Gardening Basics

Sensory Gardens

Would you like to make your own garden or a school garden more interesting and fun? Striving to educate young children about the pleasures of gardening and being out in nature is a worthy endeavor. For many, that experience will provide an interest they can enjoy for the rest of their lives. Because preschool and elementary school students can get bored quickly, how about creating a sensory garden to engage them in many ways!
As the name implies, a sensory garden strives to stimulate all the senses and not just for children: sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch through plants and garden enhancements make the garden fascinating for all ages. A sensory garden may be small or large and usually has areas where plants are selected for the sense they stimulate. Consult the National Capital Poison Center's list below for common plants that you may not wish to include.

The following examples are just a few of the many options available in each sensory category. The Resources list at the end of this guide suggests other possible additions to your sensory garden.

Sight: bright colors and consistent blooms such as zinnias, butterfly weed, coneflower and sunflowers

Touch: lambs ear, artemisia 'Powis Castle', cockscomb (Celosia), yarrow



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Smell: herbs are a great choice for stimulating the sense of smell when rubbing the leaves to release their essential oils. Some easy-to-grow herbs include sage, thyme, oregano, chives, and mint. (Caveat: be aware that mint is an aggressive spreader and is usually best grown in a container.) Caution: although roses are wonderfully fragrant plants, the thorns make them less desirable.

Taste: herb plants also fit this category along with vegetables

Sound: use garden enhancements such as a fountain or a bird feeder that offers chirps, songs, and squawks when feathered friends stop by.

Be sure to label each plant type using its common and botanical name and any cautions to be followed.

Resources

"Child Friendly Native Plants of Texas", Texas Parks & Wildlife: (accessed 27 April 2026), https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/bioblitz/tpwd-child-friendly-plant-flyer-final.pdf

"Creating a Sensory Garden", (accessed 27 April 2026): https://extension.sdstate.edu/creating-sensory-garden

Plant Lists, Trinity Forks Chapter – Native Plant Society of Texas, (accessed 27 April 2026): https://www.npsot.org/chapters/trinity-forks/trinity-forks-resources/tf-what-to-plant/

"Poisonous and Non-Poisonous Plants: An Illustrated List", National Capital Poison Center, (accessed 27 April 2026): https://www.poison.org/articles/plant

"Sensory Gardens", IFAS Extension – University of Florida, (accessed 27 April 2026) https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/sensory-gardens.html

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