

Memorial Garden

A memorial garden provides a long-lasting tribute to a loved one who has passed away, as well as offers a place for the survivors to remember and to heal.

The garden can be as small as a single tree or perennial plant or as large as an oversized flowerbed or garden with many different flowers, ornamental grasses and even shrubs and trees, depending on available space.

When selecting plants for a memorial garden, consider the favorite flowers of the individual you are honoring. Did that person love daisies or lilacs? Prefer peonies or poppies? Did he or she have a favorite season such as spring, making a bulb garden of daffodils, tulips, and other spring bloomers the perfect tribute'?

Or think about the fragrances or colors that evoke fond memories. Perhaps the scent of lavender or roses reminds you of that person. Another possibility is to include plants that have the same name as your friend or loved one, such as black-eyed susan (*rudbeckia*), veronica, or sweet william.

If red was his or her favorite color, consider planting a garden consisting primarily of red hues with a single accent color such as silver. For example, you could plant a mixed bed of red impatiens, geraniums, and verbena edged with silvery dusty miller, lamb's ear, or one of the silver-leaved varieties of artemisia.

You also could select plants that have specific meanings, such as forget-me-nots (memories), rosemary (remembrance), poppies (rest or eternal sleep), yellow tulips (friendship), or pink carnations (I'll never forget you). If the memorial is for a baby or young child, plant daisies for innocence or white lilies for purity. Or use varieties such as baby's breath (*gypsophila*) or 'Sweet Dreams' *coreopsis rosea*.

Plant sweetheart roses to remember a spouse. Or if your memorial garden is a single tree, plant an oak for strength or a yew for immortality. Just keep in mind that these can get quite large and need adequate space if they are to last and remain there over the years.

If commemorating a war hero or veteran, plant a red, white, and blue garden, including varieties such as red poppies and daylilies, white phlox and peonies, and blue Jacob's ladder (*polemonium*) and Siberian irises. There are very few true blue flowers, so you may need to substitute dark purple varieties, perhaps some of the delphiniums or campanulas for blue.

Or choose plants with inspirational names like the 'Patriot' hosta, 'Peace' rose, 'Freedom' alstroemeria, and 'Over in Gloryland' Siberian iris. Other popular choices are gentle shepherd daylily, remember me hosta, or guardian angel hosta.

When planting your memorial garden, you will probably want to include a mix of varieties, as well as keep rules of proportion in mind--taller plants in the back, smaller ones in the front, for example. What makes it a memorial garden though is that it's planted from the heart. Don't worry whether your planting fits rules of design or will be appreciated by others. Do what is most meaningful for you.

include appropriate statuary and hardware. If memorializing someone, who loved cats, why not include a small cat statue? For a bird lover, add a birdbath to attract backyard songbirds. If the person was known for a great sense of humor, buy or make a garden whimsy or two as a remembrance.

Add a bench for visitors to sit and reflect or a water feature, such as a fountain or water garden, to create a soothing, comforting environment. Or put in an arbor or trellis, training honeysuckle's, ivies, and other climbing vines to cover the structure to create a quiet, secluded spot for contemplation and remembering.

Where you locate your garden will depend on where you have adequate space and/or the type of plant--sun lovers or shade lovers, you want to include. Or you could choose a quiet, private spot or one with a favorite view or meaning to the deceased.

When choosing a site, keep in mind that for a successful garden you need to select the right plants to fit the soil, sun, and other growing conditions. Full-sun plants such as peonies will not do well in a shady spot. Siberian irises don't mind wet feet while varieties that need a well-drained soil will struggle to survive in wet areas.

If you live in an apartment, or don't have a backyard, you can still create a memorial. Tie a colorful ribbon around a pot of Rosemary and keep it by your desk. For a deck or patio, fill a special container with a few choice perennials that you can move indoors to over winter when the weather turns cold. Or check with your local town officials to see if you can have a tree planted at a park or near a town landmark or building in memory of your loved one.

It doesn't matter what you plant, where you locate the garden, or what form, size, and shape it takes, what's most important is that you create the garden that is most meaningful to you. Involve your family and friends, and let the planning, planting, and caring for the garden be part of the healing process not just for you, but also for others.