

# How to Create an Accessible Garden for Those with Physical Limitations

Gardens bring so many benefits to youth and adults alike. They supply fresh fruits and vegetables, clean our air, connect us to the natural world, provide endless opportunities for learning and inspiration, offer a quiet spot to take a break from our electronics-filled world, and so much more.

For individuals with challenged mobility, gardening opportunities may at first appear limited. However, by designing your garden with accessibility in mind, you can create a garden that can be enjoyed by everyone. Here are some ways to plan a garden that is welcoming to all.



A young gardener from Youth Garden Grant winning school P53K in Brooklyn, NY.

**Install accessible pathways.** Navigation to and through the garden requires careful consideration to ensure ease and safety.

- Pathways should be at least 4' wide, but preferably 5' wide, for optimum accessibility.
- The surface must be smooth and level; fill large holes or cracks that may catch a toe or impede a wheelchair.
- Ensure that water drains properly to prevent muddy or slippery spots.
- Avoid steps; if an elevation change is needed create a gently sloping ramp, ideally with handrails.
- Concrete is an excellent pathway material; however, there are many crushed rock products that will provide a similar surface if installed properly.

**Build raised beds.** Bring soil and plants up to an easier working height by installing raised beds. Wood, rock, concrete blocks and plastic timbers are some good building materials.

- Build beds to the height needed for the audience you plan to serve.
- Construct beds so that gardeners can reach the entire planting area. In general, beds can be 3' or 4' wide if they're accessible on multiple sides. If beds are against a wall or fence they should be no wider than 2'.
- If feasible, create a broad, sturdy ledge at a comfortable sitting height along the sides of the beds to allow gardeners to sit rather than stand or squat while they work.
- Raised beds shaped like tables allow gardeners in wheelchairs to roll under them so the work surface is in their lap.

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- Click here for a [Comparison of Materials for Raised Bed Garden Structures](https://kidsgardening.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/KG_RaisedBedComparison.pdf).  
check URL: [https://kidsgardening.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/KG\\_RaisedBedComparison.pdf](https://kidsgardening.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/KG_RaisedBedComparison.pdf)

**Plant container gardens.** Install planters to raise plants so they're easier to reach.

- Ensure that every planter is secure, stable and heavy enough so it won't move, wobble or tip if gardeners lean on the rim.
- If necessary, attach planters to the surface beneath them before filling with soil.
- Smaller planters can be placed on a sturdy platform to raise their height.
- Use hanging baskets positioned at a reachable level. Or, place them on a sturdy pulley system so they can be easily and safely raised and lowered for planting, watering and tending.

**Plant vertical gardens.** Plant up instead of out! Growing on vertical supports not only makes plants easier to access, it also frees up garden space that would otherwise be taken up by sprawling plants.

- Install a trellis for vining plants like squash and pole beans to climb, where they're easier to access.
- Secure containers to a wall at varying heights.
- Create a garden wall by placing plastic-wrapped soil between secure wire fencing. Place plants in the soil by cutting a hole in the plastic. The fencing provides support for the weight of the soil and plants.

**Avoid garden clutter.** Tools, empty pots, and piles of weeds and other debris are not only unsightly, they are also a safety hazard for all gardeners, especially running children and individuals with impaired movement and vision.

- Put away tools after each work session.
- Remove plant matter and other debris and place in a compost bin or trash can.
- Make sure that garden storage is nearby and accessible.

**Purchase or create adapted garden tools.** Look for tools that are designed for accessible gardening, with features for ease and safety. For example, tools with hook-and-loop straps to secure tools to the arm help distribute weight and steady tools in the hand. As you stock your garden shed, look for:

- lighter-weight tools and hoses
- tools of varying heights and sizes
- tools with padded handles for a looser grip
- kneeling pads with handles
- tools with brightly colored handles for those with impaired vision

In some cases you can create your own adaptations; for example, wrap padding around a handle and secure it with heavy-duty tape. You can also get creative with household items, such as using an ice cream scoop as a trowel.

**Incorporate places to sit.** Include comfortable, easy-to-access seating areas throughout the garden so children have convenient spots to take a break, rest, and reflect. Make sure some of them are in the shade of trees or structures.

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