

## A Beautiful Way to Challenge Your Brain



**Scramble Squares®** is a mind-stimulating product I have enthusiastically promoted for many years. The concept is simple: Take nine 4 X 4-inch squares and form one large square in which the pictures match up on all sides. In other words, if I have a square which has half a yellow tulip on one side, half an orange tulip on a second side, half a red tulip on a third side and half a lavender-striped tulip on the fourth side, the challenge is to be sure that all the pieces it touches in the 9-piece square match the other half.

Simple concepts, however, do not necessarily lead to simple solutions. There are more than 100 variations of these Scramble Squares® puzzles which come from the company b. dazzle ([www.b-dazzle.com](http://www.b-dazzle.com)), and while some are simpler than others to solve, all are challenging. Players often find they can match all but one or two pieces and then have to rethink their strategy from the beginning. **Bottom line:** Played as intended, this is a challenging brain exercise for anyone of any age.

### What I like about Scramble Squares®:

- There are more than 100 variations of flowers, birds, animals, fish and other sea creatures, food and beverages, culture, occupations, cityscapes, cars, sports and other puzzle categories, which means that **virtually everyone can find a personally appealing set to work on.**
- Most of the puzzles feature strong colors so that they are **visually appealing** and easy for people with less than perfect vision to see clearly.
- Because the puzzle pieces are large (4 x 4 inches), they are **easier for arthritic hands to handle**, and because they have smooth bottoms, they slide easily on a bare tabletop without ever having to be picked up.

### Variations:

- Scramble Squares® **can be played as a team as well as by an individual.** Teams with either the same or different puzzles can compete against one another.
- Scramble Squares® **can be played with fewer pieces.** Is a 9-piece square too difficult? Try making a square with 4 pieces or a rectangle with 6.
- Scramble Squares® **can be played by simply lining up all the pieces in one long row.** Then no single piece needs to match more than 2 sides.
- Scramble Squares® **can be played like dominoes.** Can't fit the pieces in a square? Then simply place each piece wherever it does match one side.

**Adaptations for people with Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia:**

- **All of the above variations are simplifications that can help people with dementia feel successful** with Scramble Squares®. Go with what works.
- When we talk about matching half a tulip, we are talking about a tulip that has a top half of a blossom and a bottom half that is attached to a stem. Solving the puzzle as it was meant to be solved means that putting two top halves or two bottom halves of a tulip together is “wrong.” When working with people with dementia (or people with vision impairments, or perhaps young children) it is usually better to go with the flow and **view slight mismatches as an acceptable variation** rather than pointing out the “mistake.”
- Because most of the puzzles feature strong colors, particularly as background, **even when they are put together “wrong” they are visually pleasing** so that a person with dementia can still feel accomplished for having created an interesting picture. On the other hand, a few puzzles, such as the one of manatees, have highly blended colors so that “mistakes” are less obvious, and again the overall effect of beauty is enhanced, no matter how the puzzle is put together.
- Because the puzzles come in so many variations, **it is easy to use their themes as the basis for reminiscence discussions:** *Do you like fishing? Did you ever have a rose garden? Are you comfortable around farm animals?*

Among my favorite Scramble Squares® puzzles for their visual appeal and ability to make mismatches easy to ignore are the following. You can see them, learn more about them, and order them directly from Amazon by clicking on the links:

- [American Native Flowers](#)
- [Farm Animals](#)
- [Hot Air Balloons](#)
- [North American Birds](#)
- [Pansies](#)
- [Quilt](#)
- [Sea Shells](#)
- [Teapots](#)
- [Tropical Fish](#)
- [Tulips](#)

*Let the fun begin!*