

## THE THEME!

This year I worked with Guide Dogs Victoria to create 'Through the Keyhole' - a sensory garden highlighting how vision-impaired people interact with the outdoors. From fragrant blooms, tactile foliage, the soothing sound of water and interesting surfaces underfoot, a sensory garden is a way for anyone to appreciate the great outdoors.

This is the first 'sensory garden' I have designed. I began by visiting a well known sensory garden at Royal Talbot Rehabilitation centre where I met with its creator Steven Wells. Steven was a great help and what I gleaned from him was that, in reality, 'all gardens are sensory'. As a sighted person I could develop the design for the sighted audience but what about those with limited or no sight? I spoke with visually impaired people to hear how they interact with a garden, and how to keep it safe. Their opinions were wide and varied, so I adopted a best fit approach. It seemed I needed strong visual contrasts for those who have some sight. Black and white seemed obvious.

For Guide Dogs Victoria, the key message was to demonstrate to those 'viewing' the display what a garden means to someone with limited or no vision. To do this I chose to strip down the idea of a sensory garden to a simple form by breaking the garden into areas to visually represent each non-visual sense.

**Touch** - felt through 15sqm of giant liriop, planted out as a vertical garden that wraps the deck.

**Sound** - provided by the water chandelier created by combining the Hedgehog Lights with an IP rated light fitting.

**Taste** - experienced via the fruit and vegetable garden with strawberries, sweet corn, broad bean, chillies and capsicum.

**Smell** - achieved through a herb garden - employing thyme, rosemary, mint, sage and the curry plant.

Adding to the sensory experience, further plantings included magnolia, woollybush and lemon myrtle.

To meet my goals, the garden needed to be 'real' - something the public would relate to - that they could have as their own. A play area with chalk board and outdoor covered seating area helped create this - a garden a young family would play and interact in.

Follow the line of the white walls and see a keyhole shape. Look through the keyhole and unlock those senses that are too often stifled by the dominant sense of sight.

## CONCLUSION

Guide Dogs Victoria were happy, the public seemed to enjoy it, and after 4 radio slots, 3 TV interviews, 3 print media articles (so far) I think the media liked it. As for me, if they all appreciated it, it was worth the effort, but I'm still too tired to think about it! **LD**

1. Through the Keyhole garden for Guide Dogs Victoria.
2. Water chandelier - became the garden's biggest drawcard.
3. Taste garden with fruit and vegetables - other non-visual sensory spaces offered touch, sound and smell experiences.
4. Water chandelier centrepiece with curved wall.

