

## **Matford Sensory Garden**

A design based on personal experience of living with a loved one with memory loss, by Colin Pill Chartered Landscape Architect. Director at Tyler Grange Environmental Consultants

### Background

My mother has dementia, and we have been living with the terrible effects for the last 7 years or so. The impact on every aspect of life is devastating. It's such a cruel disease and as many have experienced robs your loved ones of their inner selves, slowly eroding at their ability to interact with people and the things around them. So you find yourself looking for anything that makes a connection and anything that gets a reaction. The outdoors and fresh air always has a positive effect, in particular plants and wildlife, although getting out and about gets harder and harder as the connection between the senses and the brain starts to go. People forget or are unaware that dementia doesn't just affect memory, memory is the first thing to go, and the first noticeable sign, but it then goes on to affect mobility, speech and all other normal functions.

### Design Objectives

The sensory garden has been designed for everybody to use but is specifically designed to be attractive and stimulating to people with dementia and memory loss. A place to get away from the trials and tribulations of 'normal' life, a bolt hole at the end of your street for people with the condition and their careers. It is so important that their carers have somewhere special to go and it is hoped that this will become one of those special places.

The memories for those with dementia fade but not so for their careers, who look after them 24/7. Creating new positive memories with their loved ones is so important, and living 'in the moment' for sufferers equally so. Hopefully the garden will provide a setting for new memories and 'of the moment' experiences.

The principal objective of the design is to create a garden which sets out a journey through the senses, providing a different experience at each point of the journey with plenty of places to sit and take in the sights, sounds and smells. It is primarily a place to sit in, but also to travel through, it is also a place to contemplate, relax and reflect in a safe attractive setting. Contrasting planting with different textures and colours is key.

### Planting

Whether it be the wonderful sight of a wildflowers in a pictorial floral meadow, the smell of roses or the sound of ornamental grasses rustling in the wind, or even the taste of rosemary, all the plants chosen should stimulate the senses and hopefully unlock a distant memory or experience.

The planting has been chosen for maximum effect and all year round interest but will be particularly beautiful in the summer months when as well as the shrubs being in flower and trees in leaf, the pictorial meadows will be in full bloom, creating a summer long tapestry of colour woven through the garden.

The garden is located next to the proposed play area which will encourage interaction between users of the garden and the play area.

At its heart the garden has a gentle winding path running through the centre of it - which has been designed to be accessible to all, (this is particularly important as dementia sufferers have difficulty with changes in levels). Associated with the path are a number of seating pods which will have blends of planting relating to a particular sense. Simple way marking posts and interpretation help with navigation, we are also working with a local sculptor to create a number of pieces of art relevant to each of the senses which will further help with user interaction and enjoyment.