



Top Tips for Daily Gardening Activities Family Carers and Friends

Gardening can cover a wide variety of activities, stimulate many of the senses and be extremely therapeutic. Was your relative an expert gardener? Was gardening a big part of their lives? Maybe they never had the time or inclination but seem interested now, or maybe they just enjoy being in the garden.

Seeing or feeling close to nature on a regular basis often has a calming effect and generally improves mood.

Getting out into the garden

If your relative is lucky enough to have a nice garden, then use it to its full potential and try to see this as an extension of the person's home.

Here are some easy ways to do this on a daily basis:

Encourage your relative to walk around in the garden. The garden will obviously need to be a safe place and the needs of your relative and potential risks assessed before doing so. Just the feeling of fresh air on your face and in your lungs can be very uplifting, so encourage your relative to use the garden as much as they like.

Depending on their capability, certain tasks may be suitable for your relative to help with. These could include:

- Raking or sweeping up leaves
- Raking over soil
- Watering the garden (think about how heavy the watering can may be – use a smaller one or a hose)
- Weeding
- Deadheading flowers
- Tidying pots
- Picking fruit, vegetables, or flowers
- Sorting through seeds or empty plant pots

These practical based 'jobs can help to provide a sense of purpose and achievement and allow the individual to feel that they are contributing instead of always being 'cared for'.

Try to make sure the garden is 'user friendly'. For example:

- Raised beds can lessen the need to bend over
- Smaller beds on sturdy legs or window boxes can allow for someone in a wheelchair to get close up
- There are many adapted tools available such as lightweight tools with easy grip handles
- Try to avoid steps and uneven surfaces or install handrails if they cannot be avoided

Walk round the garden with your relative and discuss what you can see. Smell and touch flowers and plants, listen to bird songs and see if you can identify them. Ask your relative to pick out something

they especially like and chat about they like it. Collect interesting items such as fallen bark, interesting leaves, or pine cones to take back.

These could be made into a seasonal display or used for an art project.

Your relative may get a lot of satisfaction out of helping with garden related tasks and there is also the added benefits of fresh air and exercise. Relating back to familiar activities from earlier in their life can be a very good way of 'connecting' with relatives, especially if they have dementia.

Birds and wildlife

Birds and wildlife can really add variety to a garden scene and be a real source of interests. Regular feeding of the birds should encourage a good population in your garden.

Look on the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) website for tips on what to and what not to feed them and when. Create a daily activity of feeding the birds and then sitting and watching them through the window or outside if the weather is fine.

Take the garden indoors

For those who may not wish, or be able, to go into the garden, you could take the garden to them.

- Take scented leaves, such as herbs back inside for smelling
- Take flowers in for them to arrange, draw or paint
- Take a variety of leaves and see if your relative can identify them. These could then be used for leaf printing, or pressed into dried leaves and used to decorate cards

Bringing elements of the garden into your relative's home can add a good sense of wellbeing and can help your relative who may not want to leave their home to feel they can interact with the garden.

Ideas include:

- Window boxes where the plants are changed to reflect the seasons
- Wind chimes or birdfeeders (see instructions on how to make one opposite) hanging on or near the window can provide interest and stimulation
- Growing seeds in their room. Herbs could be used as they grow quickly and have a strong smell
- Moving plants around so that people have different ones to look at
- Gently crush a scented leaf, such as a herb, under their nose so they can smell it or take in scented flowers from the garden
- Take in different textures of leaves and petals for them to touch
- Help your relative to arrange flowers or dead head their own flowers using a tray/table on their bed or knee
- Make sure your relative has access to a television and radio when they wish to listen to gardening programmes

If you would like to discuss the information included in this resource, please call the NAPA Helpline; our free and confidential activity support service.

