

## sanctuary FOR THE senses

A garden that engages sight, sound, scent, taste, and touch offers peace and inspiration. BY ANNETTE BURDEN

**T**HE MOMENT YOU STEP into any well-designed garden, a feeling of contentment washes over your whole being. What else so quickly relaxes and tunes the mind and body while stimulating the senses? Driven by a deeply personal vision of paradise, each gardener seeks to recapture a basic relationship with the earth. In a very real sense, at the center of every garden lies hope for the future.

Preferences for location, size, and style vary infinitely, but the healing attraction to nature remains constant, and science backs up this connection. Studies prove that hospital patients recover more quickly when they see trees rather than parking lots from their beds; people living in public housing show less aggression and better coping ability when their windows frame leafy courtyards rather than a sea of concrete; college students whose dorms face greenery score better on cognitive tests; children with ADHD exhibit fewer symptoms after outdoor activities in natural environments; and people with greater access to nature are better able to resist unhealthy food options.



For years the savannah hypothesis—which suggests that humans prefer landscapes resembling the African veld from which we evolved—contributed to the trend for wide-open lawns studded with a tree or two. More recently, though, a study by Richard Fuller, an ecologist at the University of Queensland, showed that a diversity of plant life adds to the

psychological benefits of a green space. So if you're looking to design your own personal Eden, plan to include plenty of colors, textures, scents, features that create sound, and edible plants. You'll get back in tune with yourself quickly each time you visit if you design a garden that sings to you through your senses. Eager to get started? Turn the page. »

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**1 SIGHT** Start by devising a color scheme and layout based on the borrowed landscape—what you see beyond your own boundaries and what you cannot change. Block anything unpleasant from view and complement or frame elements you like (including the sky). Create a focal point—perhaps a water feature, sculpture, or specimen plant—then add intrigue with a path that winds out of view. Also, consider the light. Pale flowers may look gorgeous in spring but might need dark green foliage to show them off in the harsh light of summer. White blooms and bright leaves are useful anytime and are especially good at brightening shady spots during the day. Finally, choose plants—such as elderberry, bee balm, and buddleia—that call in birds, bees, and butterflies to add color and movement to the scene.

**2 SOUND** A trickling fountain can mask undesirable noise, as can a wind chime or the rustling leaves of a tree. These auditory soothers can also serve as a focus for meditation. Consider a gravel path for the satisfying crunch it makes underfoot, as well as a feeder for finches, jays, and other songbirds.



**3 TOUCH** Incorporate various textures into your garden to create a tactile experience. Layering works best: Set rough wood against smooth stone, ferns, and baby's tears, for example. Let a mossy brick path lead you to a sparkling pond. Tuck plants with small leaves between those with medium and large ones. (Who could resist touching velvety lamb's ears set off by shiny green camellia leaves?) Consider a warming fireplace or fire pit and build in movement, such as a row of ornamental grasses dancing in the breeze. The sight will underscore the sensation of air moving on skin.

**4 SCENT** Indulge in the sweetest-smelling flowers you can find. The choices are nearly endless: Heirloom roses, gardenias, daffodils, heliotrope, jasmine, and honey-suckle are just a few aromatic options. And plant fragrant herbs—such as woolly thyme, sage, rosemary, bay laurel, or lemongrass—where your passing footsteps, elbow, or shoulder can't help but release their fragrance.

**5 TASTE** The same herbs that lend their fragrance to your garden can add delicious flavor to your meals. And don't forget fruits and vegetables. A tree festooned with apples, an arbor of Concord grapes, or a border of rose-colored cabbage can be a feast for the eyes as well as the palate. Plus, you can take a bit of paradise with you when it's time to go inside.

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