

Creating a Community Sensory Garden in Balla

Stimulating the senses with a sensory garden in our community

Balla Sensory Garden, a Balla TidyTowns led project in collaboration with Balla CRD, South West Mayo Development Company and Mayo CoCo. With the support of the community, we hope to transform an unused area on the Main Green into a place of beauty, peace and tranquillity.

Balla Tidy Towns has always been committed to making a difference in the community with our various projects and we hope that this Sensory Garden will further enhance the environment of our dynamic community by providing a peaceful and tranquil space. The area will also be accessible to wheelchair users and anyone with mobility or intellectual difficulties. The facility will also be of benefit to members of our older community by allowing them a space to relax and meditate.

Balla TidyTowns has been working on this project for a while now and after teaming up with Balla CRD, South West Mayo Development Company and Mayo CoCo we have designed a preliminary plan. Everybody likes to be part of something and with Balla growing at such a rate with nine housing estates and so many people coming to settle and make their home here this project will help Balla a truly Inclusive Community.



This project is a collaboration of organisations and service providers who are working to create an environment that is welcoming, accepting, and understanding. We are proud to create a community space which invites all sectors of our community, no matter what their ability to relax and participate together.

The idea of a sensory garden is that plants, hard landscaping and other garden materials and features are selected for their appeal to all five senses with the aim of offering a richer and more therapeutic experience. In essence, all gardens are places where our senses are stimulated. What distinguishes a sensory garden from a traditional garden environment is the considered inclusion of features with particular sensory qualities, intended to create a stimulating and beneficial environment. Creating such an environmentally sustainable, pollinator friendly space embracing as much biodiversity as possible will benefit everybody.

Sensory gardens include features, surfaces, objects and plants that stimulate our senses through touch, sight, scent, taste and hearing. They are places that can be designed with many different purposes in mind. They can be calming with scented plants and restful seating; a community area for wildlife friendly plants; a therapeutic space for people to recuperate; a learning zone full of exciting things to touch and smell or an accessible garden for people with sight loss or wheelchairs to be fully independent. The possibilities are endless and that's what makes these gardens so exciting. There are so many ideas to be explored to make this eco-friendly biodiverse space into a sensory experience.

A well thought out plan is critical which accommodates space for the mature size of the plants chosen. Hardscape elements such as benches, paths, water features, bird feeders, and garden art will be incorporated into the sensory space for added effect.

Design

The design process begins by consulting with the people who are going to use the garden. We need a clear idea of how users might experience each area or feature depending on their interests and needs. Group planning sessions are an integral part of the overall project. Considerations will be made around both the 'hard' and 'soft' landscaping – including accessibility – and how these elements of the garden will interact with the changing seasons. For example, wind chimes, sculptures and materials which echo with rainfall or pebbles which take on different colours when they become wet. By accessing professional advice we will ensure that planting is in the right place in terms of growing conditions, and more specifically in terms of selection depending on what sensory experience needs to be achieved. For example, plants for taste, touch and texture need to be robust enough to be picked, squashed and crushed. Plants for scent, sound and sight need to contrast in colour, shape or movement of light, and we will also include plants that have scent during the day or in the evening. Key design considerations are as follows:

- establish the needs and include all stakeholders
- design for everyone to enjoy the space equally
- start small – allow the garden to develop organically over time
- keep it flexible to allow for changing needs and interests
- ensure low maintenance
- provide adequate seating and tables, in shade and sun
- allow access and space for wheelchairs
- attract wildlife in the garden to provide further stimulation
- involve the local community to encourage integration
- as well as the five senses consider movement, temperature, gravity, space and enclosure
- include lots of art and craft.

We intend to create an additional sensory experience by using containers, pots of herbs as well as scented and tactile plants to create a sensory trail.

Location



Environmentally Sustainable, Pollinator Friendly and Biodiverse Area adjacent to Existing Tennis Court, Multiple Use Games Area (MUGA), Playground, Picnic & Seating Area and Football Pitch on the Main Green



Critical Elements Of The Design:

- The size and shape of the space
- The type of soil (clay, sand or silt, etc) and water supplies
- How much of the garden is in light or shade?
- Any permanent features that will have to be worked around such as mature trees
- The distance from public areas and amenities
- Accessibility and security of the site

Basic Garden Structures

- ✓ Planters, containers, pots and raised beds
- ✓ Range of surfaces to walk on and make contact with
- ✓ Water features which are a great way to attract wildlife
- ✓ Creatively re-use discarded materials or features in your garden. For example, old tree stumps can be sculptured as a natural focal point and old wellies or pallets can grow plants
- ✓ Choose plants suitable for your site and conditions

Action Plan: Clearing the site of weeds and rubbish will involve ‘Méitheal Days’ with as many community members as possible so that they feel it belongs to everyone. When planting up the garden we will include labels with plant names to help people find out more about the plants. We will also add interest by including the common name and the Latin name of the plant, where it originates and its purpose in the garden.

Some ideas of things to include in a sensory garden:

1. Fence	2. Raised beds
3. Signage	4. Mud bath
5. Engraved seating	6. Grass
7. Play sculptures	8. Paths
9. Touch-pads	10. Range of walking surfaces
11. Mirrors	12. Edible plants.
13. Sandpits	14. Scented plants.
15. Water features	16. Wind Chimes

Sensory garden ideas to create an outdoor space filled with sounds, scents and textures.

The positive effects of a sensory garden on the human mind and body are too strong to be ignored.

Garden ideas with sensory at their heart will have a concentration of different elements that stimulate the five basic senses of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. These gardens are sometimes stimulating, sometimes calming, and offer tangible, visceral experiences that can evoke emotions and aid relaxation. Sensory gardens are for everyone, but are particularly beneficial to children, and those who may have specific or unique needs.

Shapes are also important in a sensory garden, materials like crazy paving and rough cut flags. The distinctive shape of some trees, flowers such as the daisy and poppy, the varied fruits on fruit trees. Movement catches the eye too, so maybe add trees such as Willow that wave in the wind.

Water features are a great addition to a sensory garden, or grasses that make interesting sounds. Pampas grass and Pearl grass are good for this. Calming sounds can also be produced by the wind blowing through leaves and stems, so plants like bamboos and large-leafed plants work extremely well.

