

## Designing for all Five Senses

Close your eyes to enjoy a garden for what you hear, feel, smell and taste. Use what your senses tell you to improve your garden experience, designs, and maintenance in all those dimensions.

### I. How all your best sense can improve a garden

Let's talk: See if together we can expand this list of techniques.

#### **A. Feel: Increasing the tactile quality of a garden:**

Use a distinctive surface for the walkway that leads from door to garden.

Consider changes in paving at significant places such as intersections.

Place rails at steps.

Use hip-high (hanging-hand high) sculpture or posts at intervals, or guide rope/chain strung between posts long one side of the path.

Put a low-rise curb along the path edge, so a toe touch tells you the way.

Plant wiry sub-shrubs along the path edge (a low curb guides a questing foot)

Hang mobiles along paths, just overhead -- reachable telltales, not head bangers.

Plant soft plants at intersections, corners, and near seating areas. Huggables.

Eliminate plants that have a feel you don't like, and those like them.

Seek and plant more plants and non-plant features with attractive feel. Your preference between smooth twigs and corky twigs, open branching and dense twiggy, pliable tips and stiffer even claw-like branch ends, fuzzy surfaces and thorny, etc.

Prune to elevate trees and shrubs, keeping paths clear so no one might be poked and there's less chance of spider webs grazing a face.

Don't use bamboo stakes and other sharp rods in a garden where people will be bending down to touch plants.

Plant a groundcover that has a contrasting feel beneath a shrub or taller perennial -- felty lambsear under stiff, smooth leaves of boxwood, etc.

#### **B. Upping the sound factor in a garden:**

Block undesirable sound with dense twiggy barriers or berms.

Mask unwanted sound with more pleasant "white noise" such as ornamental grasses' rustling or a water feature with a spray or fall. (Remember that any water sounds are very noticeable, even the drip of a leaky bucket can be rigged as a soothing feature.)

Create an easy listening space -- place a chair where your ear tells you a person can most readily enjoy the sound of swishing stems, fluttering leaves, crickets, etc. are most easily heard.

Tune your wind chimes by moving the clapper higher or lower.

Create reasons to be out in a garden early in the morning before neighborhood sounds increase.

When you shop for power tools, make increased muffling a criteria. Electric is quieter than gas, and decibel levels are specified on packaging of noise-reduced equipment.

Keep oil handy for squeaky wheels, chair rockers, etc.

### **C. Doing more with garden fragrance:**

Line paths with aromatic foliage that release fragrance when touched by toe, hand or hip.

Place scented plants upwind, so breezes carry downwind to primary viewers. Create morning sitting areas, to be near plants when still air allows fragrance to linger.

Make a centerpiece for your patio table where you can put fragrant twigs, foliage or flowers near a burning candle, allowing the warmth to release their scent.

Eliminate plants that displease your nose! Look for more like those you enjoy. Cut flowers in bud to enjoy in the house, if you have noticed that what smells good outdoors becomes overpowering indoors -- fragrance ages and it is often the case that we like the scent of a young flower but not that of the aging bloom.

Consider the time of day a plant releases its scent. Some pollinated by night flyers such as moths are best enjoyed in the late afternoon and evening.

Water the garden the *day* before a party, not immediately before, as dry, warm foliage and flowers are often more pungent.

### **D. Taste-enhancers:**

Acquaint your family and friends with unusual edibles in your yard, such as pansy flowers, lemon balm leaves, fennel stems and serviceberry fruit.

Conduct taste tests with what you learn is edible. Put calendula flowers and dandelion leaves into your salad, taste the apples from your tree, etc.

Cut stems from herb plants and hang them to dry in your home.

## **II. More lists, charts and fun facts**

We've posted Sense-ational extras for your use on our website, [www.GardenAtoZ.com](http://www.GardenAtoZ.com). (Search "Design five senses".)

Included in those extras:

**Ear to the Ground: Sound in a Garden:** Janet Macunovich sounds off about what we hear in gardens. Including tidbits and short takes on garden sound.

**Elements of Scents-ible Design:** Janet Macunovich describes elements of scents-ible ways to increase and enjoy garden fragrance. With:

- Tidbits and short takes on garden scent
- Fragrances classified and examples of plants in each category
- Oddball fragrances and smells born sour
- Effect of drying on scent
- Scents that mark seasonal and daily changes
- Fragrant roots

**Five senses plant list:** Plants, described for feel, sound, smell, taste (as on the chart shown today)

Keep in touch to tell us other ways to improve a garden's sound, touch, scent and taste. We'll keep updating to share it around for everyone's greater sensibility!