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Portable 'gardening workstation': Facilitating elderly gardening activities

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Maintaining a high quality of life through participation in stimulating activities and social engagement, are worthy goals for all senior citizens. Unfortunately, enjoyable outdoor activities such as gardening can be difficult for the elderly to continue to be active in as they age, without alternative access methods being available. In 2012, the Masters of Design (Industrial Design) program at the University of South Australia was approached by Uniting Care Wesley (UCW), a non-government provider of community services, to develop a portable 'gardening workstation' in order to facilitate elderly gardening activities. Many age-care residents have fond attachments to their gardens and whilst the UCW had provided raised garden beds, many of the elderly residents who encompass a wide range of limitations and disabilities, still have considerable difficulty with even the simplest conventional gardening tasks.



Figure 1: Portable Gardening Workstation

The research proposal, requested the development of a portable 'gardening workstation', which could hold pot plants or planter boxes and enable elderly gardening activities. An unforeseen major obstacle to this goal however, was the need for any system developed to prevent dementia residents being able

to access soil, in order to reduce the risk of soil ingestion. This need saw the development of special plant propagation containers, which could safely limit finger access to soils. A hessian, biodegradable, peat-based, restricted-access plant container was developed and trialled.



Figure 2: Restricted-access plant propagation containers

Working in close collaboration with carers, residents and gardening enthusiasts, students developed and tested fully engineered, functional prototypes. The modified outcomes of the prototype tests now have the potential to improve the quality of life for residents, by providing therapeutic and social opportunities, to interact with nature, each another and their carers. The solution shown in figure 1, is now being considered for local manufacture.

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