# Gardening information pack

## Introduction

This factsheet provides information for blind and partially sighted people who would like to take part in gardening. With the help of our long-time collaborators at the horticultural charity Thrive, we offer helpful hints and tips for getting started, types of tools to use and to ensure the easiest possible start for everyone, no matter what your stage of sight loss.

## Getting started in the garden

Gardening can be a great way of keeping you active as it can get you out and about and it offers you a chance to be more social. This could be through chatting to neighbours over the garden fence, joining a gardening club or in your local allotment.

Thrive has been working closely with gardeners who suffer from sight loss for more than 30 years, taking on board great experiences that have allowed them to put together valued gardening hints and tips.

Thrive encourages blind and partially sighted gardeners to be as independent as possible from the beginning, as this helps to gain confidence. They regularly encourage people to be as independent as possible wherever possible. Don’t be put off when seeking advice or help from sighted gardeners, as it can on occasions, prove necessary and valuable.

### Design your way to easier gardening

Taking a bit of time to get ready can really make a difference. Below we have some helpful tips for starting out.

#### Getting ready

* If you’re just starting to garden with sight loss, you might find it useful to familiarise yourself with your garden’s settings by walking around it at different times of the day, this allows you to get familiar with the garden’s settings and layout at various times.
* If you need some help with any part of a job, ask for it. If not, then carry on independently. This helps you become a much more confident gardener.
* People who have sight loss can sometimes find it difficult to find their way back to where they were in the garden. One idea is to use a sound beacon or take a small radio with you and leave it on while you’re working.
* A washing line can also provide a point of reference, and you can use it as a guide to help you know where you are.
* Think about the job you’re going to do, and plan what will make it easier for you. It might be as simple as making sure you have a kneeler with you to protect your knees, possibly a stool or seat to work from, or to take more rests.
* Get all the tools you’ll need together to save trips back and forth to the shed, garage or house. Keep your storage area tidy so you can find tools easily.
* If you find it difficult to carry things, you might need to base your activities near the house or the place you keep your gardening equipment.

##### Equipment and tools

* If you have some sight, you’ll find your tools easier to spot if they have bright handles. You may want to paint the handles in more contrasting colours or use brightly coloured tape.
* Most gardeners who have sight loss like to work close to the soil and often use short-handled tools. There is now a whole range of “multi-change” tools with Snap-On interchangeable heads. Choose a handle length that’s right for you – 30cm (12 inch) is most popular.
* Make sure you choose the right tools for the job. Think about trying out tools before you buy them if you can, and check for weight and comfort.
* If you have a weak grip, hand tools will be easier to hold if you slide some plumber’s insulating tubing over the handle, or there are specialist ranges with wide spongy grips available from most gardening centres.
* You can carry hand tools in a tool belt, apron or bag – whichever you might find easier. You can safely carry secateurs in a holster.

Our “Designing gardens and nature trails” factsheet helps with ideas of what materials to use in a sensory garden for blind and partially sighted people. You can request this factsheet by calling our Helpline.

## Planning your garden

Many people find it helpful to start small and work on a small part of the garden or in containers until you gain confidence. Garden layout can make a real difference to how you enjoy gardening.

#### Layout

* You’ll find your garden is easier to manage and get around if it is laid out in a square, with straight paths and borders.
* Landmarks around the garden can be useful to help you find your way around. Shrubs or trees, scented or tactile plants, items such as benches, and sound – from rustling plants, running water or wind chimes, can all help you navigate your way.
* Borders will be more manageable if you can reach across them easily. So, make your flower borders no more than 60cm (two-foot) wide if you have access from one side, or 120cm (four-foot) wide if you can reach from all sides.
* Containers and raised beds look attractive and are ideal if you want to start gardening on a small scale. A raised bed can be raised just a few inches or can be at a comfortable height to use sitting down.
* Planting in containers is a simple way of ensuring that your plants are easier to look after. You can vary the heights and bring the garden to the best level for you. Many vegetables as well as flowers and shrubs do well in containers.

#### Paths

* You’ll feel safer and are able to get things done faster, if all your paths are even with a surface that provides good grip. You can mark any changes in the direction of your paths with a change in texture, or a change in colour, or with a marker like an ornament.
* Don’t let plants overhang your paths. Some gardeners who have sight loss, edge their borders with a low kerb that keeps soil in and is helpful if you use a cane.
* If you use a wheelchair or walking aid paths in the garden and the greenhouse must be wide enough with ample turning room; a 1m (three-foot) wide path is recommended as a minimum.

#### Steps

* Some people find it helpful to highlight steps, path edges and fencing with simple white paint.
* Consider replacing steps with ramps. A ramp gradient of 1:15 is recommended as a general guide.
* If you don’t have a handrail near your steps or ramp, consider having one installed. A handrail should begin at least a metre before the first step up or down.

#### Plants

* Although scented plants are a bonus, don’t have too many as a mass of scent might be confusing.
* Choose colours that work best for you for plants, tools and containers.
* Plant pale coloured plants against a dark shrub, a fence or a dark coloured mulch, as this can help them stand out more.
* Think about planting in blocks or lines to help you identify plants and to make more of a colour or scent impact in an area of the garden.
* It also helps to choose plants that are easy to maintain, that are thornless and don’t need much pruning.
* Get rid of plants that cause you problems – rampant growers, plants that take up too much space, are hazardous to you, or cast too much shade.
* If you would like to grow fruit trees, choose espalier or cordon trained varieties. These grow at a lower level and the fruit is within reach.
* Hedges provide good screening in a garden but usually require cutting back. To make things easier, consider alternatives that are still wildlife-friendly, such as a wall or fence with climbing plants covering the surface.

#### Seed sowing

Many gardeners who have sight loss avoid sowing seeds in the open ground. Sow seeds in seed trays or other containers and plant out the resulting plants at an early stage. Full details on how to successfully sow seeds can be found in the book by Thrive “Getting on with Gardening Volume 1” **thrive.org.uk/shop/getting-on-with-gardening-volume-1**.

An alternative option for sowing seeds is to use seed tapes. These are commercially produced fine paper tapes with seeds sandwiched between layers at regular intervals. The seed tapes are produced by a number of the larger seed companies. To use the tapes, prepare the soil by clearing the site to produce a level area with no weeds and no large stones. Use a small hoe to create a shallow trough. Lay the seed tape along the trough and cut to the desired length, mark each end and draw the soil over to cover the soil to a depth of 1cm (half an inch). Place water in the tapes well using a watering can with a rose to avoid washing away the soil. Remember to water daily until the seeds germinate. You can also use the tapes in containers.

## Getting on with it – more ideas from Thrive

Thrive offer assistance with a range of gardening advice by telephone, email or post to help with any gardening queries that you may have. Visit the Thrive website **carryongardening.org.uk** where you can find helpful hints and tips for easier ways to do every day gardening jobs, information on tried-and-tested gardening equipment and tools, and a specific section for people who have sight loss.

Thrive have a variety of publications available:

* **Getting on with Gardening** **books** – These are essential guides to gardening when you suffer with sight loss or a sight impairment, it’s full of useful tried and tested gardening techniques devised by people who have sight loss. They are available in large print, on audio CD and tape, DAISY CD and Braille. This guide was produced by Thrive and originally published by RNIB, with funding from the Big Lottery Fund.

**Volume 1** focuses on seed sowing, potting, gardening outside, tools and equipment, raised beds, preparing the ground, planting and watering.

**Volume 2** looks to expand the gardener’s knowledge with sections on taking cuttings, container growing, more gardening outside, protected growing, pruning, the lawn, pests and diseases and labelling.

* **Getting on with growing food** is a full-colour guide to start growing your own vegetables and fruit.
* **Getting on with growing in containers** details information on how to grow in containers which includes choosing containers, how to plant and maintain them and planting suggestions.
* **Gardening Yearbook** offers 55 pages of seasonal advice on your food and flower gardens plus ideas on tools and equipment.
* **Gardening Together** is a guide to starting up a local gardening club for blind and partially sighted people.

Each of these books includes large, clear diagrams with a wide range of tips from gardeners including the winners of the Blind Gardener of the Year competitions.

Thrive no longer hold stocks of this publication, but they can arrange for a printed copy. An audio CD and a limited number of braille copies are

also available, contact Thrive for more information.

#### Meeting other gardeners who have sight loss

“You pick up little tips from other people who have gone blind or who have been blind all their lives – the way they do their gardening: it’s amazing! You can learn new tips and develop your own.”

–Spiro, a blind gardener.

There may be some local gardening club for blind and partially sighted people near to you. Normally you will find that many of these gardening clubs have been set up and organised through a local voluntary association, through social workers or have been created by other blind and partially sighted people who share a keen interest in gardening. Contact Thrive to see if there is a club local to you or visit our Sightline Directory at **sightlinedirectory.org.uk**.

## Getting out and about

There are many gardens open to the public around the country, which are run by a variety of organisations, which can help make an enjoyable trip out. Group visits can often be arranged and in some cases guided tours of the gardens are available by arrangement.

### Some of the largest gardens

#### The Eden Project

Bodelva

St. Austell

Cornwall

PL24 2SG

Tel: **01726 811 972**

Email: **boxoffice@edenproject.com**

Web: **edenproject.com**

#### The National Botanic Garden of Wales

Middleton Hall

Llanarthney

Camarthen

SA32 8HN

Tel: **01558 667 149**

Email: **Contact form available from website**

Web: **gardenofwales.org.uk**

#### Royal Botanic Gardens

Kew

Richmond

Surrey

TW9 3AE

Tel: **020 8332 5655**

Email: **info@kew.org**

Web: **kew.org**

#### Royal Botanic Gardens

Edinburgh Arboretum Pl

Edinburgh

EH3 5NZ

Tel: **0131 248 2909**

Email: **Contact form available from website**

Web: **rbge.org.uk**

#### Royal Horticultural Society’s (RHS) Gardens

80 Vincent Square

London

SW1P 2PE

Tel: **020 3176 5800**

The details for the individual gardens are:

Tel: Wisley - **01483 224 234**

Tel: Harlow Carr - **01423 565 418**

Tel: Rosemoor- **01805 624 067**

Tel: Hyde Hall - **01245 400 256**

Web: **rhs.org.uk**

#### Garden Organic

Wolston Lane

Coventry

Warwickshire

CV8 3LG

Tel: **024 7630 3517**

Email: **enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk**

Web: **gardenorganic.org.uk**

### Other people’s gardens

In England and Wales, The National Gardens Scheme publishes “Gardens Visitors Handbook” which lists gardens across the UK, with details of when gardens are open on specific days during the year. To purchase the handbook, call **01483 211 535**, email **hello@ngs.org.uk** or visit **ngs.org.uk**.

You can obtain booklets of gardens in each county these are available from county organisers of the scheme, or from local shops or tourist information offices.

A similar scheme exists in Scotland which is run by Scotland’s Gardens. To purchase a copy of their guidebook, call **0131 226 3714**, email **info@scotlandsgardens.org** or visit **scotlandsgardens.org**.

The National Trust has many gardens and properties throughout England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

#### England:

PO Box 574

Manvers

Rotherham

SG3 3FH

Tel: **0344 800 1895**

Email: **enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk**

Web: **nationaltrust.org.uk**

#### Wales:

Priest House

Tredegar House

Newport

South Wales

NP10 8YW

Tel: **01633 811 659**

Email: **wa.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk**

#### Northern Ireland:

Rowallne Stable Yard

Saintfield

Ballynahinch

BT24 7LH

Tel: **028 9751 0721**

Email: **ni.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk**

#### Scotland:

Hermiston Quay

5 Cultins Road

Edinburgh

EH11 4DF

Tel: **0131 458 0200**

Email: **information@nts.org.uk**

Web: **nts.org.uk**

### In wilder places

For those who wish to venture further, there is the whole countryside to explore.

#### Sensory Trust

The Sensory Trust has information on access to the countryside for people who have a disability.

ESAM 7

Carluddon Technology Park

Carluddon

St Austell

PL26 8WE

Tel: **01726 222 900**

Email: **enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk**

Web: **sensorytrust.org.uk**

#### Thrive

Thrive is a national charity that uses gardening to change the lives of disabled people.

The Geoffrey Udall Centre

Beech Hill

Reading

RG7 2AT

Tel: **0118 988 5688**

Email: **info@thrive.org.uk**

Web: **thrive.org.uk** and **carryongardening.org.uk**

## Connect with others

Meet or connect with others who are blind or partially sighted online, by phone or in your community to share interests, experiences, and support for each other. From book clubs and social groups to sport and volunteering, our friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable team can link you up with opportunities to suit you. Visit **rnib.org.uk/connect** or call **0303 123 9999.**

Call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999**, we’re ready to answer your call Monday to Friday 8am-8pm and Saturday 9am-1pm. You can email us at **helpline@rnib.org.uk**. You can also say, **“Alexa, call RNIB Helpline”** to an Alexa-enabled device.

For more information on other leisure activities, visit **rnib.org.uk/leisure**.

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