

## Creating Friendly Outdoor Areas

Plan your outdoor areas so they are easy to access and provide maximum enjoyment.

There's something about gardens.

They lend themselves to tranquillity and a positive frame of mind. They are therapeutic to spend time in and to work in. So they are especially good for many people with Parkinson's.

Yet, maintaining your garden often involves a few new challenges when you've got Parkinson's

First of all, you might need to adjust your expectations. Maybe it's better to have a garden and outdoor area without all of the bells and whistles that is more manageable than trying to do too much.

Before you do anything else, making time to review your garden with new eyes can make a real difference, perhaps with a family member or friend who can help you make decisions (and move things around for you).

If your garden is big, can you remove some plants or flower beds? Or is allowing part of it to grow wild an option?

6

If your mobility isn't what it used to be, or other symptoms complicate things, keep it simple. It's worth scanning your outdoor spaces and thinking about how they can be improved to suit your needs. Decluttering any cluttered areas and putting pots on raised benches, for example, will make these areas safer and more accessible. You'll be able to maintain your pots more easily. Alternatively you may want to replace most of them with hanging baskets to free up space for you to move about in.

### GETTING IN THERE

To enjoy your garden, you want to ensure getting in there and moving around isn't too hazardous. Go for only gentle slopes. Equally, ensure that surfaces are firm for safety (concrete, paving, timber). Pebbles aren't the best on traversed areas because they roll under your feet. Hoggin or crushed limestone may be more suitable. Make sure paths are wide enough to fit a walker, scooter, or wheelchair.

As for flower beds, raising them can minimise having to bend or stoop, and mean they're more accessible from a wheelchair. They also make digging and planting easier. Just make sure they aren't too wide so that there is reasonable access from both sides, to reach plants.

The right tool for the right job is also vital. Tools should be lightweight and have easy grip rubber handles. You can buy them or improve the comfort of existing gardening tools by covering the handles with foam tubing for a better grip. Long-handled tools are available to help you to reach plants for weeding and harvesting. Make sure your tools are sharp to reduce the energy you need to exert to achieve anything in your



garden and always wear gloves to protect your hands. You can also buy tools which have different length handles which are easy to change round so can be used by more than one person, and in different situations.

### KEEPING IT SAFE

Consider installing handrails next to steps and paths. If possible, get rid of steps to make walking around your garden safer and easier. Or, try placing garden features or sculptures adjacent to pathways. They can help steady someone navigating a path.

Remember to include plenty of seated areas in your garden. Is it possible to incorporate seating among your raised planter boxes? Try arranging seats near fragrant plants like star jasmine, gardenia and Australian dwarf frangipani. Seating is also a good idea near veggie gardens particularly, where so much time is spent working! Clear areas around seating are important for wheelchair, walker, and cane users, who need plenty of space for turning.

Especially during the warmer months, it's helpful to think of ways to create shade in the garden, so you can screen out the sun when it's hot.

### HANGING BASKETS

Retractable hanging baskets are a great way to add interest from an overhead pergola or to frame a front entrance. As long as they are not in a main access area, hang them at head height so the plants can be easily viewed and looked after.

Hanging baskets do need to be watered more often than other containers. This is because they have air movement all around them, so more water is required to replace what is lost through evaporation. Look for specific hanging basket or container potting mix that includes slow release fertilisers.

Cascading plants can look wonderful. Often choosing one flowering plant in a single colour can give great impact, especially if you have a row of baskets along a pergola or veranda.

There is a myriad of ways you can make gardening more do-able and sustainable as a future option when you have Parkinson's.

For more information about how to improve the design of your home to make it more accessible and pleasant for everyone at all stages of life, see the March 2017 edition of *The Parkinsonian*.