

Book Review: *Dementia Green Care Handbook of Therapeutic Design and Practice*

**Garuth Chalfont &
Alex Walker.
Mesa, AZ: Safehouse
Books. 2013. 50 pp.
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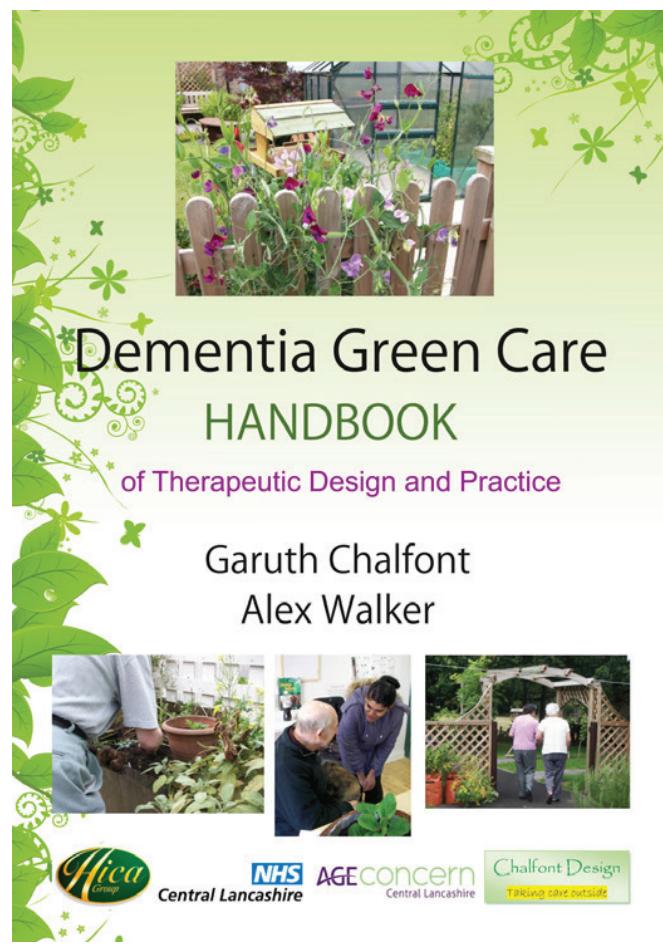
Reviewed by Lesley Fleming, MA, HTR



With the availability of a free download of *Dementia Green Care Handbook of Therapeutic Design and Practice*, there are few reasons to not read, skim, or ponder some of the concepts in Chalfont and Walker's compact book. Although the book is intended for administrators and staff of dementia care facilities, many other health professionals can benefit from these green care ideas for people with dementia, including horticultural therapy practitioners, nurses, landscape architects, and recreation therapists.

Despite the distinctly United Kingdom (UK) tone, North American health professionals will easily relate to the book given the increasing level of interest and demand for services for dementia populations. The authors' underlying foundation is the UK's 2009 National Dementia Strategy that states people should be "living well with dementia" (Department of Health, 2009). The authors focus on *abilities* of those with dementia, rather than the more typical medical and behavioral focus of deficits and declining abilities. Contact with the natural world is presented as integral to living well with dementia. Green care, the European term for non-traditional healthcare interventions that include farming, gardening, and animal husbandry, is the link between dementia care services and the natural world. While green care is not a new concept, *Dementia Green Care Handbook of Therapeutic Design and Practice* provides a comprehensive outline for actual implementation to provide or expand interactions with nature within a healthcare setting.

Chalfont and Walker talk about the importance of both social engagement and nature engagement in dementia green care and how the overlap of these two things is beneficial because it provides multi-dimensional therapeutic opportunities including sensory stimulation, purpose and meaning, agility and balance, appetite, and mood and sleep patterns. They then introduce the concept of the *Third Thing*, referring to the focus on an object during nature/social engagement that enhances opportunities for communication. They report that if that third thing is something in the garden then the experience is further improved for the person with dementia. Discussion of these potential benefits piques readers' interest, but the book's empirical data substantiating these health improvements is limited. Pollock & Marshall's 2012 *Designing Outdoor Spaces for People with Dementia* is identified as a source for more detailed empirical information.



As the title suggests, this book can be used as a step-by-step guide for facilities interested in delivering green care for dementia populations. The handbook provides definitions, staff training suggestions, social and therapeutic horticulture activities, and garden design ideas. Two types of dementia care facilities are referenced and demonstrate the versatility of the book's green care ideas: Charnley Fold, an enhanced dementia day support facility in Bamber Bridge and the Lodge in the Buckshaw Retirement Village, a residential facility in Chorley, both of which are located in Central Lancashire, England.

Several of the authors' concepts are thought provoking. Chalfont and Walker use the term *distressed behavior* to refer to behavior of people with dementia. Not yet a standard diagnostic term, their explanation and use of this definition seems appropriate. As they explain, people diagnosed with dementia are often referred to as challenging; a challenge to family members or other caregivers. Taking the perspective that this behavior

is often a result of distress, the authors then consider therapeutic interventions such as green care or access to the outdoors to aid in reducing that distress. This is a significant shift in mindset, focused less on controlling behavior and more on removing stress. Using nature to calm, gently stimulate, or provide joyful experience is the overriding praxis of Chalfont and Walker's book.

Dementia Green Care Handbook of Therapeutic Design and Practice presents another concept worth thought: *risk-free vs. risk-assumed gardens*. Based on their research at the two dementia care facilities mentioned above, the authors state that many dementia facility gardens are designed so that all spaces are safe for all users. They contend that this renders many gardens "therapeutically useless" and limits their ability to stimulate.

Designing gardens to more finely correlate appropriate types of sensory, intellectual, physical, and social stimulation with the degree, deficits, and abilities of garden users with dementia, the authors propose risk-free and risk-assumed gardens. Risk-free gardens would be used independently by those with dementia while fully visible by staff. Risk-assumed gardens would be used *with* staff or family members and enriched to provide greater stimulation using swings, ponds, or adult play equipment.

These garden classifications suggest design distinctions that could lead to significant landscape design implications in this developing area but ultimately must reflect evidence-based research on specific types of gardens for people with varying degrees of dementia. Their terminology—*risk-free* and *risk assumed* gardens—may prove difficult for Americans who, in their litigious culture, are challenged to think of any environment for people with dementia as risk-free.

Chalfont and Walker should be applauded for providing free access to their handbook. Dissemination of information may have been a stipulation for the government funding of their work, but regardless, the strength of their work is in presenting green care practices in a format useful to both those new to green care as well as those already working with nature as a healing medium.

Department of Health, UK. (2009). *Living well with dementia: A national dementia strategy*. London: DH Publications. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/168220/dh_094051.pdf

Pollock, A., & Marshall, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Designing outdoor spaces for people with dementia*. Stirling, Scotland: Hammond Press.

Free downloads of *Dementia Green Care Handbook of Therapeutic Design and Practice* are available from the following websites at the time of printing:

Alzheimer's Australia Dementia Enabling Environments
<http://www.enablingenvironments.com.au/Resources/ReadingList.aspx>

United Kingdom Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN)
<http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingandDementia/Design/?parent=5091&child=8837>