



Gardening with People with Disabilities

The first and critical step in creating enabling gardens is a thorough understanding of the individual's abilities (hand-eye co-ordination, visual activity, endurance, balance, strength, and ambulation).

Assess height and reach measurements for those with ambulation challenges. Assess space requirements needed to navigate variably sized walkers or wheelchairs in the garden.

ACCESS AND PAVING

Once gardening capabilities are known, the most important consideration is basic access to and around the garden.

Build paths that accommodate wheelchairs and walkers of different sizes making them a minimum of 30 inches wide. For a comfortable turning radius, allow interspersed wide spaces of approximately 5 feet. Grades should not exceed five percent, preferably less.

If all gardeners are able to walk, a woodchip path, commonly used for garden pathways, can also be used as they cushion falls. Also, all pathway surfaces should provide good traction at any time the garden is in use.

TOOLS

- Use smaller bladed, longer handled tools to reduce the force needed to move the tool through the soil, to increase leverage, and to enhance limited reach.
- Modify handles to aid weakened grip and arm strength and use simple foam rubber padding to improve traction and comfort.
- Use levers instead of knobs for water spigots and garden gates.
- You can improve watering ease by using watering wands, snap connectors with shut-off valves and shorter hoses.
- Consult medical supply catalogues to source out equipment, often for use around the house, which can be modified for use in the garden.
- Use garden soils that are light and easily workable by weaker hands.
- Allow for plenty of seating in your garden for those who may need frequent rest.

RESOURCES

- American Horticultural Therapy Association
- Gene Rothert, Chicago Botanic Garden
- *The Enabling Garden: A guide to Lifelong Gardening*, by Gene Rothert
- How Does our Garden Grow? A guide to community garden success, by Laura Berman