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Sensory garden provides patch of peace

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More than 80 different plant and tree species, along with water fountains Simpson Sensory Garden located at the Western Kentucky University Co Thursday, May 19, 2022. The garden, which was was designed to engage namesake, certified Master Gardener Kim Eisert Simpson. (Grace Ramey Grace Ramey

A cozy, tranquil garden can be found adjacent to the College Heights Foundation's Cliff Todd Center, complete with gravel pathways, stone benches and more than 80 plant species.

These elements make up the Kim Eisert Simpson Sensory Garden, which was dedicated in honor of its namesake last week.

Simpson harbors a lifelong passion for gardening. She was overwhelmed with emotion when her husband announced the project as a Christmas gift two years ago.



“It was the most thoughtful gift for me and one that I hope many other people will be able to experience,” Simpson said.

Simpson, who holds a master gardener certification, immediately set to work planning the project.



“It was a lot of fun sharing and building upon each other’s ideas for the garden,” Simpson said in a news release. “It’s crazy, but every time I visited the area from start to finish the space seemed to expand.”

The garden is subdivided into five sections, each with a specific sense in mind. The sight garden plays host to a variety of flowering plants that catch the eye with pops of vibrant color. A taste garden is home to parsley, oregano, sweet mint and other edible herbs.


Next to these two plots is the sound garden, containing a bird bath, a falling water feature and red wind chimes. The surrounding fencing blocks out all outside noise, keeping the garden peaceful. The soft crunch of gravel underfoot provides a soothing sensation and the conversation of birds keeps the atmosphere light.

The touch and smell gardens are nearby, offering guests the textures of fuzzy plants and long, wispy grasses. Thanks to the abundance of flowers, there is no shortage of floral scents.

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Some of the plants have been handed down from friends and family members.

An iris from Simpson’s mother’s yard, reminiscent of her grandmother’s flower beds, was transplanted into the garden for safekeeping.

Simpson said some of the hostas came from her grandmother’s garden in Chicago. A lily of the valley originated more than 40 years ago in the garden of her mother’s neighbor in Indiana.

“I associate memories of flowers and gardens with many of the relatives and neighbors that I grew up with in my life,” Simpson said in the release. “Adding some of the plants that I have from these people to the garden pays tribute to them.”

Simpson expects the garden to change along with the seasons, giving guests a new experience each time they visit.

“I think we’ve combined interesting plants with new feature pieces and some historic architectural pieces from Western’s campus to create an interesting space that will evolve throughout the seasons of the year,” Simpson said.

Speaking of visitors, members of the WKU community have already checked out the garden. Simpson said she has seen one of the university’s famed white squirrels taking a stroll around the grounds.

“This is a place that can be explored, touched, tasted, listened to and reflected upon,” Simpson said in the release. “This is a garden for everyone.”