

Study reveals how gardens could help dementia care

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A new study has revealed that gardens in care homes could provide promising therapeutic benefits for patients suffering from dementia.

The research is published in the *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association* and by critically reviewing the findings from 17 different pieces of research, has found that outdoor spaces can offer environments that promote relaxation, encourage activity and reduce residents' agitation.

Conducted by a team at the University of Exeter Medical School and supported by the National Institute for Health Research Collaboration for Applied Health Research and Care South West Peninsula (NIHR PenCLAHRC), the systematic review also found that gardens could offer welcome spaces for interactions with visitors, helping to stimulate memories for [dementia](#) patients whilst providing wellbeing opportunities for families and staff.

Dementia is a global public health priority, with reports suggesting that 7.7 million new cases are identified each year. Almost half of the elderly people living in residential care have dementia or dementia symptoms, a figure which increases to more than three-quarters in nursing homes.

The study's lead researcher, Rebecca Whear, said "There is an increasing interest in improving dementia symptoms without the use of drugs. We think that gardens could be benefitting [dementia sufferers](#) by providing them with sensory stimulation and an environment that triggers

memories. They not only present an opportunity to relax in a calming setting, but also to remember skills and habits that have brought enjoyment in the past."

The research represents the first attempt to bring together findings from a range of studies and has also highlighted several factors that must be overcome if gardens are to be useful in the future care of [dementia patients](#). These include understanding possible hazards that a garden might represent to residents, and ensuring staff have time to let residents enjoy an outdoor space to its full potential.

Despite its positive findings, the study's authors were keen to point out that this area of research is currently understudied and undervalued by policy makers. Dr Ruth Garside, an expert in evidence synthesis and one of the paper's authors, said:

"There's a lot we don't know about how a garden's design and setting influences its ability to affect wellbeing, yet it's clear that these spaces need to offer a range of ways of interacting – to suit different people's preferences and needs. We want to pursue these answers to ensure that care experiences can be maximised for sufferers of dementia, their carers and families."

Provided by University of Exeter

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