



Care Centres,  
Residential Care  
Homes, Hospitals,  
Private Dwellings,  
and Public  
Spaces

# Dementia Friendly Gardens

Therapeutic  
Outdoor Spaces  
for People of All  
Ages, Sizes,  
Abilities, and  
Disabilities



Newtown  
Saunders Ltd

# Dementia Friendly Gardens

Creating therapeutic space for people of all ages, abilities, & disabilities



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## Introduction

Whether a person is living at home, or in a long term care setting, access to outdoor space is a crucial factor in relation to their health and wellbeing. If the space is readily accessible and safe, it makes it easier for people to go outdoors independently, to enjoy nature, socialise, or carry out gardening or other external domestic activities. All of these activities have been shown to be therapeutic, not only for people with dementia, but also for people with various physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities, and are therefore an important part of a people centred design approach.

**“there is a need for therapeutic gardens to be incorporated as a ‘standard’ complementary element in special care units for people with dementia. Such an inclusion directly impacts the quality of life for residents, staff and family members.”** (Hernandez, 2007)

In light of the above, **Newton Saunders Ltd** commissioned **TrinityHaus, Trinity College Dublin**, to carry out research into this area and to develop a ‘Dementia Friendly Garden Toolkit’ for the creation of people-centred therapeutic garden spaces. This builds upon various Universal Design and dementia friendly design research completed by TrinityHaus over the last few years. One of the outputs of this work has been the creation of a new set of Universal Design Dementia Friendly Dwelling Guidelines, these have been published by the National Disability Authority’s (NDA) Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (see <http://universaldesign.ie/Built-Environment/Housing/>).

**“Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability** (NDA’s Centre for Excellence in Universal Design)

More recently **Sonas apc** have joined the team, and through their experience in providing training, resources and supports for people with dementia and their care partners, they bring a unique perspective to this work and help to create a multi-disciplinary team, which is important for good dementia friendly design.

## Using best practice to create Dementia Friendly Gardens

Following a detailed literature review, the research team identified a range of dementia friendly design considerations which fall into the following categories: Overall design and details; Location and entry to garden; layout and pathways; Planting; Seating; Lighting; Boundary and Edge Conditions; Edge spaces; Maintenance and Amenities; and Other.

This design approach is underpinned by Universal Design to ensure that the space is accessible and usable by all people regardless of their mobility, sensory, or cognitive needs.

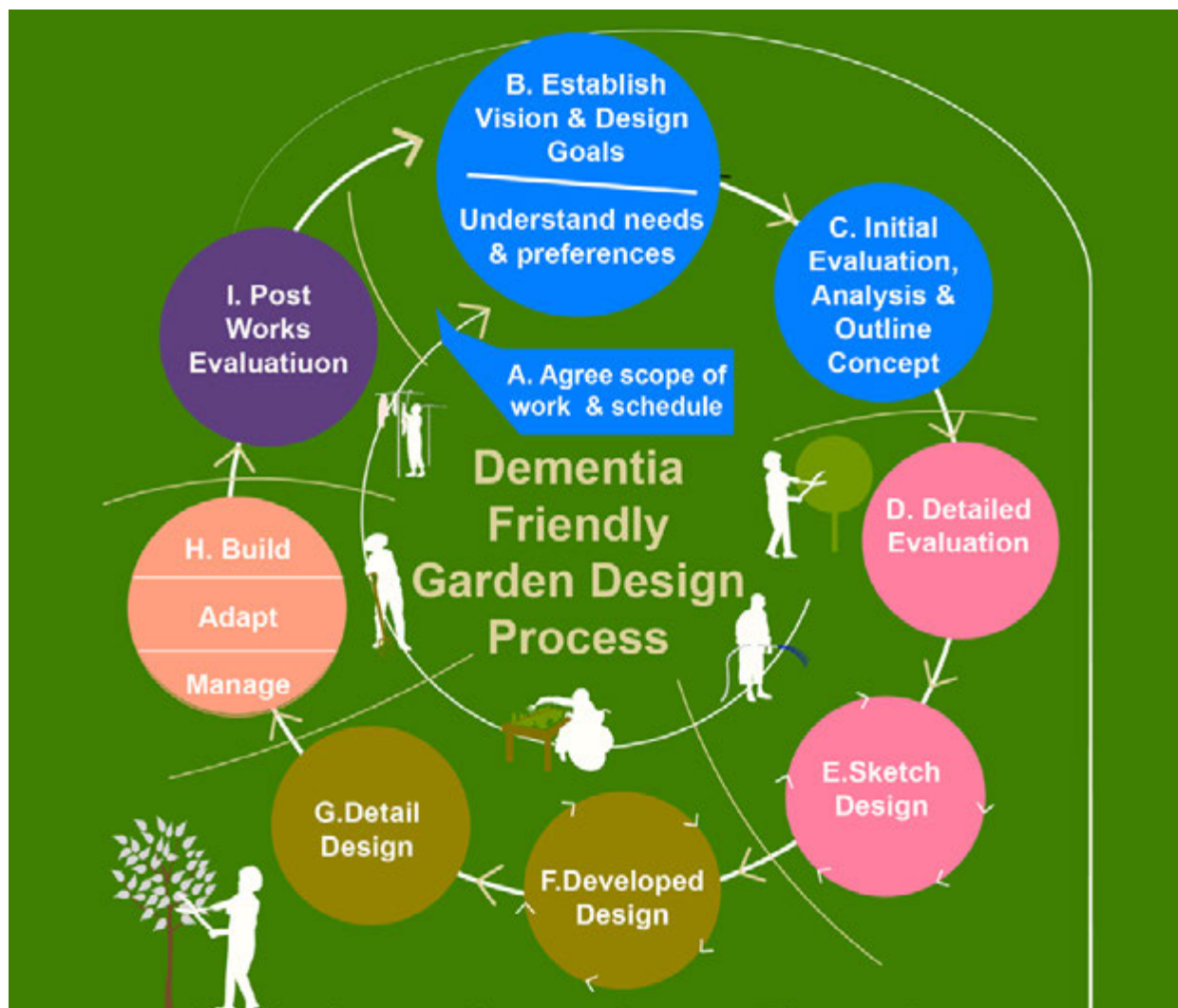


## Dementia Friendly Garden Process

This research has also informed a Garden Design Process to ensure a human-centred design approach that engages with all key stakeholders, including residents, visitors or family members. It also ensures that the dementia friendly design features are based on best practice and will thus result in an evidence based design approach.

## Garden Design Process

The design process is broken into nine stages and therefore guarantees a high level of interaction between the design team and the clients. This also represents an iterative process that helps both the design team and the client to fully understand the context and co-create a unique solution that supports the individual needs of each care centre.



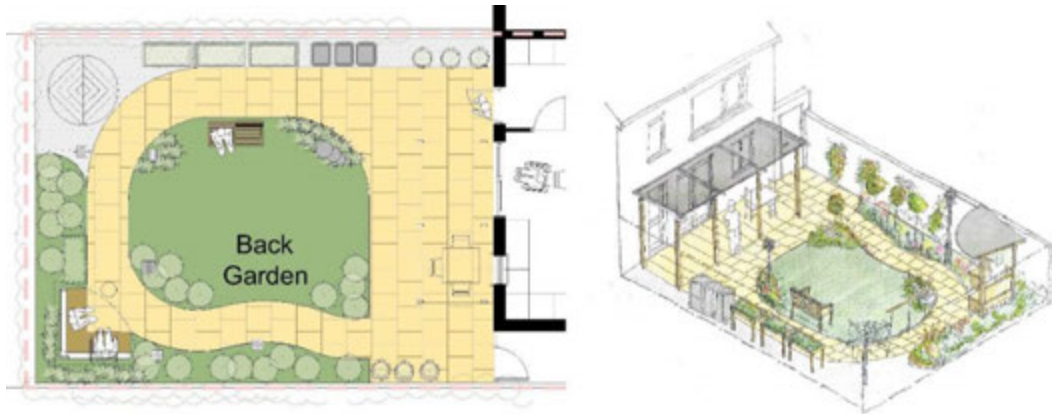
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- A.** Discuss and agree the project brief and agree a project timetable and schedule of activities.
- B.** Prepare an initial appraisal of needs & preferences to establish a preliminary vision for the garden & key design goals.
- C.** Based on a first site visit, complete an initial site evaluation, analysis & an outline concept design.
- D.** During second site visit, collect onsite data through: onsite audit; consultation with staff, residents and visitors; behaviour mapping; and care plan review. This will also involve a short design workshop to discuss the concept design and develop a preliminary sketch design in collaboration with the staff (and residents where possible).
- E.** Using the data collected and the preliminary sketch, prepare a more detailed sketch design.
- F.** Prepare developed design and discuss with care home through short workshop or meeting.
- G** Agree amendments and prepare final design
- H.** Construction phase during which all onsite construction works and planting is complete
- I.** Carry out post works evaluation to determine if redesigned garden achieves the design goals as set out in at Stage B. This will also provide a findings and recommendations report based on evaluation.

## Prototype Gardens: Building the Evidence Base

### Conceptual Prototypes

As part of the development of this approach the design team has developed a number of conceptual prototype gardens to examine various features (See Figures 1 and 2 below). These gardens represent settings including private dwellings, supported housing, and care homes, and help to examine the wide spectrum of needs that a dementia friendly garden may need to support in various locations.



**Figure 1:** Dementia Friendly Garden in a Domestic Setting



**Figure 2:** Dementia Friendly Garden for Care Home Setting

### Care Centre Dementia Friendly Gardens

In the last year, the design team has been working with a number of care centres around the country to redevelop their gardens as therapeutic outdoor spaces that support the activities in the centre.

More recently the team has worked closely with **St. Clare's Nursing Home** to redesign their key outdoor spaces to ensure that these fully support the needs of their residents, whether these are people with dementia, or people with various mobility and sensory disabilities.

**Figure 3:** St. Clare's Redesigned Garden Layout







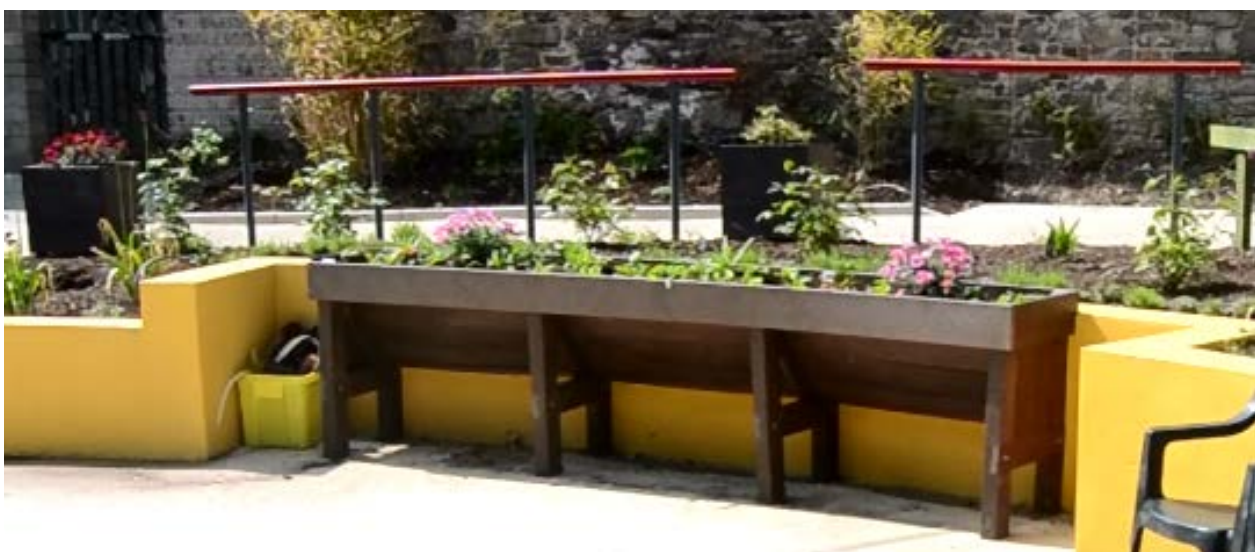
**Figure 4** – St. Clare's Nursing Home: View to redeveloped garden.



**Figure 5** – St. Clare's Nursing Home: View to new doors in redeveloped garden.

### Garden Structures, Furniture, and Supports for Therapeutic Activities

The structures, objects and furniture that support therapeutic activities are central to a well-functioning dementia friendly garden. In this regard the design team has been developing a series of dementia friendly gardening structures and furniture to compliment the overall design approach. These prototype garden pieces are accessible for wheelchair or seated use; are heavyweight to support leaning; use smooth non-splinter materials that are comfortable to touch; and, are composed of non-glare or non-reflective finishes.



**Figure 6** – Accessible planter that facilitates group work or social interaction over garden activities





**Figure 7** – Raised planters facilitating groups or single planters for individual activities.



**Figure 8** – Heavy weight & durable recycled plastic furniture

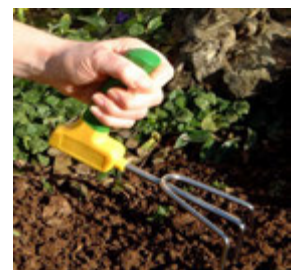


Covered Seating Areas

In addition to these garden pieces, we are sourcing appropriate low maintenance **water features** to help create multi-sensory environments. We are also selecting and testing various easy-grip **garden utensils and implements** that are usable by people with dementia and those with various disabilities. These will help make gardening activities more accessible and fulfilling for all garden users.



**Figure 9** – Water Features



Accessible Utensils

**We are keen further develop this concept in Ireland and examine more ways for outdoor space to support therapeutic activities. Considering that the design features used in a dementia friendly garden are underpinned by Universal Design, we believe that this approach will also provide therapeutic, accessible and usable gardens for a wide variety of people with various physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments.**

For more information see [www.newtownsaunders.ie](http://www.newtownsaunders.ie) or contact Clive Jones at ph. 086 8337512 or [clive.jones@newtownsaunders.ie](mailto:clive.jones@newtownsaunders.ie)

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