

# Potting Plants– The Dementia Friendly Way

Potting plants, like any gardening is a really therapeutic activity which involves a number of the senses. As short-term memory is limited in a person with dementia, potting plants/herbs as opposed to growing from seed can be a better choice. This will enable you to use the senses of smell and colour that are in the plants and focus the activity on potting them into a new colourful pot.

**Communication:** Communicating when gardening is such a pleasure with lots to discuss including the person's love for the garden, how it's changed over the years, what plants and flowers are their favourite. Discussing what flowers bring back the most memories for someone – what flowers did they have at their wedding day, in their family garden? Working alongside someone when gardening allows for calm non-verbal communication - including open body language and relaxed facial expressions and touch.

**Role:** Consider how the person's roles in life relate to the garden. Was it something they always enjoyed? How did they use and enjoy their garden – from being actively involved in planting to sitting out on a summer's evening reading the paper? Was their childhood garden big or small, rural or urban? Did they use herbs in their garden to cook and if so which ones were their favourite?

**Senses:** Gardening is one of the best therapeutic activities for stimulating the senses.

**Sight:** Consider how sight is stimulated by potting plants in the garden – the trees, shrubs and nature that's around the person providing the backdrop for the activity. Consider the plants themselves that you are potting – their colour, shape, variety. Consider the plant pots – their colour and contrast and vibrancy. Consider all of the other activity of nature buzzing or fluttering around that can be looked at whilst potting plants outside.

**Hearing:** Think about the reassuring sounds of the garden and how that can support someone with dementia. Birdsong, buzzing bees, distant lawnmowers and children laughing, dogs barking and the rustle of leaves on the tree. If gardening inside, think about a piece of music to act as a backdrop for further reminiscence.

**Smell:** Consider the smell of the garden and the smell of the plants that you have chosen. Consider including herbs and flowers such as basil, mint, lavender– smells that will stimulate memories.

**Touch:** Think about the feel of the soil as you plant – moving the soil with your hands, patting it down and adding water and how that changes the texture. Consider the small pebbles added if drainage is needed and how they feel to touch. Consider the delicateness of a plant already flowering.

**Taste:** Always use non-toxic plants if you are encouraging and stimulating the sense of taste. Stick to well known edible plants such as basil, mint, parsley, thyme, sage and other familiar ones the person may have cooked with. Consider introducing taste in other ways too such as cool refreshments or fruits that would have grown in the garden – strawberries or raspberries.