

Creative Spaces information sheet - Sensory Trust

Activity: Nature palettes

Colourful flowers and shiny leaves, soft grass and gravel paths, spiky seeds and soft wool tangled in hedgerows. All of these sensory features are a part of how we experience outdoor places and can stimulate memories of places we've been and people we've spent time with. These associations are particularly important in helping people with dementia to reconnect with outdoor environments and with their memories of being outdoors.

Outdoor-related activities and interests that make hands-on use of natural materials can make stronger emotional connections and associations for people with dementia than simply looking and talking. They have proved to be effective in making connections to past memories associated with the outdoors as well as helping to create memorable new experiences. These activities help us as a friend, carer and/or relative, to reconnect with an individual and discover what they find attractive outdoors.

Nature Palettes is one such activity. It has been used by environmental educators for many years, reconnecting people with their surroundings and providing hours of fun for people of all ages and abilities. It has proved unbelievably popular with professional and



home carers we have worked with because of its simplicity and low-cost.

Materials:

All you require is:

- a strong, thick piece of cardboard in whatever size you wish
- double-sided sticky tape
- an outside space

Instructions:

Cut the piece of cardboard into the shape of an artist's palette; any size you like. Don't forget to cut out a hole for the thumb!

Note: you can use recycled materials if you don't have any cardboard. For example, we have used circular sections of thick foam cut from the inside of stereo speakers that happen to be sticky on one side. Old pieces of wood serve just as well, as long as they're not too thick and are easy to carry.

Cut the double-sided sticky tape into strips long enough to reach across the palette

Take your blank Nature Palette(s) and find a lovely outdoor location to spend time wandering around.

Note: if you're out in the countryside or on someone else's property only select items that are lying around – don't pull leaves from trees or petals from flowers.





Fill as much or as little of the palette as is desired. You may want to record memories on the back of the palette so that you can use it later in conversation. Mark the date or time of year on the card, it will help build a picture of what an individual enjoys about each season.

As this activity can be done any time of the year it's a lovely idea to hang the palettes up at home and change them to reflect the different seasons. This will help people to identify with the changing time of year. If you have several palettes why not join them together to create a hanging mobile using coloured string or ribbon with garden canes or twigs collected while you were out.



Top tips

- 1 Make sure the cardboard is sturdy, whatever shape you decide to create
- 2 Nature Palettes are for all-year-round; not just for spring or summer!
- 3 Unless you're on your own property always take things from the ground unless told otherwise
- 4 Think textures and smells as well as colour
- 5 Don't try to influence what the person chooses; avoid 'closed' questions such as "Do you like....?"
- 6 Have a go yourself; have fun together, it's about joining in not leading an activity

Creative Spaces

This information sheet has been produced in collaboration with Cornwall Care as part of the Creative Spaces project

CornwallCare

Because we're Individuals

Cornwall Care promotes people-centred care through their 18 care homes in Cornwall - www.cornwallcare.org



Sensory Trust

Sensory Trust promotes and supports the creation and management of outdoor spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age or ability.

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