



Garden for Life

Plants for the Senses

Interacting with plants is by nature a sensory experience. In fact, plants have evolved structures over time to ward off predators, distribute seed, or attract pollinators. These structures are enjoyed by a gardener as soft fuzz on leaves, beautiful seedpods, and bright or fragrant flowers. Sensory plants enable you to be flexible with choosing plants for the garden. If one sense is lost or impaired,

you can increase your pleasure by filling your garden with plants that appeal to those senses that remain. The sensory experience when interacting with plants is usually passive. This is ideal for people with sensory processing disorders or other impaired sensory functioning. There are at least five ways to experience a garden: sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste.

Sight

Sight is arguably the most highly developed of our senses. Many of us first appreciate a garden through sight, and color in a garden can capture our visual attention readily. We usually think of flowers when we think of color; however, foliage tends to last longer than blossoms. Leaves can be found in every shade of green, plus yellow, red, purple, and more. The chart below highlights some plants with colorful leaves.

Plant type	Scientific Name	Comments
Annuals		
Coleus	<i>Solenostemon scutellarioides</i>	Range of bold, multicolored leaves
Persian shield	<i>Strombilanthes dyerianus</i>	Bright purple/pink and silver striped leaves
Sweet potato vine	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>	Many cultivars boast brilliantly colored, bold leaves in many shapes and sizes
Red fountain grass	<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i> 'Rubrum'	Reddish-purple foliage with vase-shaped form
Perennials		
Coral bells	<i>Heuchera</i> hybrid	Attractive scalloped leaves, with many cultivars offering a wide range of colors
Plantain lily	<i>Hosta</i> spp.	Green, blue, or yellow leaves, often with white or gold markings
Shrubs		
Goldflame spirea	<i>Spiraea x bumalda</i> 'Goldflame'	New growth red, copper, and orange, turning yellow in summer, then orange, red, and yellow in autumn
Cream-edge tartarian dogwood	<i>Cornus alba</i> 'Argenteo-marginata'	Striking white variegation; red stems in winter
Trees		
Golden full-moon maple	<i>Acer japonicum</i> 'Aureum'	Golden leaves, turning red in autumn
Variiegated box elder	<i>Acer negundo</i> 'Variegatum'	White-edged green leaves



Smell

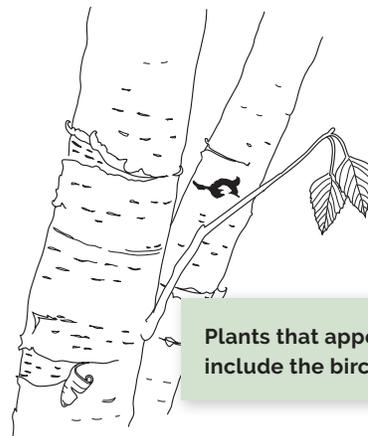
You may experience a flood of memories simply by sniffing a fragrance because the olfactory system is closely associated with parts of our emotional regulation system. Once a scent is associated with a memory, that memory may be evoked each time the scent is detected. Fragrant plants emit their scent into the air. They do this to attract pollinators. An example of a fragrant plant is a lilac. Aromatic plants must be bruised or pinched for their scent to be released. An example of this is rosemary, which does not attract much notice until we pluck or crush it. More scented plants are listed below.

Type of plant	Scientific Name
Annuals	
Chocolate cosmos	<i>Cosmos atrosanguineus</i>
Heliotrope	<i>Heliotropium arborescens</i>
Herbs	Many species
Marigold	<i>Tagetes</i> spp.
Pansy	<i>Viola x wittrockiana</i>
Stock	<i>Matthiola incana</i>
Sweet alyssum	<i>Lobularia maritime</i>
Vines	
Moonflower	<i>Ipomoea alba</i>
Sweet autumn clematis	<i>Clematis terniflora</i>
Perennials	
Butterfly bush	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>
Garden phlox	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>
Peony	<i>Paeonia lactiflora</i>
Bulbs	
Hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i>
Lily	<i>Lilium</i> sp.
Shrubs	
Common lilac	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>
Koreanspice viburnum	<i>Viburnum carlesii</i>
Rose	<i>Rosa</i> sp.
Apple	<i>Malus</i> sp.
Amur maple	<i>Acer ginnala</i>

Touch

Touching plants is a unique way to experience their sensation. Textures range from soft and fuzzy to leathery and paper-like. If you choose plants for their texture, be sure to plant them where you can easily reach them. Good locations are near a path or in a container at a comfortable height. Be careful where you place plants that are unpleasant to touch. Plants with sharp thorns and those that cause a skin rash or leave a stain are best appreciated without touching them. The chart below has some plants with delightful textures.

Plant type	Scientific Name	Comments
Annuals		
Dusty miller	<i>Scenecio cineraria</i>	Soft leaves
Fountain grass	<i>Pennisetum</i>	Soft flower clusters
Ranunculus	<i>Ranunculus asiaticus</i>	Soft papery flowers
Strawflowers	<i>Bracteantha hybrid</i>	Dry, straw-like feel
Perennials		
Lamb's ear	<i>Stachys byzantine</i>	Woolly, silver-gray leaves
Sedum	<i>Sedum</i> sp.	Fleshy, bumpy texture
Silver mound artemisia	<i>Artemisia schmidtiana</i> 'Silver Mound'	Soft mounds of silver-gray foliage
Ornamental grasses		
Many kinds		Soft, plummy flower heads
Trees		
Amur chokecherry	<i>Prunus maschii</i>	Shaggy, peeling bark
Bur oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Rough, ridged bark
European beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Satin-smooth bark
Paperbark maple	<i>Acer griseum</i>	Red peeling bark
River birch	<i>Betula nigra</i>	Exfoliating, papery bark
Yellow birch	<i>Betula alleghaniensis</i>	Silvery, papery bark with wintergreen scent to young bark



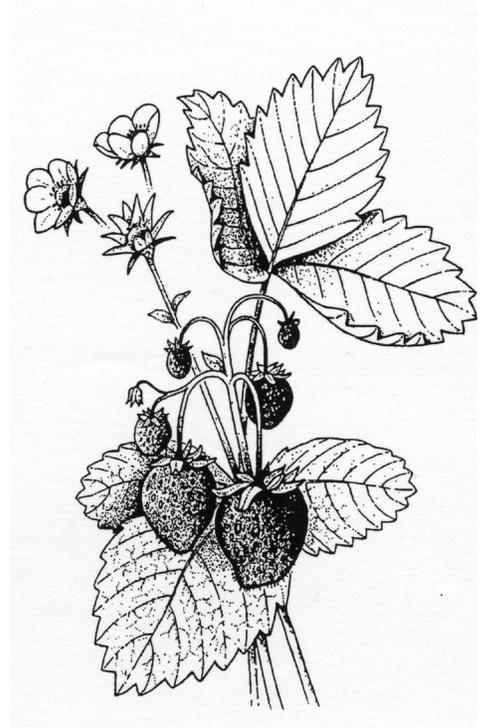
Plants that appeal to one's sense of touch include the birch with its peeling bark.



Taste

Growing and harvesting edibles brings unique flavors and distinct satisfaction to many gardeners. In addition to the many fruits and vegetables available, consider growing edible flowers to enhance a salad. Some easy-to-grow edibles are in the chart below, but there are many, many more.

Plant Name	Scientific Name	Comments
Lettuce	<i>Lactuca sativa</i>	Various cultivars yield a range of flavors and textures
Strawberries	<i>Fragaria ananassa</i>	Edible berries May to August
Nasturtium	<i>Tropaeolum spp.</i>	Edible flower
Sweet leaf stevia	<i>Stevia reubani</i>	Herb, sweet sugar substitute, 0 glycemic index
Cherry tomato	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>	Sweet and prolific
Cucumber	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	Prolific, easy to grow in containers



Sound

Ornamental grasses, dried seedpods, and rustling trees bring movement and sound to a garden. In addition, features such as a fountain, wind chimes, or bells can add depth of sound and serve as landmarks for wayfinding. Selecting plants that provide animal and bird habitats will bring them close to enjoy. Be sure to provide a fresh, shallow water source as well.

Plants that attract birds

You can attract more songbirds to your garden by offering birdhouses and feeders and by including plants that produce fruit relished by birds.

Shrubs	Scientific Name
Apple serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier x grandiflora</i>
Japanese barberry	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>
Redosier dogwood	<i>Cornus sericea</i>
Rugosa rose	<i>Rosa rugosa</i>
Winterberry holly	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>

Trees	Scientific Name
Crabapple	<i>Malus</i>
European mountain ash	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Japanese yew	<i>Taxus cuspidate</i>
Russian olive	<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>

Attracting butterflies

Butterflies are attracted by colors, strong scents, and sweet nectars. Plants that best attract butterflies are sources for all three of those elements.

Plant Name	Scientific Name
Flowering tobacco	<i>Nicotiana spp.</i>
French marigold	<i>Tagetes patula</i>
Purple coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Butterfly weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>
Sage	<i>Salvia spp.</i>
Spiderflower	<i>Cleome hassleriana</i>
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>
Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>
Bee balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>
Butterfly bush	<i>Buddleja spp.</i>



Plants for Crafts

To engage the gardener even more, plant the garden with plants that can be harvested for use in nature crafts and culinary projects. Easy-to-dry flowers such as statice (*Limonium* spp.), baby's breath (*Gypsophila* spp.), or ornamental grasses can be used for wreaths and other dried arrangements. Other flowers such as larkspur (*Consolida ajacis*), and pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*) are beautiful and long-lasting when pressed to make cards or pictures.

Gardens that attract wildlife provide a place of wonder for those observing.

Maintenance Tips

Here are a few tips to help minimize problems in your garden:

- Start with easy-to-grow plants such as annuals and natives that are adapted to your climate.
- Choose disease- and insect-resistant varieties to eliminate pesticide use.
- Check each plant's tolerance for sun or shade; then compare its needs to your climate and site.
- Group plants with similar water requirements. A plant that likes dry soil won't thrive when paired with a plant that requires a lot of water and vice versa.
- Avoid toxic or thorny plants, especially in gardens visited by small children or where accidents are possible.
- Select trees and shrubs that need little pruning, such as dwarf or slow-growing varieties and those that have good form without pruning.
- Choose self-cleaning plants such as impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*) and vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*) or plants with foliage color.

Design Tips

- Plan your garden so you can enjoy the view from indoors when the weather keeps you in the house.
- Plant fragrant plants near open windows, paths, and patios, where you can't miss their delicious smells.
- Plant low-maintenance plants including vegetables, herbs, and cutting flowers in easy-to-reach containers, raised beds, and vertical gardens.
- Plant vining plants such as tomatoes and pole beans at the base of supporting walls, fences, or trellises so the harvest will be within easy reach.
- Plant shorter plants in containers and raised beds.

Recommended Reading

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1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, Illinois 60022 U.S.A.
chicagobotanic.org (847) 835-5440

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