biodiversity and wildlife habitats, e.g. by becoming ‘Bee-Friendly,’ and act as a base for environmental projects and volunteering activity;
- Encouraging social interactions – does your garden encourage people to spend time there, and how could this be enhanced? Do you have somewhere to sit and relax? Could you incorporate talking or ‘chatty’ benches, which provide a place for people to connect? Is there a space where you could potentially hold social events that could be enjoyed by all sections of the community?
- Eye-catching displays – could you add some form of display that promotes inclusivity and adds character and a talking point to your garden? This could include artwork, statues, poetry, storyboards, anything that adds a point of interest, captures a sense of local character and/or history, and grabs people’s attention. Is there a way in which all sections of the community, including those with disabilities and additional needs, could come together to contribute? E.g. to different art/other creative exhibitions across the year.



## References

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