



Henderson County Master Gardeners

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A Touchable Garden

by Lydia Holley

Have you ever considered putting in a garden just for the sensation of stroking the plants, feeling their textures, and delighting in their touch? A garden such as this would be perfect for a children's garden, a garden for those with failing eyesight, or if you are naturally tactile in nature. Plants that are soft to the touch could also be used to line a narrow pathway, where one's ankles would be caressed by soft plants, and an open palm could gently glide along the gossamer tops of blooming plants.



First on the list of any touchable garden would be, of course, lamb's ear, (*Stachys byzantina*). This delightful plant has soft, furry leaves. Petting it is much like petting a soft, furry rabbit. Sensitive plant (*Mimosa pudica*) can be mesmerizing to persons of any age. With touch, it curiously closes its leaves. When I was a child, there was a sensitive plant in a neighbor's garden. I loved watching the leaves coil to my gentle strokes.

Sensitive briar (*Mimosa microphylla*) has the same reaction - but be careful, this one has thorns. As an aside, if you have a weed that looks like the sensitive plant but does not close when touched, you may have an invasive weed in the *Phyllanthus* family.

Artemisia, sometimes called wormwood, grows in a cloud-like shape, and is fuzzy to the touch. It also has a spicy fragrance that adds even more to the experience. Other aromatic plants that begged to be stoked are fennel, lavender, rosemary, and mint.

Mexican feather grass (*Nassella tenuissima*) looks like a ponytail. It is just as silky as fine hair, and just as fun to comb through your fingers. Although muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is usually sharp and pointed, in the fall it sports beautiful plumes of pink, which are ticklish to the touch. Those that grow Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) report that the tall plumes feel like feather dusters. Be careful, though, that you do not get cut by this grass's sharp edges.

Even trees can be included in a touchable garden. A smoketree (*Cotinus coggygria*) would be perfect to use in your touchable garden. Hairs from spent flowers form a fog which engulfs the tree, and looks like smoke. There are several varieties of smoketrees, with different colors of foliage and smoke. Be aware, however, that if you choose the yellow foliated variety, Golden Spirit or 'Ancot', there is varying reports on whether this cultivar produces the smoke that gives the smoketree its common name.

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