



Design for dementia care

The Lodge: garden space

The garden serves The Lodge's residential and nursing communities.

Garuth Chalfont, Consultant in Dementia Care Design

When I first came here this was one big triangular-shaped garden. Since then we've had residents come in with different levels of ability and different levels of need. The first thing right off the bat was that we needed to have two gardens. One big garden for everyone didn't work for everyone. The problem was that we had people coming from one side coming across into another community, mixing with people with different needs, and it created a bit of difficulty, so then staff would keep the door locked. Now the doors are all open. That's a main criteria for the design of a garden, is it's got to be an open door policy. So you have to design it in such a way that the staff can leave the door unlocked, and people can independently use it, or they can use it supervised. When you walk into a garden a person with dementia needs to have an idea of what can possibly happen, and what they can do. The message from the landscape and from the design is not that it's an institution, but it's a place that is user-friendly and you're encouraged to engage and do things, and so I think that if you set the tone in the environment that this is some place where anything that you see, you're welcome to get on and do it, then that's the sort of message that the space really has to put across. You need to make sure that the environment enables people to do as much as possible for themselves. You've got to have a productive garden and that's one thing that was not here, and that's something that I've changed. I've got fruit trees, I've got rhubarb. It's important to put things in that people can go out, pick, bring in and do something with.

Lucy Ewbank, Care Assistant

I think it was last month we made rhubarb custard where the residents picked the rhubarb out and then they cut it, washed it and cooked it, and they ate it for their supper, so that was really good to do.

Garuth Chalfont, Consultant in Dementia Care Design

If it's not meaningful for them they won't come out, you know, they'll come out, look around and go back in, but if there's something for them to do, that they've taken some ownership over, then that's crucial. We have animals here so, obviously, if you're outside and you've got animals, then that's something that needs your TLC. You need to pay attention to them, and a lot of the residents do get involved. We have a rota and then people come down and take care of the rabbits, feed them, water them, clean out the bedding, and just basically pet them and cuddle them, which is very good. Animal-assisted therapy, I wholeheartedly agree with that.

Colour and contrast are important elements of dementia-friendly garden design.

Garuth Chalfont, Consultant in Dementia Care Design

The colour and the contrast comes from nature. It is helpful just because the eye ages, and the eye doesn't see certain colours, that you think about the colours of the plants, and you'll put a cluster of plants together, so that that person can actually see the flower, rather than a bit here and a bit there.

And careful consideration was given to the continuity of the paving.

Garuth Chalfont, Consultant in Dementia Care Design

You do still need a way to walk your way through the garden to bring you back basically from where you started, so that's one of the basic design criterias that you'll always see in a book, right, you need a circular route. But that doesn't mean it needs to be a race track, and it doesn't mean it needs to be all exactly uniform, so I work with a hierarchy of paving. We've

got wide areas, we've not narrow areas, and when you walk into the narrow areas that would cause you to slow down and to have a look, and so those narrower areas are places that have lots of interesting, rich planting along both sides.

Lucy Ewbank, Care Assistant

And then you've got benches all the way around the garden so if they get tired halfway walking round they can just sit down and relax. And then you've got an open green area where they can just throw a ball or play football, or whatever they want, they can do.

Resident

Right, are you ready? That one, right there.

Carer

Nearly.

Garuth Chalfont, Consultant in Dementia Care Design

Because I had to divide it in half, I also took the opportunity to build a very interesting and permeable connection between the two. So I've got white picket fence and I've got some trellis, and I've got a raised bed, and this is all sort of higgledy-piggledy, so that it's interesting and you go over there and you have a look at it, and you can also look through to the other side, and we have some interesting talking across the fence to the neighbour, sort of interactions that can occur, and if you had just thought we need to divide the garden in half, boom, just put in a dead straight fence that no-one can see through, you're actually creating all sorts of psychological, not good. If you look out there you would feel trapped. People with dementia can develop new interests, and I think that actually the value of nature is to provide the opportunity for creativity in a way that it hasn't been done before. I mean it's, it's not rocket science to make a really good garden for people with dementia.