

Enabling Garden/Anacortes ADA Garden

By Anita Reetz and Madelyn Case

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Gardens for all abilities: Every body can enjoy gardening.

Gardening can be a lifelong pleasure for every body. Though physical limitations can interfere with bending, kneeling, digging and hoeing, there are ways to adapt gardening by removing barriers for people who love to grow plants. Here in Skagit County, there are two specially designed gardens to invite viewing and possible participation for those of us with disabilities.

The Enabling Garden is one of twenty-eight theme gardens that make up the WSU Skagit County Discovery Garden at 16650 Memorial Highway in Mount Vernon. The Enabling Garden includes accessible-to-all garden features like containers, raised beds of various heights, espaliered trees, and resting benches. The gardeners here can demonstrate safe body postures and ergonomic tools to promote the joy of gardening, even with decreased strength or energy, or physical limitations. Another specially designed garden is the Anacortes Community Garden at 29th Street which officially opened an accessible gardening area on May 15th this year. The Anacortes Garden welcomes volunteers with physical limitations.

ADAPT THE GARDEN SITE

With consideration to age and physical ability, gardening can be enjoyed more safely and comfortably with advance planning and awareness. When planning your garden, be realistic about the environmental conditions in combination with your abilities and your limitations.



Master Gardener Anita Reetz, a co-coordinator of the Enabling Garden, checks out the espaliered apple trees that are kept at a height accessible by wheelchair or walker. **Photo by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald**



Master Gardener Madelyn Case of Anacortes, a co-coordinator of the Enabling Garden in the WSU Discovery Gardens near Mount Vernon, shows how the raised beds can be tended by sitting on the perimeter ledges of each bed. **Photo by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald**

Garden walkways should be a smooth hard surface such as bricks, asphalt or cement. Navigating a wheelchair on grass or dirt on a rainy day can be challenging. Pathways need to be well drained for water runoff, maintain a flat surface and be at least 4 feet wide for ample room to maneuver.

Throughout the garden, consider installing railings and ramps as needed so you have access to all areas to work in. Raised beds, containers and window boxes are accessible alternatives to garden beds at ground level.

Raised beds at the WSU Discovery Enabling Garden in Mount Vernon vary in height, dimension and orientation. Each is no more than 3 feet across, so whether a gardener is sitting or standing, the entire bed can be easily reached.

At the Enabling Garden you'll find six distinctively different raised beds:

- The Lattice Garden includes a wood lattice running down the middle of a raised bed, supporting climbing plants such as scarlet runner beans or sweet peas. The Hoop Garden has similar, crescent-shaped white plastic tubing provides the structure for vines.
- The Sitting Ledge allows the gardener to cultivate plants while seated. The Visually Impaired Garden is designed with a trail of small white rock to contrast with bright colored annuals or perennials. The Wheelchair Garden contains three working areas arranged in a U-shape. A wheelchair can just tuck into the U and a gardener has easy access to the three raised beds.
- The Square Foot Garden stands about 25 inches high, 3 feet by 8 feet across. Each of the 24 one-foot squares is devoted to vegetables in summer. The rope defining each square serves a dual purpose: the visually impaired can identify by feel the separate square for each plant, and the plants are not crowded together, making weeding easier. Diversity in a small space is an advantage of this design.

At the Anacortes Community Garden you'll find five raised beds in wooden boxes (4 feet by 8 feet) and two at a height of 22 inches for easy wheelchair access. The lower beds have removable sitting ledges. The new beds are appropriately surrounded by 5 feet of packed gravel, a surface allowing easy access for wheelchairs and walkers. The design of this compact area was accomplished with the help of Anacortes Barrier Busters, a local advocacy group.

ADAPT GARDENING TOOLS

Options to gardening using the usual tools include selecting lightweight gardening tools made of fiberglass, aluminum or composite instead of wood and metal. Longer, telescoping handles extend the gardener's reach, such as a watering wand. D and T-shaped grips can be attached to the shaft of long handled implements like a shovel or rake. These special grips are back savers that also add more leverage to digging or raking. Handles with a soft grip are more comfortable; and handles with indentations for thumb and fingers are easier to hold.

ADAPT THE PLANTS

Choose plants that satisfy your senses of smell, touch, hearing, and taste. Kids visiting the Enabling Garden say "it's fun to feel" the woolly lambs ear (*Stachys byzantia*), spikey thyme citriodorus and saxifrage, trailing hederella helix, and soft moss. Fragrant plants throughout the

garden include lilies, mint, sage, violets and sweet peas. Herbs like lavender, rosemary and lemon verbena can be energizing to the gardener.

Some plants are even included for their sounds! Balloon flowers (*Platycodon grandiflorus*), bamboos, Chinese lantern plants (*Physalis alkekengi*), honesty (*Lunaria annua*) provide pleasant sounds when a breeze blows through the garden.

Come and visit the enabling gardens for enjoyment and inspiration. Use all your senses as you take in the environment of the WSU Discovery Garden Enabling Garden and the Anacortes Community Garden this summer season. You will take home ideas for adapting your own garden – or a friend’s or family’s garden – to make it more enjoyable for every body to savor the gardening experience.



Special tools are on display in the Enabling Garden that can help gardeners with limitations avoid unnecessary stress and pain. **Photo by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald**

GET INVOLVED!

1. Discovery Garden: Kari Russom, Master Gardener Coordinator, WSU Skagit County Extension, (360)428-4270, ext 227 or <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/index.htm>
2. Anacortes Community Garden: Betty Carteret, ACG Advisory Committee, (360)299-8553 or Jonn Lunsford, Anacortes Parks and Recreation, (360)293-1953 or www.cityofanacortes.org/Parks/CommunityGarden

RESOURCES

- *Square Foot Gardening*. Bartholomew, Mel. Rodale Press.
- *The Healing Garden: A Natural Haven for Body, Senses and Spirit*. Sue Minter, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc.
- *The Enabling Garden: A Guide to Lifelong Gardening*. Gene Rothert, Taylor Publishing
- *The Able Gardener: Overcoming Barriers of Age and Physical Limitations*. Kathleen Yeomans, R.N., Storey Communications, Inc.
- *Accessible Gardening for People with Disabilities: A Guide to Methods, Tools and Plants*, Janeen R. Adil, Woodbine House.
- *Accessible Gardening for Therapeutic Horticulture*, U of Minnesota Extension Service, www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg6757.html
- *The American Horticultural Therapy Association* www.ahta.org or 1-800-634-1603
- List of some ADA – compliant public gardens in major US cities: www.ahta.org/content.cfm?id=links