

EXTENSION  
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

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*Extension Master Gardener Sonja Wright expanded a community garden in Bryant, IL and created a sensory garden that intentionally spurs visitors to engage all five senses. Everyone can benefit, but people with learning and physical disabilities are especially impacted through a sensory garden.*

## New Sensory Garden Added to Community in Village of Bryant

Sonja Wright, University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties, created a sensory garden in her hometown of Bryant, IL. Through her professional career as a speech pathologist, Sonja understands the value of using all five senses as a means of skills recovery. As an active member of the community, and as a village trustee, she is aware several community members live with various types of physical and learning disabilities and the sensory garden is of special value to them and their families. Additionally, the garden has already attracted visitors from outside Bryant.

Created years ago, the garden features a design inspired by the area's agricultural life. Wishing to honor the original garden and connect with the traditions it represents, Sonja developed a plan that added five long raised beds—one for each of the senses—designed in a circular fashion around the existing garden. She further planned for a thick, soft mulch path between the existing garden at the core and the sensory garden around it.

According to Sonja, the raised beds are long, narrow, and not too high: just right for children and adults to easily reach in and touch plants, grasp and break off a piece to taste or smell, lean in to see them up close, or listen and hear them rustling in the breeze. Lamb's Ear and parsley are but two of the dozens of plants that await visitors to touch, taste, smell, see, and hear.

Sonja's love of barn quilts led her to design and create a series of artistic panels that surrounds the garden. The colors in the quilt patterns echo the colors in the surrounding natural environment, adding to the sense of coherence, belonging, and comfort.

In addition to being a space for exploration, contemplation, renewal, healing, and recovery, the Sensory Garden has fostered a sense of community. The local Brownie Troop has enjoyed work days there, building and decorating butterfly house art for the garden. Individual residents have contributed time and enthusiasm to help maintain the garden. The village has contributed resources and support to what is a wonderful gift to the entire community.

Through the Sensory Garden and other involvements, Sonja quickly completed her 60 Extension Master Gardener volunteer hours that moved her from intern to official Extension Master Gardener. Her journey continues and so does the garden she created in Bryant. Sonja is making plans for a pollinator garden at the site, perhaps as a next concentric area enfolding the original garden structure and the Sensory Garden.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension