

Future-proofing gardens

Working and relaxing in the garden is ageless, it promotes relaxation and well-being whilst being a good form of exercise, especially for those who have retired and have more time available. But as we age, it's important to make sure that outside space continues to be safe and accessible, while continuing to provide as much pleasure as possible.

John Lavin of Cognatum Property says, *"There are lots of ways of adapting outside space for the older generation to make sure it's delivering maximum value – both financial and recreational.*

"First things first, look at the ergonomics of the outside space and how it flows from the house. Any changes you can make to ensure that this access is as practical as possible will pay dividends, not least because it will mean you get maximum use out of the garden. If structural changes are necessary to give you wide access from the right part of the house that doesn't involve steps, make the investment and make it in good time.

"Other structural changes that will ensure you get maximum use out of your outside space include 'inside/outside' space such as a conservatory, summer house or veranda. Some shelter will allow you to enjoy the great outdoors even on slightly damp warm summer days, roasting summer days when some shade is required, and crisp, clear winter days.

- *"If your garden shed is hidden away at the far end of the garden, consider repositioning it so it's easily accessible.*
- *"You can significantly extend your gardening life by including raised beds in your scheme, making weeding, planting and picking much easier. Invest in long-handled tools, and if you have a penchant for gadgetry, indulge it!*
- *"Ensure ease of access around the garden with level paved paths.*
- *"Install lighting and heating to extend your enjoyment into the hours of dusk and darkness, and include benches or seating areas in pretty corners for peaceful contemplation and rest.*

"Low maintenance gardens don't have to be dull gardens. Think about the elements that will give all your senses joy, for example, sweet peas and pots of mint for their scent; interesting textures of grasses for touch; colour and architectural plants for variety; a raised vegetable garden and pots of herbs for taste; and plants that encourage birds and insects for constant activity and interest.

"A picking garden is a wonderful thing allowing you to bring the sights and smells of your garden into your home; ponds require a huge amount of work and maintenance, but a water feature brings the joy of running water without the hard labour.

"Keeping grass looking good requires constant manicuring, so if you can live without a lawn, do! If you need a lawn for pets or visiting grandchildren, consider concealing it behind a pretty screen so that the need for constant mowing isn't an issue – or consider a meadow area.

"Finally, don't be afraid to get help. Do the jobs you love yourself, and investigate the many tools there are available that make gardening more accessible for people as they become less flexible or have difficulty using regular tools. Identify the tasks that you dislike, or find too onerous, and get somebody to come and do them for you, whether that's a helpful family member or a professional. It's important to maximise the pleasure that your garden delivers."

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