Gardening - people with disabilities
Gardening is a healthy, stimulating activity that can be enjoyed by people of all abilities. Gardening equipment and tools can be modified to suit people with disabilities. Your garden can be landscaped so that garden beds are easily accessible and safe.

Gardening can have many health benefits for people with disabilities, and can provide a source of exercise, friendship, stimulation and relaxation. With a little planning and consideration, you can create an accessible, productive and pleasant garden for people with disabilities.

Equipment and garden structures need to be carefully designed and selected to accommodate people with disabilities. Vertical gardens (which make use of walls and fences) and raised containers can help make a garden accessible to people with disabilities.

Gardening skills for people with disabilities

For people with disabilities, gardening may help to improve:

- Communication and social skills – from being involved in groups and community activities
- Fitness – gardening is a great physical activity
- Confidence – gardening helps to develop a range of new skills
- Wellbeing – gardening is a great way to relax and reduce stress levels
- Physical ability – through improved motor skills
- Nutrition – gardening provides an opportunity to learn about healthy food
- Knowledge – it’s a chance to learn about the environment and nature
- Enjoyment of life – gardening is a wonderful leisure activity where tasks and routines can be varied and shared.

Making a garden easy to use for people with disabilities

To provide easy and safe access and to accommodate people with a range of disabilities, you may need to make some modifications when planning your garden, including:

- Raise garden beds to help people with physical restrictions, and to avoid bending and stooping.
- Provide tables that are wheelchair accessible where people can do potting and planting together.
- Use pots, window boxes, wheelbarrows and raised containers to make gardening more accessible – these can also be used when space and sunlight are limited.
- Provide retractable hanging baskets that can be pulled up and down so they are within easy reach.
- Use containers with wheels, which can be moved around easily to accessible positions and to catch the sunlight.
- Keep paths smooth, non-slip, accessible and level.
- Have a water supply handy and place plants together according to their water needs.
- Have an equipment storage area or shed nearby.
- Provide shade for working in the garden in summer (remember to use hats, sunscreen and other sun protection).
- Provide ready access to toilets.

Garden equipment for people with disabilities

Garden equipment can be adapted in many ways to suit people with varying disabilities. Consult an occupational therapist for expert advice. Suggestions include:

- Use tape, foam padding, bicycle grips and PVC pipe to improve grip and handle length on tools.
- Find specific ergonomic (designed to reduce discomfort) and enabling tools – these are available at some hardware shops.
- Use gloves that have a sticky surface or gloves with gripper dots.
- Use of splints and supports may also be appropriate – consult an occupational therapist.
- Look for lightweight tools that are easier to handle.

Plant selection for people with disabilities

Consider using varieties of plants that have sensory and textural qualities. Sensory plants include those that have special sound, smell, taste, touch and visual qualities.

Examples of great sensory plants include:

- Touch – woolly lamb’s ear, succulents (such as aloe vera), bottlebrush species, snapdragons
- Taste – basil, strawberries, peas, rosemary, carrots, cherry tomatoes
- Smell – jasmine, sweet peas, lavender, pelargoniums, native mint bush, lemon balm
- Bright colour – daffodils, rainbow chard, marigolds, pansies, sunflowers
- Sound – corn, bamboo and grasses rustle against each other when the wind blows.
Garden activities for people with disabilities

People with disabilities can be involved in many gardening activities, including:

- Watering
- Digging, planting and sowing
- Pruning and clipping
- Weeding and mulching
- Flower picking and arranging
- Craft activities using materials from the garden
- Harvesting garden produce
- Cooking food from the garden.

Where to get help

- Community or local garden groups
- Occupational Therapy Australia, Victoria Division Tel. (03) 9481 6866
- Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9836 1128
- Cultivating Community Tel. (03) 9429 3084

Things to remember

- Gardening is a healthy, stimulating activity that can be enjoyed by people of all abilities.
- Gardening equipment and tools can be modified to suit people with disabilities.
- Your garden can be landscaped so that garden beds are easily accessible and safe.

References

- Kevin Heinz Garden Centre. More information here.
More information

Environmental health

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Environmental health basics
- House and garden
- Chemical and metal pollutants
- Air and water quality
- Food quality and safety
- Technology and man-made risks
- Bushfires, floods and extreme weather
- Climate change
- Public health and disease control

Environmental health basics

- After a flood – animal and insect related hazards
  When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...
- After a flood – returning home safely
  When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...
- Air pollution
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne'/s air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions..
- Allergies explained
  Allergy occurs when the body overreacts to a 'trigger' that is harmless to most people..
- Disease clusters
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards..
- Emergencies - floods
You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood.

- Food safety and storage
  High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning.

- Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections.

- Smoke and your health - science summary (video)

- Smoke and your health (video)

### House and garden

- Asbestos and your health
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs.

- Asbestos in the home
  Asbestos fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including lung cancer and mesothelioma.

- Bed Bugs
  Bedbugs have highly developed mouth parts that can pierce skin.

- Edible gardens - saving water
  Saving water in the garden not only saves money, but also helps protect the environment.

- Gardening safety
  Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care.

- Gas heating - health and safety issues
  If you service your gas heater regularly and use it correctly, it will be safe and economical to use.

- Greywater - recycling water at home
  When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden.

- Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections.

- Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist
  Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites.

- Mould and your health
  The way to control indoor mould growth is to control the source of moisture.

- Passive smoking
  Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults.

- Pest control in the home
  If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible.

- Pest control services
  If you have pest problems that you cannot manage yourself, you may need to hire an authorised pest control operator.

- Sewage overflows at home
  Sewage contains harmful microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa.

- Wood fires and breathing problems
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

### Chemical and metal pollutants

- Hazardous waste
It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections...

- **Arsenic mine tailings and health**
  
  Mine tailings near goldmines may contain high levels of arsenic...

- **Cadmium**
  
  Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body...

- **Chemicals and spray drift**
  
  Sprayed chemicals can drift over neighbouring properties or water sources, and can affect human health, animals or the environment...

- **Copper chrome arsenic (CCA) treated timber**
  
  CCA treated timber should not be used to build children’s play equipment, patios, new garden furniture, decking or handrails...

- **Farm safety and handling agrichemicals**
  
  To reduce risks on the farm, use hazardous chemicals according to manufacturer guidelines or replace them with less dangerous options...

- **Lead exposure and your health**
  
  Long-term exposure to low levels of lead may produce symptoms including irritability, lack of energy and loss of appetite...

- **Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)**
  
  Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...

- **Mercury exposure and poisoning**
  
  Preventing or minimising exposure to mercury in your environment is the best way to reduce the risk of mercury poisoning...

- **Mercury in fish**
  
  Pregnant women and young children should limit consumption of fish that contain high levels of mercury...

- **Pest control in the home**
  
  If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible...

- **Pest control services**
  
  If you have pest problems that you cannot manage yourself, you may need to hire an authorised pest control operator...

**Air and water quality**

- **Air pollution**
  
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne’s air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions...

- **Beaches and water quality**
  
  Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality (such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant) will help...

- **Dental care - fluoride**
  
  Fluoride in your drinking water is like a constant ‘repair kit’ for your teeth...

- **Greywater - recycling water at home**
  
  When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden...

- **Groundwater**
  
  Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use...

- **Harmful algal blooms**
  
  Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can harm humans and animals when swallowed, inhaled or touched. People and pets should not enter the water at locations affected by blue-green algae...

- **Healthy swimming (video)**
  
  We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun...

- **Legionnaires’ disease**
  
  Legionnaires’ disease is a rare form of pneumonia...
Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)

Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...

Passive smoking

Passive smoking means breathing other people’s second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults...

Smoke and your health - protect your health (video)

Smoke and your health - science summary (video)

Swimming - keeping the water clean

There are simple steps for all visitors to follow to keep pool water clean for healthy swimming...

Water from natural resources

Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis...

Water quality in tanks, bores and dams

Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe...

Wood fires and breathing problems

The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people’s health...

Food quality and safety

Avoid food poisoning - Cook Safe (video)

Learn how to prepare and cook food safely at home...

Avoid food poisoning - Store Safe (video)

Learn how to store food safely in your fridge at home...

Eggs

The humble egg is a powerhouse of nutritional goodness. Eggs are full of things your body needs. They are a great source of protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals (such as vitamin A, vitamin D...

Fishing - eat your catch with care

People who fish in the Lower Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers need to be careful about eating their catch because of the risk of chemical exposure...

Food allergy and intolerance

Food allergy is an immune response, while food intolerance is a chemical reaction...

Food - pesticides and other chemicals

Chemicals such as pesticides, antibiotics and hormones are used to boost food production and ensure adequate food supply...

Food poisoning - prevention

You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...

Food safety and storage

High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...

Travel health and safety tips (slideshow)

We all love travelling to new and exotic places, but unfortunately illnesses and unforeseen events can ruin the trip of a lifetime. With a little effort, take a few of these simple precautions to make...

Technology and man-made risks

Asbestos and your health

When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...

Cancer and asbestos

Long-term exposure to asbestos is a cause of lung cancer and other serious illnesses...

Electromagnetic fields (EMF) and health issues

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
The effect of electromagnetic fields (EMF) from power lines and other sources is a controversial issue.

- Legionnaires' disease
  Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

- Mobile phones and your health
  Using a mobile phone while driving greatly increases the risk of traffic accidents.

Bushfires, floods and extreme weather

- After a flood – animal and insect related hazards
  When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden.

- After a flood – returning home safely
  When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease.

- Bushfire aftermath - safety tips
  Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards.

- Bushfire preparation advice
  Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency.

- Bushfires and water tanks
  Debris, smoke, ash and dead animals from a bushfire can contaminate water tanks.

- Bushfire smoke
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people’s health.

- Emergencies - floods
  You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood.

- Extreme heat (video)
  Extreme heat can affect anyone, including the young and healthy.

- Heat stress and heat-related illness
  Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness.

- How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat
  Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others.

- Mould and your health
  The way to control indoor mould growth is to control the source of moisture.

- Sewage overflows at home
  Sewage contains harmful microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa.

- Smoke from planned burns
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people’s health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires.

- Survive the heat
  How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat.

- Talking to children about bushfire risk
  Children can be affected by information regarding bushfire risk and they may become concerned about issues of safety. Talking to children openly in a way that suits their age, while also involving...

Climate change

- Beaches and water quality
  Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality (such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant) will help.
Climate change and health
The effects of climate change will have a serious impact on the physical and mental health of people around the world.

Climate change - what you can do
There are many things you can do to tackle climate change and live a more sustainable lifestyle.

Edible gardens - saving water
Saving water in the garden not only saves money, but also helps protect the environment.

Urban flash floods - FAQs
Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease.

Public health and disease control

Disease clusters
Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards.

Harmful algal blooms
Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can harm humans and animals when swallowed, inhaled or touched. People and pets should not enter the water at locations affected by blue-green algae.

Healthy swimming (video)
We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun.

Mosquitoes can carry diseases
You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home.

Mosquitoes - mozzie-proof your holiday a checklist
Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from spoiling your holiday. Mosquitoes can carry diseases be prepared and avoid mosquito bites.

Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist
Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites.

Needlestick injury
A needlestick injury means the skin is accidentally punctured by a used needle. Diseases that could be transmitted by a needle or needlestick injury include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Travel health and safety tips (slideshow)
We all love travelling to new and exotic places, but unfortunately illnesses and unforeseen events can ruin the trip of a lifetime. With a little effort, take a few of these simple precautions to make...

Related Information

Gardening - planning an edible garden
An edible garden does not have to be large, you can start small with a pot or a window box with a few herbs.

Gardens for the senses
Sensory gardens are designed to stimulate all five senses and are therapeutic for everyone.

Gardening - propagating your own plants
One of the real wonders of gardening is actually propagating your own plants.

Gardening - making a scarecrow
Making a scarecrow can add to the appearance of your garden and keep the birds away.

Gardening - making compost
Compost is nature's fertiliser. It is made from decomposed organic matter.

Related information on other websites
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