

Aibreán – Gairdín Scoile Céadfach

Paddy Madden continues his series of SESE tips



April Hands-on: the school sensory garden

What is it?

An area or areas on the school grounds with plants and objects which appeal to the senses.

Sensory plants

Use plants that have texture for the sense of touch, colour for the sense of sight, strong scent for the sense of smell, edible for the sense of taste, and aural for the sense of hearing.

The sensory plant container

The container should ideally have five sections to cater for the five senses.

Filling the container

Fill the 'smell' section nearly to the top with a soil-based compost such as *John Innes No.1*. Add about a quarter of grit to the total volume. Alternatively, use an equal mix of coarse grit, good

top soil and school compost. Many herbs originate in the Mediterranean region where the soil is poor, gritty and well-drained. Fill the other sections with a multi-purpose compost.

Maintenance

Feed about once a week from March to September with a general purpose balanced fertiliser. Feed herbs with a half-

strength seaweed fertiliser.

Site

Choose a sunny, sheltered area. A south-facing courtyard is ideal.

Additional features

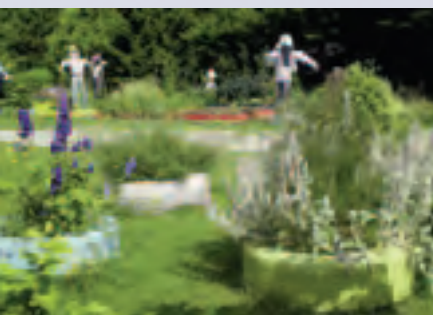
A trickling water feature either from a wall or sited in the centre of the courtyard has a calming effect.

Resources

Websites mentioned plus:

- # http://apps.rhs.org.uk/Schoolgardening/uploads/documents/Plants_for_a_sensory_garden_270.pdf
- # www.lucygardens.com/sensory-garden-plant-touch.html

- # www.naturalelearning.org/sensory-gardens
- # www.deltasensorygardens.com/the_garden
- # Geoff Hamilton's *Cottage Gardens* (Ted Smart, 1997)
- # *Gardeners' World* (August 2001; June 2004)



Sensory garden, St Thomas's SNS, Jobstown.

Touch

	Height	Spread
Bronze fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> 'Purpureum') Feathery foliage.	1.8m	45cm
Helichrysum 'Korma' Soft, silvery leaves.	30cm	30cm
Jerusalem sage (<i>Phlomis fruticosa</i>) Soft, downy leaves.	1m	1.5m

Scent

	Height	Spread
Mexican orange blossom (<i>Choisya</i> 'Goldfingers') Scented flowers and aromatic leaves.	1.2m	1.5m
Lavender (<i>Lavandula</i> 'Goldburg') Scented foliage and perfumed flowers.	60cm	60cm
Common lilac (<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>) Scented flowers in May.	4m	4m

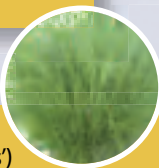
Taste

- # Blackberry ('Oregon Thornless') Cultivated blackberry. Non-invasive. Height: 2.4m; Spread: 2.4m.
- # Mangetout peas Sow indoors in March. Plant out under wigwams in April.
- # Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus* 'Autumn Bliss') Plant outdoors from November to March. Produces fruit in September.

Sound

	Height	Spread
Grass (<i>Miscanthus</i> 'Zebrinus')	1.5m	1.2m
Grass (<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i>)	1.2m	1m
Umbrella bamboo (<i>Fargesia murielae</i>) Semi-shade location. Clump-forming. Non-invasive.	2.5-4m	1-1.5m

Ornamental grass



Sensory bed, Agards NS, Celbridge.

Sight

- # Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus* 'Dwarf') A half-hardy annual which doesn't tolerate frost. Only grows to 1.5m.
- # Dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Budds Yellow') Beautiful, bright, yellow twigs in May/June. Cut to ground level every two to three years. Height: 2m; Spread: 2m. Grow *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' nearby for contrast. Prune annually.
- # Weigela ('Brigela') Variegated foliage. Ruby-red tubular flowers. Height: 2m; Spread: 1.5m.

Literacy/Litearthacht

- # Sensory plants/*Plandaí céadfacha*: Plants that are particularly good for providing scent and sound and are also have tasty, colourful and tactile qualities. *Plandaí atá go maith chun cumhrán agus fuaim a sholáthar agus a bhfuil cáilíochtaí a bhaineann le blas, dath agus tadhall acu, freisin.*
- # Aromatic leaves/*Duilleoga aramatacha*: Leaves that produce lovely scents when touched and rubbed. *Duilleoga a dtagann cumhrán deas uathu nuair a*

dhéantar teagmháil leo agus nuair a chuimlítear iad.

- # Textured plants/*Plandaí le huigeacht*: Plants that have a downy, leathery, crinkly, feathery or soft foliage. *Plandaí le duilliúr clúmhach, duilliúr leathair, duilliúr craphtha nó duilliúr bog.*
- # *The Sound Collector* by Roger McGough is a fine poem to use when teaching about the sense of sound. *Is dán breá é The Sound Collector le Roger mcGough, chun páistí a mhúineadh faoi chéadfa na héisteachta. Buíochas do Marie Whelton (MIE) don aistriúchán.*



Herb table

A herb table with thyme plants in a sunny spot entices hands to squeeze the leaves and smell.

- Step 1** Mix equal parts of coarse grit, good soil and school compost and fill nearly to the top. Add a herb fertiliser.
- Step 2** Plant with three or four thyme plants (*Thymus vulgaris*, Thymus 'Silver Posie', *Thymus citriodorus* 'Silver Queen').
- Step 3** Surround the plants with grit to emulate dry, rocky Mediterranean slopes.
- Step 4** Cut back in spring.

Indoor scent

See www.blackrockec.ie/content/september for instructions on planting hyacinths and scented daffodils in the classroom. These will provide scent in the heart of winter.

Also plant scented pelargoniums in pots. These have

highly-scented leaves. Only water when compost feels dry. Feed with a half-strength general fertiliser every month from spring to summer.

Good varieties are Chocolate Mint (*Pelargonium tomentosum*), Mosquito plant (*Pelargonium citrosa*) and Variegated Rose Geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens* 'Variegata').

Other ideas

Make an interactive pergola, a musical washing line and a wind chime by following the instructions on this site: www.growingschools.org.uk/resources
Viburnum Bodnantense 'Dawn' is undoubtedly the best shrub for winter scent. However, its berries cause a mild stomach upset if ingested.

Herb wheel

A herb wheel made from bricks and divided into segments will be visually appealing and will introduce children to a wide variety of herbs.



Pelargonium tomentosum

Herb wheel, St Thomas's SNS, Jobstown

Step 1 Choose a sunny spot. Source 60 old bricks. Use a mortar made from cement and sand (4:1) to embed the bricks in the soil. Keep level with the surrounding ground for ease of mowing.

Step 2 Remove the soil from the segments.

Step 3 Use a mix of coarse grit, good soil and school compost as the planting medium and fill the segments with this. Add a herb fertiliser.

Step 4 Plant the segments with different herb species such as chives, thyme, marjoram, lavender, sage. Plant a rosemary in the centre circle for height.

Sit it in a sunny spot. Mulch annually with well-rotted compost or manure.

Caution: Sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*) is strongly scented but beware of using it in the school garden especially if children are used to eating edible peas raw. Sweet peas are poisonous.



Chives



Viburnum Bodnantense 'Dawn'

Sensory plants

Touch: Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*), Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), Silver sage (*Salvia argentea*).

Smell: Curry plant (*Helichrysum italicum*), Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*).

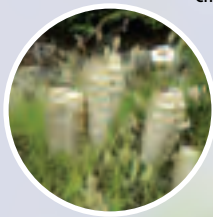
Taste: Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), Alpine strawberry (*Fragaria vesca* 'Alexandria'), Salad rocket (*Eruca sativa*).

Hear: Great quaking grass (*Briza maxima*), Miscanthus oligostachyus, Miscanthus 'Purpurelescens'.

Look: Swiss chard 'Bright Lights' (*Beta vulgaris*), Heuchera 'Chocolate Ruffles', Cyclamen (Cyclamen coum).



Lamb's Ears



Quaking Grass



PADDY MADDEN lectures on SESE in MIE. He gives short courses to whole staffs on school gardening and also visits schools through the Heritage in Schools Scheme. His book, **Go Wild at School**, has recently been reprinted. Available from paddy.madden@mie.ie for €18 (Includes p&p).