

# “I used to be a gardener”

Communal gardens  
as conduits  
for Aged Care residents to  
activity, identity and to  
others.

Hannah Fielder and Pauline Marsh

Centre for Rural Health. University of  
Tasmania.



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# Today

- Theory
- Method
- Results
- Implications

A sense of (gardening) self

Finding meaning

- Conclusions



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# Theoretical Framework

Therapeutic Horticulture and Therapeutic Landscapes



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# Participants

Role	Description	No.
Staff	Various roles	4
Residents	Mixed levels of cognitive capacity and past/ present interest in gardening	6
Volunteers	Elderly, involved in RACF and gardening	2
Family members	Kin to RACF resident, keen gardener	1
Total		13



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## Methods

- Phenomenological qualitative enquiry
- Dementia inclusive
- Process consent (Jan Dewing)
- Thematic analysis



# Results:

## Six Themes

- Gardening
- Being outdoors
- Socialising
- Perceptions of risk
- Independence and support
- Gardening identities



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# A sense of (Gardening) Self



*I mean, if I was well I could help in the garden. But if I was well I wouldn't be here. It's as simple as that.*

Resident

*I was very upset when I couldn't garden, when I wasn't well enough. I was very upset, but now I've accepted it and I've gone onto sewing.*

Resident



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# Finding Meaning

- Connecting with nature, plants and the outside world
- Being, doing, contributing



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*If it's just a shrub and it doesn't produce a flower it's not interesting. You want something where they can say, "ok let's go out and smell it, eat it", or something like that.*





# Why go out when you can stay in?



## Why stay in:

- Boring garden design
- Limited physical and cognitive capacity (or perceptions of...)
- No support from volunteers, staff and family
- Rules

## Why go out:

- Physical and emotional therapy
- Maintaining identity
- Risk taking like a human
- Access to the outside world and interesting others





Look out for:

**Companion Planting:** A guide to creating dementia inclusive community gardens.

DIGNITY Supported Community Gardening  
[www.dignitygardening.com](http://www.dignitygardening.com)

#### Contacts

- ➡ Hannah Fielder  
[Hannah.Fielder@utas.edu.au](mailto:Hannah.Fielder@utas.edu.au)
- ➡ Pauline Marsh  
[Pauline.Marsh@utas.edu.au](mailto:Pauline.Marsh@utas.edu.au)



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