

# Gardening Basics

## Sensory Gardens

Would you like to make your child's 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 early 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: sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch through plants and garden enhancements. A sensory garden may be small or large and usually has areas where plants are selected for the sense they stimulate. First though, here are some plants NOT to use in your children's garden according to the Philadelphia Children's Hospital: "Know the Plants in Your Garden — For Your Child's Safety"

<https://www.chop.edu/news/health-tip/know-plants-your-garden-your-child-s-safety>.

The following examples are just a few of the many options available in each sensory category. The links at the end suggest other possible additions to your sensory garden. Because not every type of plant that can be grown in a sensory garden will do well in North Central Texas, check out the plants discussed in the "Top 100 Plants for North Texas":

<https://www.ntmwd.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/top100.pdf>.

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

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



Lambs Ear *Stachys byzantina* 'Helen von Stein',  
Patrick Standish, CC BY 2.0, via flickr

**Smell:** herb plants 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: several types of mint grow well in North Central Texas but 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 for a children's garden.

**Taste:** herb plants also fit this category along with vegetables.

**Sound:** one way to include sound in your sensory garden is with garden enhancements such as a fountain or a bird feeder that offers chirps, songs,

and squawks when feathered friends stop by to snack.

Be sure to put a label with each plant type using its common and botanical name and any cautions that should be followed as children move through the garden and enjoy the experience.

### Resources

"Creating a Sensory Garden": <https://extension.psu.edu/creating-a-sensory-garden>

"Creating a Sensory Garden": <https://extension.sdstate.edu/creating-sensory-garden>

"Sensory Gardens": <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/sensory-gardens.html>

"Sensory Garden Plants": <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/growing-guide-sensory-garden-plants/>