

Plant uses

In Pisa and Padua in the 16th. Century, the monastery gardens grew herbs for culinary and medicinal purposes, and many of the herbs we see in the sensory garden would be very familiar to the monks of that time: sage, comfrey, thyme, hyssop and lavender to name a few.

The leaf, flower, seed, root or fruit of the herb may be used in a variety of different ways:

- In a tea—pour boiling water over fresh or dried leaves or flowers and allow the brew to infuse for 5-10 minutes. The tea is strained and drunk warm or cold.
- As a wash—make the tea as above and apply externally with cloth or cottonwool.
- As a gargle—use the tea warm as a gargle.
- As a poultice— macerate the fresh herb and mix with a little hot water, or mix the dried herb with bran or flour to form a paste. Apply this warm between pieces of cloth directly to the affected area.
- Preserved in oils—either for use in cooking, or as an externally applied scented balm or ointment.
- By direct application internally—simply chew the leaf, seed or fruit and swallow.
- By direct application externally—rub the herb in its natural raw state to the affected area.

There is an ever-changing menagerie of culinary and medicinal plants for you to explore in the herb garden. ***But remember: not all herbs are edible, and some people may eat a plant safely while another will have a violent allergic reaction to it. Self-medication should not be attempted without expert medical advice.***

A useful reference is “Rodales Encyclopaedia of Herbs” (available in the City Library (Ref. 635).)

History of the Sensory Garden.

The sensory garden is built on the site of the original rubbish tip. Clearing and construction was a bicentenary project of the CEP (Commonwealth Employment Program), and it was one of the women in the CEP group who originally designed the area.

In 1987, Council members and CEP workers cleared away the vast amounts of glass, bottles and twisted bits of metal to make way for this delightful section of garden.

Paths were constructed and a timber pergola built on the north side of the rose garden. The pergola was replaced with the current brick and steel structure in 2010.

The herbs in the garden are a “moveable feast”. As some die back periodically they are replaced with fresh varieties. Thus signs are placed with permanent plantings but not all herbs are named. Many herbs have aromatic leaves, so lightly rubbing a leaf between finger and thumb may assist in plant identification.

***It is a golden maxim to
cultivate the garden for the nose,
and the eyes will take care of themselves.***

Robert Louis Stevenson

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NORTH COAST REGIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN

THE SENSORY GARDEN



**The Friends of the North Coast Regional
Botanic Garden Inc.
is an active community group dedicated
to developing and maintaining the
attractions and amenities of the Garden.**

***Your donation would be very much
appreciated.***

PLANTS OF THE SENSORY GARDEN

At the northern end of the main bushland area, before the Glasshouses, is the Sensory Garden, home to a wide variety of plants that “tickle the senses”.

The Sensory Garden is surrounded on two sides by a camellia border (*Camellia japonica* “Jennifer Susan”) with the side facing the back lawn bordered by a hedge of lilly pilly (*Syzygium francisii* “Little Gem”).

There are four entrances:

Off the main path;

In the northwest corner;

On the north side through the lilly pillies;

and from the subtropical rain-forest. Wheelchair accessible brick and tiled paths wend their way through the area.

Many plants are in raised beds for easy access, including a section with various herbs grown for their fragrant, spicy or flavoursome oils in their seeds, flowers, fruit or other parts.

While many are edible, be aware that some are poisonous; in fact the same plants may contain both edible and poisonous parts.

A pergola in the eastern part extends from the sensory garden towards the rain-forest.

One of the most spectacular vines on the pergola is *Thunbergia mysorensis*, the lady’s slipper vine, which forms long pendulous sprays of yellow and brick red flowers.

An analemmatic sundial is a favourite with children, and is located on the lawn. Stand on the correct month and use your body or a long stick to cast a shadow on the hour markers to tell the time.

If you enter the Sensory Garden from the main road and keep left, the first path takes you past a beautiful sweet Viburnum tree (*Viburnum odoratissima*). and Bear’s Breeches shrubs (*Acanthus mollis*). Look for members of the salvia family (the sages), osmanthus, and oregano along the path.

Beyond the irises (*Iris sensate*) is a bed containing edible plants and herbs. In the centre of this elevated square garden bed is a bay laurel tree surrounded by a variety of chillies. The assortment of herbs planted in the surrounding elevated beds varies over time, but you are bound to find some familiar ‘faces’.

Just over the camellia hedge off the main road, a tall elder tree dominates, its flowers a-buzz with bees in spring. A magnolia is nearby and both trees provide spectacular visual displays when in flower.

Along the northern side of the Sensory Garden are gardenias, azaleas, climbing oleander and frangipani. The northern entrance leads to the turf maze in the main lawn outside the Sensory Garden.

From the eastern entrance near the subtropical rainforest the path winds past mounds and rockeries containing a variety of grasses. Look for the gardenias, barleria, and hibiscus, as well as the unusual centipede and felt plants. Flashes of colour announce the presence of a croton while the perfume of jasmine hangs in the air.

Further along, the path opens to a lawn that is traversed by a rock-lined water-course. Stop awhile and take in the view to the trees—among them magnolias, tree daisy and Lemon Myrtle, So many of the plants have delightful names: lion’s ear, cigar plant, firecracker plant and Little Boy Blue.

Across the lawn, the path resumes and winds around a bed of evergreens. A tall Champak tree is on the right and a bed of aloes beyond that.

The Sensory Garden is a place to wander, smell the perfumes, and gently touch the plants to sample their fragrance and texture. There are places to sit and enjoy a lunch, as well as listen to and watch a variety of birds and butterflies that come to sample the abundant nectar.

