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Stroke  
association

# Be Inspired

Activity ideas for Stroke Clubs  
and Voluntary Groups



**Thank you** to all Clubs and Groups who submitted their ideas for this resource.

**Graphic design** by Alan Price

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# Getting active

As exercise is a specialist activity, groups are advised to think very carefully about how and why they may wish to organise exercise sessions. It is also very important to ensure that the health and wellbeing of members is protected.

## Benefits of exercise

### Regular physical activity helps:

- Reduce the risk of stroke and heart disease;
- Increase muscle strength and flexibility;
- Reduce the risk of falls;
- Reduce the risk of developing Type II diabetes;
- Reduce and help control blood pressure;
- Reduce stress and anxiety;
- Improve balance and coordination;
- Enhance quality of sleep.

### (Taken from British Heart Foundation Patient Networks Development Toolkit 11 on Physical Activity)

Exercise also helps stroke survivors with recovery and to prevent further strokes.

As with all elements of running a group, it is important to be sure of the need for an activity. For this reason, it is a good idea to do some research into what is already on offer locally, and to ask members if they are interested in the group providing an opportunity for exercise.

Once you've established the need, you'll need to make sure everyone involved is clear on the purpose for setting up exercise sessions. We all know that exercise is important, but what does the group hope to achieve in organising opportunities for physical activity? There could be many reasons:

- To promote physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle;
- To aid recovery from stroke;

- To encourage social support and friendship in the group;
- To provide an opportunity for appropriate exercise that doesn't exist elsewhere in the local community.

Whatever the reasons, be clear about what they are. Being clear on the aims will help with the next part – deciding what sort of exercise to offer. The most common is seated exercise classes, but some groups offer different activities such as group swimming sessions, yoga, tai chi, and group walking sessions. You may want to talk to other groups in making this decision and benefit from their experience, and even learn from their mistakes.

## Where and when

Whatever activity your group wants to organise, thought will need to be given to where it is going to be run, and how often.

Most seated exercise sessions are run in the group's regular meeting place. Swimming activities will obviously have to take place in a pool. Below is a checklist of things to consider in choosing a venue:

- Is there enough space for the activity?
- Is there a maximum number of people who can take part?
- Is there adequate lighting, heating and ventilation?

## ...no exercise in a group setting is undertaken without a qualified instructor to run it.

Remember you'll be exercising in summer and winter.

- Is there disabled access and facilities  
If you're organising swimming sessions, don't forget that people need to get in and out of the pool, and get changed.
- Is the right equipment available?  
For example, for seated exercise you'll need stable chairs and a plug socket for music. Stacking chairs are not always suitable – you may need to check with your instructor.
- Are there facilities for making or buying refreshments?

Exercise is most effective when it is done regularly, so think about how often you're going to run sessions. Also, when they are going to be run i.e. at every group meeting or as an additional session on a different day?



## Choosing an exercise Instructor

Exercise is a specialist activity that needs a specialist to run it. It should be fun, enjoyable, appropriate to each individual's needs, and most of all safe. A qualified instructor will ensure all of these things.



The Stroke Association strongly recommends that no exercise in a group setting is undertaken without a qualified instructor to run it. They should be either a registered and currently practising physiotherapist or be registered with the Register of Exercise Professionals. There are a number of organisations you can go to find a qualified person. This list is not exhaustive and there are other organisations that can help.

- EXTEND - a charity that trains individuals to run safe and enjoyable seated exercise sessions for older people and those who are less able. They have a course on working with people affected by stroke which instructors can complete as part of their ongoing professional development.
- Keep Fit Association – a provider of exercise teacher training;
- Register of Exercise Professionals – a list of qualified fitness instructors holding nationally recognised qualifications;



**...appropriate to**

**individual's needs, and most of all**

**fun and enjoyable.**

- British Wheel of Yoga – the governing body for yoga in the UK who hold a list of qualified teachers;
- Swimming Teachers Association – provider of swimming teacher, aquacise instructor and lifeguard training;
- Local gyms – both council-run and private gyms employ qualified fitness instructors, who may also be looking for extra work;
- Local physiotherapy department – they may have junior members of staff interested in gaining experience, or be able to advise about where to go to find someone suitable.

In choosing someone to run your sessions, don't be afraid to interview them. You'll want to make sure they are qualified and are going to fit in with your group. For example, you might want to ask them about their qualifications, experience of working with people affected by stroke, or how they'd work with people with communication difficulties. You may also want to ask them about their first aid qualifications and working with vulnerable adults, see Health and Safety section below.

## Exercise sheets and videos

Be wary of using exercise videos in a group setting. They set a standard pace that may not be appropriate for everyone. It is also advisable not to use exercise sheets that have been given to individuals. Again, they may include exercises that are not suitable for everyone, and have been written with individuals, not groups, in mind.

Remember, a qualified person will ensure that the activity is safe, appropriate to individual's needs, and most of all fun and enjoyable.

## Exercise activity ideas

- Balance exercises
- Mini golf
- Golf
- Skittles
- Swimming
- Ten pin bowling
- Chair based exercises
- Curling
- Line dancing
- Indoor bowls
- Tai chi
- Yoga
- Zumba (Zumba Gold)
- Boccia
- Sponsored walks
- Guided walks (to meet others and find companionship)
- Use a pedometer to measure your steps and watch your progress

## Chair based exercises

Chair based exercises are designed to help people build up their activity levels without putting unwanted strain on their hips, legs or arms. The exercises are a series of stretches, movements and activities.



**Anyone joining in  
exercise should wear  
appropriate clothing.**

## Tai chi

Tai Chi is a type of Chinese martial art which consists of slow movements. It's mostly practiced for its defence training and its health benefits.

## Yoga

Yoga is a term for a range of exercises and meditation. It's used to alleviate health problems, reduce stress and make the spine supple.

## Zumba

Zumba is a Colombian dance fitness program created by a dancer and choreographer. It involves dance and aerobic elements such as hip-hop, soca, samba, salsa, merengue, mambo, martial arts and some Bollywood and belly dance moves.

## Health and safety

Running safe exercise sessions is vital. Any exercise session run by a qualified person should carry minimal risks but there are a number of things to consider. The group has a responsibility to ensure that its activities are safe and suitable to members' individual needs.

## Risk assessment

Undertaking a risk assessment of the venue and activity is the best way to ensure that all health and safety concerns have been thought through. You can get a sample risk assessment form and advice on completing it by contacting the Stroke Association.

## Insurance

Qualified instructors and professionals should have their own professional liability insurance. You should ensure you've seen proof of insurance, and check it covers them away from their normal place

of work. Don't forget to tell the group's insurer about the exercise sessions. There shouldn't be any additional premium if you are using a trained and insured instructor.

## First aid

All group sessions should have first aid cover. Professional instructors should have this qualification already. If you are undertaking swimming sessions, make sure a qualified lifeguard is on duty at all times.

## Next of kin and medical information

As a matter of course, the group should ensure it holds information on all members' medical history, as well as next of kin details. This information will be important for any instructor and in case of ill health or an emergency.



**...exercise can result in dehydration, so providing refreshments is essential, including plenty of water.**

Remember that the person leading the exercise retains the right to refuse someone from joining in the exercise session if they feel it is not appropriate for them. Encourage members to let their health professionals know that they are taking part in exercise sessions, especially if the individual has multiple conditions.

## Clothing and refreshments

Anyone joining in exercise should wear appropriate clothing. For seated exercise, this means loose fitting clothing and comfortable shoes that are flat and stay on whilst exercising e.g. trainers. Any sort of exercise can result in dehydration, so providing refreshments is essential, including plenty of water.

## Working with vulnerable adults

As many stroke survivors are considered to be vulnerable adults, it may be appropriate for instructors to have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau.

For example, EXTEND, a well-respected instructor training organisation, insist that all their instructors have been checked. The Stroke Association is able to advise further.

## Funding

Providing exercise as part of your group's activities in a safe and appropriate way does often come with some additional costs. These may include:

- Room hire, if sessions are held away from the usual group meeting;
- Transport, again if sessions are held away from the usual meeting place;
- Refreshments;
- Fitness instructor payment, usually around £25 to £30 a hour;

## There are different ways to cover these costs:

- Those taking part in the exercise could be asked to contribute to the cost, bearing in mind that private classes often cost between £5 and £10 per person.
- The group could choose to cover all the costs from funds;
- The group could consider paying for a volunteer to be trained as a fitness instructor. This is probably most appropriate if the group wants to run seated exercise sessions. For example, EXTEND training costs around £500.
- Project funding could be sought locally. For example, some councils have grant schemes for new health or exercise related projects. Consider including the costs of volunteer training in this as grant making bodies are always looking to ensure sustainability and the development of volunteers.
- Get in touch with your regional fundraising team at the Stroke Association and find out how you can get involved in fundraising events, such as Step out for Stroke.



# Creative arts

A brilliant way of expressing yourself is through art. It can also be used as a form of communication as well as having therapeutic benefits. The great thing about art is that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of doing things. Anybody, of any age or ability, can take part and enjoy its many forms. For those whose communication and verbal skills have often been severely affected, art can become a vital medium for self-expression.

Some people can even learn to paint with their non-dominant hand since their stroke. Give your members an opportunity to express themselves through art and share their talents with their fellow members.

## How can I incorporate art into my group sessions?

Here are some examples of art activities that your group could take part in:

- pencil drawing

- oil painting
- water colour painting
- pastel drawing
- ceramics
- collage
- chalk drawing
- photography.
- mosaic making
- plate, pot and glass painting/decorating
- paper mâché
- t-shirt design
- poetry



**The great thing about art is that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of doing things.**

## Painting and drawing

### Tiled effects

1. Ask members to draw/paint a different section each of one object, which can be done using a variety of different mediums, such as chalk, various paints, pencil and pastel.
2. Piece the drawings/paintings together like a jigsaw to create one large image.

Alternatively, members can draw their own whole versions of the same object. These can then be placed together to make a Warhol inspired tiled effect.

## Plate decorating

### You will need:

1. Porcelain paint pens
2. Porcelain paints
3. Paintbrushes
4. Selection of porcelain plates/bowls.

Draw out your design onto paper first and once you have done this, copy it onto the plate or bowl. Use the porcelain paint pens for the finer details of your design and the porcelain paints for the larger sections. Leave the plate or bowl to dry for 24 hours and then bake for 35 minutes at 150 degrees Celsius. Leave to cool and, finally, run through the dishwasher.

## Painted plant pots

### You will need:

1. Terracotta pots
2. Acrylic paint
3. Cotton buds
4. Paint brushes

Use the paint brushes for larger sections of your pattern and cotton buds for smaller sections and/or dots. Experiment with different sized brushes for greater precision.

## Complete the picture

Take a plain piece of paper and draw a line in any size or shape. Then hand each of the members the paper. Their task is to make a picture out of it, including the already existing line drawn on it. It is a good way to stimulate creativity.

## Photography

You can explore different modes of photography depending on the level of technology you have access to. You could invest in a digital camera and upload your photos to your computer. Alternatively, stick to a film camera or even a few disposable ones. If you have one sided hand or arm weakness, try turning the digital camera upside down and take pictures that way. It would be a great idea to combine a photography session with an outing. The photos can then be developed and used as subjects for a drawing or painting session.



## The key to creating a great light painting is a slow shutter speed ...

### Light painting

Light painting is a photographic technique where light sources are moved in front of a camera to create pictures. The key to creating a great light painting is a slow shutter speed – the more time you have, the better your images will look.

#### You will need:

A camera  
A light source (torches, bicycle lamps, mobile phones, iPads etc)  
A dark location  
Somewhere to rest your camera

1. Find a good location and set up your camera. Take a sample shot with the flash on to plan your composition.
2. Set the camera's exposure time, also known as the shutter speed, the shutter priority or bulb setting. If you can, try setting it to at least five seconds.
3. Turn off the lights and click the camera to open the shutter.
4. Turn on your light source and move it around in front of the lens. Imagine the torch is a paint brush, using it to smear the light. Moving the light slowly will result in a brightly lit area, but be careful not to linger too long on one spot.
5. Listen out for the click as the shutter closes, which will end your composition. Inspect your image on the camera and give it another go if it isn't quite right.

### Create a photographic library

This is great for remembering all the members who have been attending the groups – including those who have passed away. It can also be really useful for those of your members who struggle to remember things.

### Mosaic making

#### You will need:

Backing Board  
Adhesive  
Items to mosaic

1. Prepare your backing board. You can use wood, such as MDF or plywood for the backing board. What is important is that the wood does not warp. It's a good idea to prepare the wood by priming it (painting the surface with a coat of diluted PVA glue) and scoring it with a knife, which gives the surface a better grip for the adhesive.
2. Choose your adhesive. Depending on what you're mosaicing, there are different types of adhesive. Epoxy resin is very strong, but can be a little unpleasant to use. It is effective for non-porous materials, such as metals. However, it is a high hazard adhesive, which can damage the skin as well as letting off dangerous fumes. PVA glue can be found easily and can be bought in large quantities cheaply. It is also very low hazard and has some water resistance. Household tile adhesive is a good choice for 3D pieces of work and is also low hazard.
3. Glue your items on to the backing board. Almost anything can be mosaicked, such as crockery, household tiles, glass (including stained glass and mirrored glass), buttons, shells and other objects you might find around the house or garden, such as stones, metal and plastics. Do be careful when breaking up items like these - wear gloves to protect your hands from sharp edges.

**There are a number of ways in which members to work together, promoting interaction among members.**

## Papier mâché

### You will need:

Paper (newsprint is ideal)  
Adhesive  
Paintbrush  
Plastic table covering  
Paints

1. Tear the newspaper into strips.
2. Make your adhesive. You can use wallpaper paste glue and if you keep in an airtight container. It will keep for several days in the fridge or somewhere cool.
3. Choose your moulds, such as balloons, bowls and plates. If you're using bowls or plates, lightly coat them in vaseline or cooking oil first.
4. Paste the strips of paper both sides with a paintbrush.
5. Place your strips one at a time over the object to be covered and smooth down to remove air bubbles. Cover with two to three layers at a time. When it is completely dry, you can gradually build up as many layers as you require until you have the required thickness.
6. To add features such as rims, handles or decoration, stick pieces of cardboard onto the model.
7. When completely dry, paint with two coats of emulsion paint to seal it and kill the newsprint. You can then paint it using any paints you like.

## Design your own t-shirts

Get your members to design and personalise their own T-shirts. All you need are plain T-shirts and a bit of creativity and you can do everything from painting over iron on transfers to embroidering.

Why not personalise some T-shirts to represent your club or group? Wear them on your next outing rip as a sign of identity and advertisement for the group.

## Mini Zen Garden

Japanese "dry landscape" gardens, often called "Zen gardens", were influenced mainly by Zen Buddhism and can be found at Zen temples of meditation. There is no water in a Zen garden. There is gravel or sand, raked or not raked, to symbolize sea, ocean, rivers or lakes.

Zen priests practice raking the gravel to help their concentration. Achieving perfection of lines is not easy and developing variations in patterns is a creative and inspiring challenge. Stone arrangements and other miniature elements are used to represent mountains and natural water elements and scenes, islands, rivers and waterfalls.

## Create your own mini Zen Garden.

### You will need:

A dish or a box  
A (plastic) fork  
Sand  
Stones

Fill the sand into the dish/box and create your own garden by adding stones and raking patterns into the sand with your fork. Can you create your lines as neat as the Zen priests?

## Placemats

Placemats can be made with fabric, plastic or vinyl, paper or even natural materials such as bamboo. You can also design them for special occasions, such as Christmas and Halloween.



## Laminated placemats

The design of the placemat can be from almost anything; a piece of cloth, a section of wallpaper, a selfmade picture or just images of leaves you have found (note: real flowers and leaves will die, even inside of lamination, copy the leaves and print out a photo of them for your place mat).

The design is entirely up to you. Once you have made your choice entrap the contents between lamination sheets. As long as the contents are basically flat they can be laminated. This also includes also glitter, ribbon, lace, felt and even dry paint.

You can also create designs from personal photographs, pictures from magazines and comics (e.g. from a newspaper). You could create calendar pages (there are countless websites that offer free printable PDFs in several styles) and take notes of your appointments (use a non permanent marker so you can wipe it off and reuse the calendar).

If you do not have access to a laminating machine use transparent self-adhesive paper. You will also need a ruler or rolling pin to smooth out any air bubbles and scissors, craft knife or rotary cutter to trim the edges. This works best with flat objects like pictures, calendars, comics, etc.

## Fabric placemats

**1.** Cut up an old pillow case into four equal pieces - approximately 12" x 18". If you sew, you might want to hem the edges, but raw edges made with pinking shears can also look nice.

**2.** Personalise the fabric as you wish. You could use fabric paint (paint your own pictures or dab a little paint on leaves or other objects and press onto the material to make prints) or glue/sew decorations such as beads, ribbons, wheat/wild grass, etc.

**Why not create matching napkin rings?**

## Confetti

### Planning a party? Make your own confetti!

Confetti is very easily made, but just may take a bit of time. Collect several punchers (preferably three hole punches as they are bigger) and punch coloured papers. Collect the paper punches in a plastic bag.

If you want to make confetti for a specific theme you might consider different shaped punches. You can find them in lots of different shapes. It may take a considerably longer time with those, though, as they are smaller but you can always mix normal confetti with the shaped ones.

## Posters

Sure enough you have already taken several photos from your group and all the fun activities you are enjoying together. So why not use those to create posters to attract new members. You can also add some short descriptions, some small drawings or whatever comes to mind.

## Poetry

Poetry can be great practice for developing communication skills and for self expression. The great thing about poetry is that there are no rules! Many stroke survivors have already shown how great they are at creative writing. Some people like to write about their experiences of stroke, whereas some members may like to write about a totally different topic. Turn poetry writing into a fun group activity. Each member of the group writes one line of the poem in line with a theme (e.g. childhood memories, summer etc) and the paper is folded so the next member cannot see what has been written when writing the next line. Once everyone has contributed, the paper is opened out to show the whole poem.



# Green fingers

Have your members got green fingers? Gardening combines exercise with the ability to be creative, as well as encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors and appreciate nature. Getting involved with gardening can also improve your mental health by giving the feeling of a sense of purpose and achievement. The great thing about gardening is that anybody of any ability can join in and enjoy it.

## Design your garden

If gardening is unsuitable for some of your members or if some people just don't feel like it, there are alternatives. Encourage your members to design their ideal garden, which is a fun, inexpensive and interactive activity. There are many different layouts to choose from. What type of layout would you have? What plants, shrubs and trees would you have?

Some people may like the idea of growing their own vegetable patch! Does anybody know which vegetables are best to grow for each season? Maybe some members have experience of this.

Perhaps you'd like to have a focal point of the garden. A water feature? A bench? A pond? An archway? This is your garden – you can design it however you wish!

### Growing in season

- **Salad leaves**

- **Mint**

- **Strawberries:** Plant April-May

- **Beetroot:** Plant March-July

- **Pumpkin:** Plant late May-June

- **Tomatoes:** Plant late May

- **Salad leaves**

- **Mint**

- **Strawberries:** Harvest June-September

- **Beetroot:** Harvest June-October

- **Onions:** Harvest July-August

- **Tomatoes:** Harvest August-October

- **Peashoots:** Harvest June-October

- **Courgettes:** Plant late May – June, Harvest late July-October

- **Salad leaves**

- **Mint**

- **Beetroot:** Harvest June-October

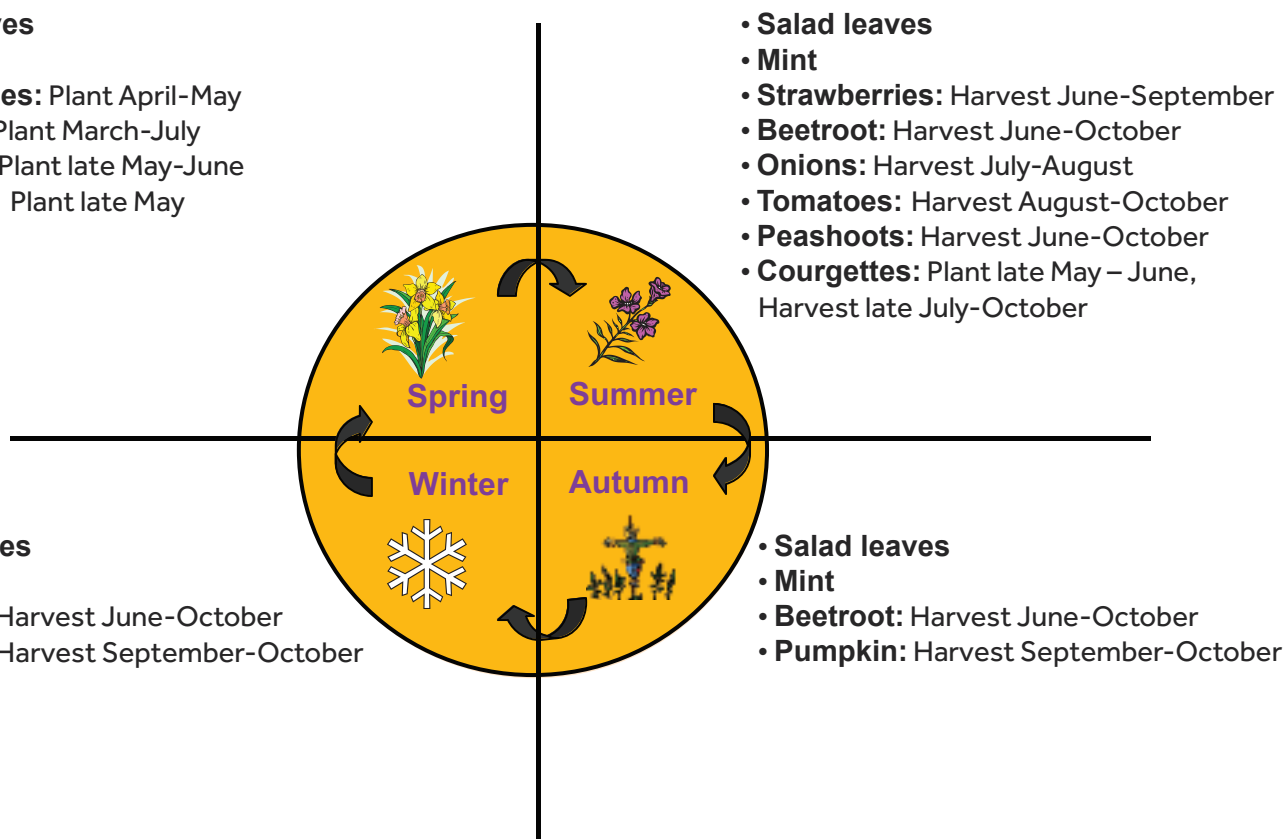
- **Pumpkin:** Harvest September-October

- **Salad leaves**

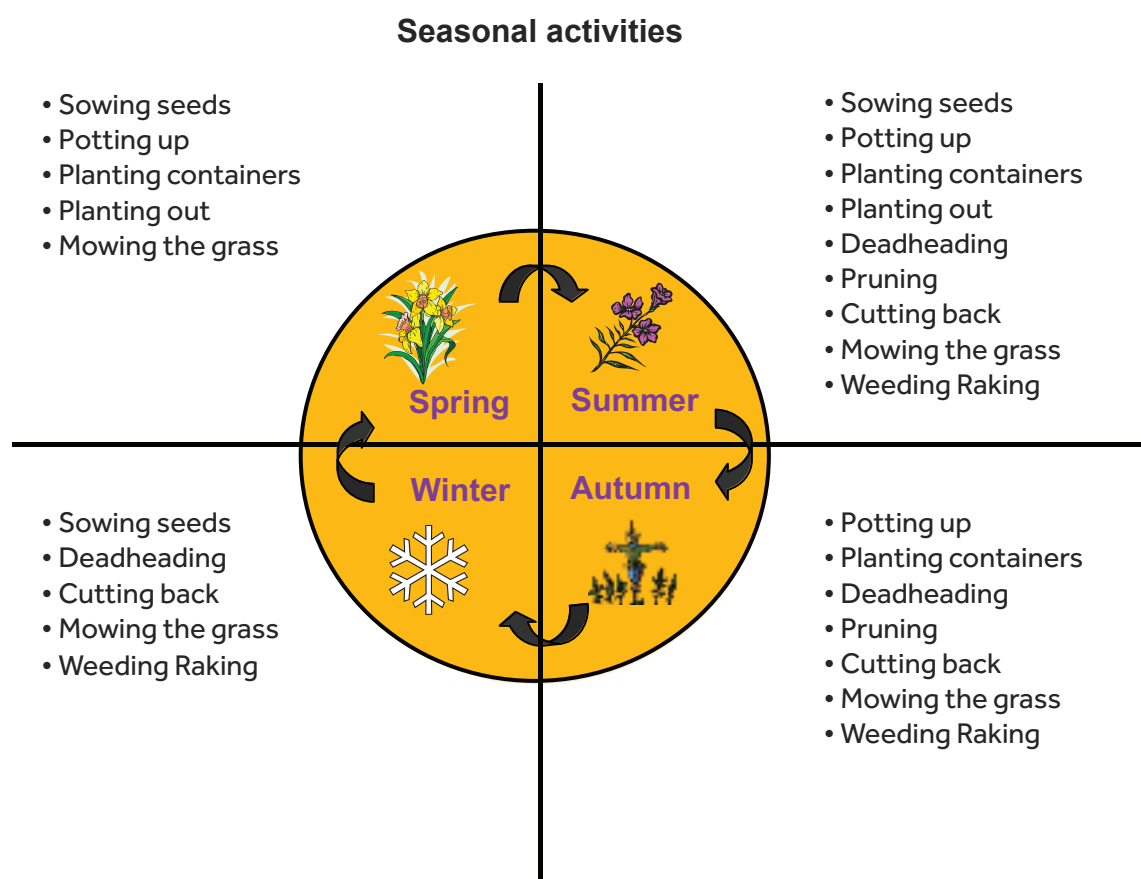
- **Mint**

- **Beetroot:** Harvest June-October

- **Pumpkin:** Harvest September-October



**For those who have mobility difficulties, table top gardening may be the answer.**



Adapted from **Gardening for Hearts & Minds** by 'Thrive'

Here are some things you may wish to consider when designing and/or creating your garden:

- Maintenance costs are low;
- Requires little maintenance;
- The garden is attractive;
- There are places to sit and relax.

## Table top gardening

For those who have mobility difficulties, table top gardening may be the answer. You can buy your own table top garden beds. Why not make your own shallow-container gardens to dress up your patio?

## Adapted tools

Why not using adapted tools to make gardening for your members with disabilities easier? These tools are ergonomically-designed, supportive and comfortable to use. Your members will keep their hand and wrist at a natural angle what eliminates the strains and blisters that can be caused by conventional style garden tools. The tools are easy to grip, even with wet hands.

## Vertical gardens

These special gardens are similar to table tops and are built up walls, fences or shelves. They are easier to maintain and look very special. Your members will have it easier to plant their flowers.

..... a pulley attached to the basket, gardeners can raise or lower the baskets minimizing the amount of reaching.



## Hanging baskets

If you have members in wheelchairs this idea could be for you. By having a pulley attached to the basket, gardeners can raise or lower the baskets minimizing the amount of reaching. Your members won't have to kneel on the ground to plant their flowers.

## Pot hangers

If you are not a fan of vertical gardens, you could try and have some pot hangers. These are great for people who can't kneel on the ground or want to

work while standing or sitting. They are special pots which can be hung on to walls or fences. They are designed to endure high winds and bear up to 100 pounds.

## Visual aided planting

Visual aided planting can make it easier for your members to recognize if the fruits and vegetables they planted are ripe. It's important to a mixture of dark and light colours to differentiate between areas of a garden, including pathways.

**If somebody has back problems,  
encourage them to partake in tabletop  
gardening to avoid bending down....**

### **Get competitive!**

Get competitive and have a sunflower growing competition. Each member plants their own sunflower and the person whose flower grows the tallest is the winner! You can take pictures of them each week to document their progress. If you And it doesn't have to be a sunflower – who can grow the biggest radish, the juiciest tomato, the most beautiful flower?

### **Flower arranging**

Flower arranging would be a good alternative if you want to do something with plants or flowers, but have no resources to do gardening. It can be done both indoors and outdoors. For flower arranging the only things you need are some flowers, shallow containers, anchor foam, glue and position spray. Start out with the middle where the focal flowers should be placed, after that use filler flowers and foliage to fill in and around the focal area.

### **Flower pressing**

You just need a flower press (or some heavy books), flowers or other plants, wax paper (if you are using a heavy book) and acid free spray. Just lay the flowers between two pieces of wax paper and close the book or place them in the flower press. Make sure the flowers, plants or leaves are not touching or overlapping, because this will cause them to stick. It is important that the



flowers are not too bulky. The drying process will take at least 2 weeks, so bear this in mind when planning to do flower pressing with your group.

### **Grow own fruits/vegetables (indoors)**

Growing from seed is a simple way of raising new plants and giving your members some responsibility. Start with planting 20 seeds as a maximum and don't plant the seeds too close together. The things you need to grow fruits/vegetables are small pots or seed trays, seed compost, a watering can and a sheet of glass or an inverted polythene bag. It will take at least six weeks for them to grow.

### **Health and safety**

Make sure that members are gardening in line with their own physical abilities. If somebody has back problems, encourage them to partake in tabletop gardening to avoid bending down and increasing the chance of further injury. Take care when using sharp tools to avoid injury.



**It's important to a mixture of dark and light colours to differentiate between areas of a garden, including pathways.**



Also, make sure that you have adequate washing facilities to clean your hands afterwards.

## **Thrive**

**Thrive** is dedicated to promoting the benefits of gardening to individuals and organisations. Thrive also provide teaching techniques and practical applications so that anybody with a disability can enjoy and benefit from gardening.

**T: 0118 988 5688**

**E: [info@thrive.org.uk](mailto:info@thrive.org.uk)**

**W: [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)**

**and [www.carryongardening.org.uk](http://www.carryongardening.org.uk)**



## **We are the Stroke Association**

We believe in life after stroke. That's why we support stroke survivors to make the best recovery they can. It's why we campaign for better stroke care. And it's why we fund research into finding new treatments and ways of preventing stroke.

We're here for you. If you'd like to know more please get in touch.

**Stroke Helpline:** 0303 3033 100

**Website:** [stroke.org.uk](https://stroke.org.uk)

**Email:** [info@stroke.org.uk](mailto:info@stroke.org.uk)

**From a textphone:** 18001 0303 3033 100