

# BRITAIN IN BLOOM

*The Results!*

GREENING  
THE GREY  
*- Get involved!*

Planting for extremes

INSURANCE





# WELCOME

To the autumn issue of *Grass Roots*, the magazine for all community gardening groups, including Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood and RHS Affiliated Societies.

We're delighted to bring you the results of this year's Britain in Bloom with the RHS UK Finals on pages 5 - 7. Congratulations to all the communities that took part, both in the finals and around the UK. It's a fantastic achievement just to take part and we hope that you will feel rightly proud of what you've accomplished over the last year. We only have the UK finalists' results printed here, for regional results please visit your Region or Nation in Bloom's website.

We continue the Greening Grey Britain theme in this issue, with a few more stories to inspire your own grey to green transformations (pages 12 - 13). And in January's magazine we'll bring you more about launch plans for April 2016.

For those groups working in the public domain, don't miss the NFU/RHS insurance coverage available - on the back page. Policies start on 1st February 2016 so now is the time to plan for next year.

As ever, please remember to keep us in touch with your news. Send your stories to: [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118

Many thanks,

Sophie Dawson,  
Editor

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Cover image: Bug boxes at Lytham station.  
Credit: C. Wildon

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## YOUR LETTERS Schools Poster competition

In Bury, we run a poster competition to raise awareness of Bloom in schools and borough wide. Any child aged between 4-16 years old who lives in the borough can enter. We make the winner's designs into posters and they are displayed in shops, businesses, parks etc on the run up and during our Bloom judging. Later in the year we have an awards ceremony where the children and their parents come along and have tea with the Mayor and receive their prizes donated by local businesses. I started the competition four years ago and only received about eight entries. This year we had over 130! I thought readers might like to see one of the posters submitted for this year's Greening Grey Britain theme.

Julie Pitchforth, Bury in Bloom



Please send your letters to [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) or Sophie Dawson, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE. Letters on all community gardening topics are welcomed, but may be edited for publication.

## Sunderland welcomes Britain in Bloom with the RHS 2015

Author: Sunderland City Council

Sunderland was pleased to host the Britain in Bloom UK Finals Awards Ceremony on 16th October.

Sunderland is a welcoming, bustling city set right on the coast and at the mouth of the River Wear. It boasts wide sandy beaches and acres of relaxing and invigorating green spaces. Culturally its offer includes Sunderland Empire Theatre, National Glass Centre, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, while its underground music scene is considered one of the most vibrant in the UK. This proud city by the sea also has a fascinating history, outstanding sporting attractions and a family-friendly programme of events and festivals.

Once an industrial town, Sunderland's green parks such as Mowbray and Barnes were the 'lungs' of the city, for people to enjoy fresh air and peace from the heavy industries. Conversely, Sunderland's newest parks and green spaces such as Herrington Country Park, Rainton Meadows and Elba Park were once industrial sites, but have been reclaimed as recreational spaces



Clockwise from above: spring bulbs on the seafront in Roker; perennial planting in Barnes Park; attractive seafront railings in Seaburn.



where people can escape the bustle of busy life and enjoy time together playing, walking, cycling as a family, see nature and experience open air concerts and events.

From the big parks like Mowbray and Roker to the smaller parks like Silksworth and Doxford, Sunderland has an amazing 42 formal and country parks.

There are pocket parks, play parks, formal parks, former colliery sites and country parks. They range from small squares of land to those such as Barnes Park, which reopened in 2011 after a £3.6 million restoration thanks to Heritage Lottery funding.

The workforce and community partners take pride and care to keep the city blooming all year round. Local environmental quality is of paramount importance to visitors and residents alike.

The community is encouraged to improve and maintain their local environment working with council staff and as opportunities arise through campaigns like Love Where You Live and Northumbria in Bloom.

The annual Sunderland in Bloom Civic Awards competition encourages all members of the community to get involved in improving their environment. This helps to make Sunderland a brighter city for everyone.

The annual horticultural shows at Seaburn and Houghton le Spring are a chance for gardeners and growers from the city's allotments and private gardens to display their produce. There are many prizes awarded, with judging across categories for vegetables and flowers.

Sunderland City Council takes its responsibility for planting and the maintenance of Sunderland's public spaces very seriously, acknowledging and appreciating the benefits that these green spaces give to the communities. In a city the size of Sunderland this is a year-round task for the Responsive Local Services team. However, they alone can't take all of the credit for what really makes Sunderland bloom. Local pride mixed with green-fingered enthusiasm means that there are colourful gardens, hanging baskets, container displays, community gardens and more in every corner of the city. Many of these are led and run by volunteer groups who really want to make a difference to their neighbourhood and understand the power that plants have in building pride and engaging people across cultures, ages and abilities.



## Variety brings in the bugs

The first published scientific paper to come from the RHS Plants for Bugs project concludes that if gardeners want to attract an abundance of pollinators, they should grow a mix of native and non-native plants. The results provide hard data that dispel the myth that native plants alone are best for

pollinating insects.

Over four years from 2010, RHS scientists tracked aerial pollinators and studied their attraction to three groups of plantings: UK native ('native'); northern hemisphere excluding those found in the UK ('near native') and southern hemisphere ('exotic').

An unexpected finding came from honeybees (*Apis mellifera*). Although considered to be 'super-generalist' pollinators - visiting a wide range of flowers regardless of their origins - these results showed a slight preference for the plots growing 'near-natives'. This may be because the honeybees themselves could be an introduced species. Hoverflies were the only insect group that had a clear preference for 'native' plots, while long-tongued bumblebees and solitary bees showed no significant differences in abundance between 'native' and other northern-hemisphere plantings.

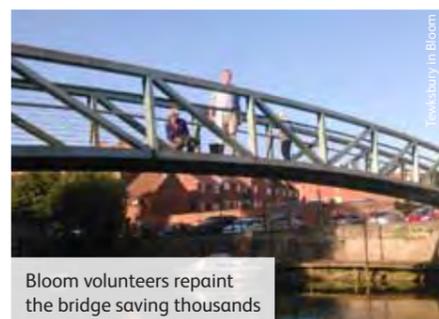
Read about the project and results at: [rhs.org.uk/plants4bugs](http://rhs.org.uk/plants4bugs)



Social wasp on *Alstroemeria psittacina*; left, hoverfly on *Dianthus deltoides*

## Bloomers save council thousands

Tewksbury in Bloom volunteers have helped to save their local authority thousands of pounds by stepping in to repaint an iron footbridge. External quotes to repaint the bridge came in at almost £100,000, including the cost of scaffolding across the river to reach the underside of the bridge. This was unaffordable, but rather than write off the job entirely the practical Bloomers proposed that they take on re-painting the visible, upper parts of the bridge seen by most users, for the cost of the paint: £500.



Bloom volunteers repaint the bridge saving thousands

## Wild About Gardens Week

Don't miss this month's Wild About Gardens Week, 26th October - 1st November. There are talks, workshops and volunteer activities taking place across the UK - and an online photo competition with three fantastic prizes to be won.

To find local events, download wildlife gardening resources and enter the competition, visit: [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)

## Elsbeth Thompson Bursary

The Elspeth Thompson Bursary provides financial assistance to amateur gardeners, either individuals or community groups, to enable them to create a garden or horticultural-based project for the benefit of the community, or to enable them to acquire horticultural knowledge and skills and to develop and share their love of gardening.

No fixed amount is set, and more than one bursary may be awarded in a particular

year. It is envisaged that the maximum amount awarded would not normally exceed £5,000, but smaller project proposals are equally welcome.

Apply before 31st December: [ngs.org.uk](http://ngs.org.uk)

## Britain in Bloom questionnaire

The RHS is conducting the third UK-wide survey of Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups to help us better understand the nationwide impacts of your activities. Survey findings will be made available to all groups to help raise the profile of the work that you do.

Complete the survey by 9 November 2015 and you will be entered into our free prize draw to win either £300 worth of plants for your group, or tickets to RHS Flower Shows.

Complete the survey online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2015Bloom>

# Congratulations RHS Britain in Bloom 2015 finalists!

This year 70 communities took part in Britain in Bloom with the RHS, the UK Finals stage of the campaign. We reveal their results, category by category, with 'CW' denoting Category Winners.

SMALL VILLAGE		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Scarva	Ulster	Silver Gilt
Tresco	South West	Gold
Wolfscastle	Wales	Gold & CW

VILLAGE		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Claverley	Heart of England	Gold
Fordham	Anglia	Silver
Glenarm	Ulster	Silver Gilt
Kirkoswald	Cumbria	Silver Gilt
Muthill	Scotland	Silver Gilt
Spofforth	Yorkshire	Gold & CW
Washington Village	Northumbria	Silver Gilt

LARGE VILLAGE		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Caistor	East Midlands	Silver Gilt
Coupar Angus	Scotland	Gold & CW
Croston	North West	Silver Gilt
Scholes	Yorkshire	Silver Gilt



Claverley in Bloom



Dalton with Newton in Bloom

SMALL TOWN		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Ahoghill	Ulster	Gold & CW
Corbridge	Northumbria	Silver Gilt
Cranbrook	South East	Silver Gilt
Kingsbridge	South West	Gold
Uppingham	East Midlands	Silver Gilt
Whalley	North West	Silver Gilt
Wimborne	Southern	Silver Gilt

TOWN		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Barnoldswick	North West	Gold
Cupar	Scotland	Gold
Dalton with Newton	Cumbria	Silver
Falmouth	South West	Gold & CW
Henley on Thames	Thames & Chilterns	Gold
Pembrey & Burry Port	Wales	Silver
Tewkesbury	Heart of England	Silver Gilt

Images clockwise from top: spring blooms in Claverley; growing legs in Dalton with Newton; community clean-up in Didsbury, Manchester.

COASTAL UP TO 12K		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Dartmouth	South West	Gold
Lytham	North West	Gold
North Berwick	Scotland	Silver Gilt
St Brelade	Jersey	Silver Gilt
St Pierre du Bois	Guernsey	Gold & CW
Whitby	Yorkshire	Silver Gilt

COASTAL OVER 12K		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Cleethorpes	East Midlands	Gold & CW
Great Yarmouth	Anglia	Gold
Llandudno	Wales	Silver Gilt

LARGE TOWN		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Antrim	Ulster	Silver Gilt
Biddulph	Heart of England	Silver Gilt
Durham	Northumbria	Gold
Knaresborough	Yorkshire	Gold
<b>St Helier</b>	<b>Jersey</b>	<b>Gold &amp; CW</b>
Ware	Anglia	Silver Gilt

SMALL CITY		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
<b>Bury</b>	<b>North West</b>	<b>Gold &amp; CW</b>
Colchester	Anglia	Silver Gilt
Derry City	Ulster	Silver Gilt
Grimsby	East Midlands	Silver Gilt
Kirkcaldy	Scotland	Silver Gilt
Weston Super Mare	South West	Silver Gilt



CITY		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Silver Gilt &amp; CW</b>
Norwich	Anglia	Silver Gilt
Oxford	Thames & Chilterns	Silver Gilt



Images clockwise: A factory transformed by Glenarm; peat-free displays in Mancroft, The Lanes, Norwich; keeping time in Llandudno; Dartmouth views

LARGE CITY		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
<b>Birmingham</b>	<b>Heart of England</b>	<b>Gold &amp; CW</b>
Hillingdon	London	Gold
Leeds	Yorkshire	Silver Gilt



URBAN COMMUNITY		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Aldridge	Heart of England	Silver Gilt
Didsbury	North West	Silver Gilt
HEF Bristol (Greater Fishponds)	South West	Silver
Mancroft, The Lanes (Norwich)	Anglia	Silver
Uddingston	Scotland	Silver Gilt
<b>Woodlesford</b>	<b>Yorkshire</b>	<b>Gold &amp; CW</b>

BUSINESS IMPROVEMEN DISTRICT		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
<b>London Bridge</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Silver Gilt &amp; CW</b>
Melton Mowbray	East Midlands	Silver
Reading	Thames & Chilterns	Silver

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS		
Entry Name	R / N	Award
Bath	South West	Gold
Filby	Anglia	Gold
Market Bosworth	East Midlands	Gold
<b>Norton in Hales</b>	<b>Heart of England</b>	<b>Gold &amp; CW</b>
Truro	South West	Gold
Usk	Wales	Gold

## RHS Britain in Bloom Discretionary Awards 2015

These awards are presented to finalists that demonstrate genuine excellence in a particular area of judging.

RHS Britain in Bloom Young People's Award	Uddingston, Scotland; and Coupar, Scotland
RHS Britain in Bloom Conservation and Wildlife Award	Fordham, Anglia
RHS Britain in Bloom Environment Award	Dundee (University of Dundee), Scotland
RHS Britain in Bloom Tourism Award	Falmouth, South West
RHS Britain in Bloom Heritage Award	Derry City, Ulster
RHS Britain in Bloom , Community Champion Award	
Alan & Helen Roberts - Biddulph; Bert Fallaize, St Pierre du Bois; Bert & Cynthia Filer, Weston Super Mare; Bill Ronald, Coupar Angus; Councillor Di Bianco, Hillingdon; Diane Mansell, Aldridge; Hannah Croskery, Dalton with Newton;	Jacqui Owen , Falmouth; Jo & Reg Chiddick, Norwich; John Stanley, Spofforth; Jonathan Davis, Woodlesford; Sue Hacon, Great Yarmouth; Wendy Raymond, Wolfscastle; Special commendation: Arthur, Kirkoswald

### RHS It's Your Neighbourhood Certificates of Distinction

Every year, a selection of the very best RHS It's Your Neighbourhood projects are recognised for their achievements, nominated by their Region/ Nation to receive this award. \*List at time of going to press

Bowbrook Allotment Community and Edgefield Greenfingers Garden Club, Heart of England	Knowle West Let's Grow, South West
Cowbridge Physic Garden Trust Ltd, Wales	Penrith Community Gardeners, Cumbria Three Close Tenants Association
Culpeper Community Garden, London	The Abbey Physic Community Garden, South East
Fareham Conservation Volunteers, South	Three Close Tenants Association, East Midlands

## Henley impresses Entente judges

The Entente Florale Jury made up of judges from 10 countries from across Europe, visited Henley on Thames, the UK entry on 19th July 2015. The day included visits to the riverside parks and conservation areas, the local vineyard, a tour of the historic town centre and church and the jury met members of the community who did so much to support the entry. Visiting judge Peter Holman said, "The Jury was impressed by the Towns commitment to green issues and the preservation of its historic past."

At the awards on the 16th September, Henley received a Silver Award.

[entente-florale.eu](http://entente-florale.eu)



Show-stopping floral displays in Henley



## My Bloom

### Dick Symonds, Retired Chairman, Bosworth in Bloom

#### Why do you volunteer with Bloom?

It makes me feel proud of the place where I live. I've been involved since Bosworth in Bloom started 30 years ago. 1985 marked the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Bosworth, where Richard III was killed in nearby Bosworth Field. It was suggested to the council, where I worked at the time, that we could put some flowers around the village to celebrate the quincentenary. We had some troughs and floral displays and that year we entered East Midlands in Bloom and were regional Champs! From there it grew and after a few years it became too big for the parish council to run so we set up a separate committee to coordinate the Bloom and I became its first Chairman.

#### Of which Bloom achievement are you most proud?

I was anxious as new Chairman that we matched our previous successes, and that year, 1988, we went on to become UK Champions in the Britain in Bloom Finals, which made me feel incredibly proud. The following year we were in the Entente Florale, which was also wonderful. The campaign has brought Market Bosworth from non-descript country village to nationally recognised floral destination. People park up and complement the place and you think, I've had a role in that. Today the environment is immaculate – if anyone throws a cigarette end someone tells them to pick it up! It's improved community spirit and led to lots of new village-wide activities. We've inspired other local towns and villages to get involved too.

#### What are you working on at the moment?

To celebrate our 30th anniversary and the 530th anniversary of the Battle of Bosworth, we've created a number of permanent displays around the village to link to our heritage including metal shields and a metal and woven wicker horse, with planting at its base. We were also in the finals this year, so have been keeping very busy!

## RHS ADVICE

## Planting for extremes

Help for your community with regular news and tips from RHS scientists and advisors. To suggest a topic for this section of the magazine, contact [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118

RHS Chief Horticultural Advisor Guy Barter recommends planting choices for challenging locations.

## Boggy ground

Water builds up in badly drained soils leading to water-logging, particularly after a downpour. Temporary water-logging seldom harms most plants, but prolonged water-logging leaves no air spaces in the soil and plant roots literally drown.

Happily in cold winter soils roots respire very little and water-logging is much less damaging than water-logging at other seasons when the soil is warm enough for roots to respire freely and have a high oxygen demand. Few plants can survive this unless they have special roots that are adapted to acquire oxygen. Willows and marginal aquatic plants such as flag irises are examples of these.

If you are gardening on boggy ground, making raised beds where the topsoil is at least 20cm (8 inches) deep will provide sufficient depth of well-drained soil for plants to grow. Another way to deal with boggy ground is to plant individual trees on raised mounds, 25cm (10 inches) high, to help improve drainage around the rootball.



Marginal aquatic plants like flag irises can cope with having their roots submerged in water

## Planting suggestions:

Where major drainage or bed building works are not an option there is a range of plants that tolerate wet soils, including:

**Shrubs:** Dogwoods (*Cornus alba*, *Cornus florida*, *Cornus stolonifera*), *Hippophae rhamnoides* AGM, *Hydrangea macrophylla*, *Hydrangea paniculata*, *Physocarpus opulifolia*, *Sambucus*

**Bamboo:** *Phyllostachys*, *Sasa*

**Herbaceous perennials:** *Acorus gramineus*, *Astilbe*, *Caltha palustris* AGM, *Euphorbia griffithii*, *Euphorbia sikkimensis*, *Filipendula ulmaria*, *Hosta*, *Iris ensata* AGM, *Iris laevigata* AGM, *Iris pseudacorus* AGM, *Iris sibirica* AGM, *Lobelia cardinalis*, *Lysimachia nummularia*, *Lysimachia punctata*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Mimulus cupreus*, *Mimulus luteus*, *Mimulus primuloides*, *Mimulus ringens*.



Plants that don't mind boggy ground, clockwise from top left: *Caltha palustris*; *Astilbe*; willow; *Lythrum*

## Damaged soils

By their nature, urban areas have many degraded soils where demolitions and previous industrial works have left little top soil and lots of debris. Typically these soils are drought-prone and infertile.

Drought-tolerant plants have natural adaptations to help them conserve water: hairy leaves help to shade the surface and trap evaporating moisture; fleshy-leaves store water. Aromatic foliage releases volatile, scented compounds that are thought to cool the foliage as they evaporate. Other drought-tolerant characteristics include grey, narrow and small leaves, leathery foliage and spikes that act as cooling fins.

With all drought-tolerant plants, it is important to plant them well and ensure they establish. It is only once a plant is

established that it will be able to find the water it needs to survive an arid summer. Try to plant in spring or autumn, and incorporate well-rotted manure or garden compost into the soil around the edge of the rootball. Water the plant in well, ideally with a half-strength fertiliser solution to overcome the infertility of degraded soils.



Sun lovers, from top: *Ceratostigma willmottianum*; lavender; *Sempervivum* work well in container displays.

## Planting suggestions:

Where sites are sunny with few trees, try perennials including *Bergenia*, *Acaena*, sage, rosemary, *Miscanthus*, *Eryngium* and *Phormium*. Most trees and shrubs will survive even the driest summers in Britain once they are established. However, broom, *Spartium*, juniper, mahonia and ceanothus are particularly resilient. Most spring-flowering bulbs will grow and bloom before the soil dries out, so are unlikely to be greatly affected.

Suntraps result from reflected heat and shelter at the base of walls. Plant the magnificent *Amaryllis belladonna* or pink, autumn-flowering nerines. Other suitable plants include blue-leaved *Parahebe perfoliata* (for warmer gardens), pinky-white, clover-flowered *Lotus hirsutus* and blue-flowered *Ceratostigma willmottianum*.

## To dig or not to dig

Wild plants don't need soil to be dug for them to thrive. Therefore digging is only needed to counter human activities, such as those causing soil compaction, or to meet our requirements for removing weeds to prepare the soil for planting, or adding soil amendments to enrich a poor soil.

Once soil has been amended and if weeds are controlled by means other than digging, and if gardeners ensure they do not walk on the soil, digging should not be needed. Typically, this is accomplished by the use of mulching to feed plants and suppress weeds, usually carried out on raised beds.

Mulch the area with a deep (8-15cm / 3-6 inches) layer of organic matter such as grass clippings, farmyard manure or garden compost, together with some fertiliser such as pelleted chicken manure. The mulch will limit weed growth, saving time through the summer, help to retain moisture, cutting back on the watering and release plant nutrients slowly in step with the growing crops' nutrient requirements. Draw back the mulch to expose the soil before planting and sowing.

A halfway measure is to merely loosen the soil with a fork, mattock or cultivator, rather than invert it entirely with a spade. This can work well before planting and after harvesting, with hand weeding and shallow hoeing between plants while they're growing.



Use a mulch, such as cardboard (above), garden compost or bark chippings to reduce weeds without the need to dig. Mulches also help to retain moisture in the soil and support growth.

# Whole-school gardening

With around 165 members, Corbridge Middle School in Northumberland has one of the largest school gardening teams in the country. Author: Alana Tapsell

It all started with a casual comment made last year by Dr Meryl Batchelder, Subject Leader for Science, about how lovely it would be to make something special out of the school's overgrown garden. A few months later some enthusiastic pupils volunteered to help her improve the wildlife garden, cutting back bushes, tidying up some of the weeds and clearing part of the pond.

The enthusiasm of the pupils in this lunchtime garden club inspired Dr Batchelder to embark on the "Garden Project" as part of the Enrichment Programme in September 2014. On Friday afternoons all Key Stage 3 pupils (those aged 11 – 14) are now taken off timetable to develop new skills and build resilience. The project allows students to work towards common goals and to anticipate, take and manage risks outdoors. The aim is simple; to raise pupil awareness of the environment around them and focus on the concept of healthy and sustainable living.

Pupils garden in groups of up to 28. They have a jobs list each week and work on a rota to share arduous or less exciting tasks such as weeding.

The garden is now growing organically in both senses of the word. The school adapts what they are going to do and 'Garden Ambassadors' selected from Year 8 pupils coordinate the management of the edible garden and monitor which plants grow best and provide the highest yields. The head cook gathers vegetables and salad and recently the school became self-sufficient in lettuce and other vegetables.

The school has just succeeded in getting funding from a Newcastle University sustainability grant for a large polytunnel, to protect crops from the elements during the winter months.

The last year has made a huge difference. From an overgrown wilderness there is now a pond - complete with viewing area and native water plants - which was immediately recolonized by frogs and newts. A newly fenced-off allotment area has a number of raised beds that are ideal for growing fruit and vegetables.

The garden has led to new community links with Corbridge Village Show, Corbridge in Bloom and Northumbria in Bloom. Some Year 5 pupils were also lucky enough to work with Alnwick Garden's Roots & Shoots project, with Alnwick garden staff visiting pupils in their school garden.

The students in Year 7 and Year 8 have worked incredibly hard; they have laughed through the rainstorms, weeded until their backs ached and dug deep. They have developed team skills, tested their resilience and have built something truly amazing together. As a result, the school can be proud that 80 pupils a year leave with the skills they need to grow their own food.



[corbridgemiddle.weebly.com/](http://corbridgemiddle.weebly.com/)



Clockwise: Students work in every section of the school's gardens, from ornamental beds to allotments and the wildlife garden including pond



Is your group involved in supporting a school garden? Send us your story and we might be able to publish it in *Grass Roots*. Please send an outline to: [alanatapsell@rhs.org.uk](mailto:alanatapsell@rhs.org.uk) or call 01483 212387

All images: Corbridge Middle School



## Putting on a Show

Dave Green (right) presents the Tudor Rose Award at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show

Dave Green is Show Manager of the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, the world's largest annual flower show. Every July an average of 143,000 visitors attend, looking for ideas and inspiration for plants, design and products for their gardens. This year the show celebrated its 25th anniversary.

**RHS: How did you get involved in the flower show?**

I love plants and being outdoors and have worked in several public gardens as a gardener in the past. I joined the RHS in 2009 as a trainee at RHS Garden Wisley and it was during this time and later whilst working as a horticulturist at the garden that I first became involved in RHS flower shows. After helping out at the shows I quickly understood how much they inspired visitors and promoted the best in gardening. I joined the shows team in 2012 and have been managing the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show since the end of 2013.

**RHS: What's it like organizing such an enormous event?**

It's easy to forget how big the events are. We concentrate on each individual element of the show and by breaking the work down it becomes much more manageable. There's a whole team working on the RHS shows all year round - as soon as one show ends we start working on plans for the following year. It's amazingly rewarding to see the whole team's hard work come to life on site, and the reactions of show visitors,

designers, growers and sponsors make all the work worthwhile.

**RHS: Are there many behind-the-scene fiascos?!**

With year-round planning we try to make sure fiascos are kept to a minimum! People often say that you can't plan for the unexpected and it's normally on site when the show is being built that the unexpected happens. The weather is often one of the most difficult things to plan for. We have wet weather and hot weather plans but the extremes can be very difficult to work with. In 2012 the show had one of the wettest years in its history and many other events taking place at the same time were called off. The whole show team worked hard to respond with extra machinery, staff and materials (such as wood chippings for the paths) brought in to ensure we could keep everything open.

**RHS: What are your favourite parts of the show?**

Horticulturally the show is very closely linked with roses, with the Tudor rose strongly associated with Hampton Court Palace and

Henry VIII. The Festival of Roses continues to be a must-see feature at the show, not only for amazing colour and scent but also for the huge selection of roses available including the very latest varieties.

**RHS: Are there any opportunities for community groups to get involved?**

For 2016 we've launched a new category: Flower & Vegetable Boxes, Meadow and Market Gardens. These are small spaces, 2.75m x 2.75m, aimed at making it easier for community groups to be involved because without the costs associated with expensive landscaping elements, it should be possible to achieve high-quality exhibits with more limited resources. The plots include edging and compost so groups only need to bring along plants, props and the helpers to put the exhibits together. If you are interested in applying and you haven't exhibited before please contact us. We guide all exhibitors through the application and staging process and it would be great to talk to you about your ideas.

[rhs.org.uk/HamptonCourtGardenApplications](http://rhs.org.uk/HamptonCourtGardenApplications)



### Derelict factory transformed

Bloomers in Glenarm, Northern Ireland, have transformed a derelict factory in their village into a feature piece. Originally built as a furniture factory the building had lain empty for years. With the owner's permission community volunteers cleared the site, repainted and decorated the building using a marine theme. At the front of the factory colourful new flower beds were created, edged with recycled bricks.



### Car park converted

Maesbury Metals is a small metal workshop in Oswestry that provides a work base for adults with learning disabilities. They make a variety of products which partly fund the organisation's work. Fed up with occupying a grey industrial unit, team members have transformed a corner of the car park into a flower and vegetable garden. "The garden is a bit of magic," says workshop member Darren. "It makes us happy to be outside in it."

### Rain gardens replace parking spaces

As part of two recent street-enhancement projects, Bankside Urban Forest in London Bridge installed several on-street rain gardens. They are designed so that rainwater runs from the surrounding pavement under the sleepers and into the planting beds. The garden occupies a space provided by reclaiming two parking spaces, in a site that would have been difficult to plant street trees in.

The beds are planted with a mixture of shrubs, perennials and wildflowers, and the space is found is immediately outside a busy office building, with over 1000 workers. One worker has 'adopted' the beds and helps Bankside Urban Forest to maintain them. "For her it adds a richness to her working day, and she reports great feedback from all who use it for sitting or passing by," says Valerie Beirne Bankside Urban Forest Manager.



# Greening the grey

Fantastic community projects embracing the principles of Greening Grey Britain

The new growing space at Olympia Station; above right: before work started; right; Each plot-holder gets a 1x1m raised bed



### Track-side veg plots

Last year the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea in partnership with Network Rail transformed a disused platform at Kensington Olympia station into a colourful and productive food growing garden.

There are 89 colourful raised plots used by the local community to grow their own fresh fruit and vegetables. The project is supported by a community gardener who gives free gardening advice and support to plot holders, and encourages them to garden organically, use companion planting to attract useful bugs and make mini-beast areas.



### From grot to great in Weston Village

A couple of years ago a few residents in Weston Village, Bath began planting up a nondescript bed outside the toilets on the High Street. Fast forward to 2015 and the flower bed has grown into a show-stopping community garden containing 97 varieties of shrubs, plants and vegetables. Hanging baskets have been hung in front of the toilets and four stone troughs added along the high street.

Richard Potem, who leads the planting, says, "Bath in Bloom supported the project by contributing towards some of the costs, we also had funding from sponsors. We added a notice board to let the locals know what some of the plants are and we give gardening tips for each month.

"I am proud to be part of this. Next year I will also be involved with the local Mencap who have been given a plot of land. With plants I split in the spring I will help them turn it into a garden so

they can grow their own plants and vegetables and enter the Bath in Bloom competition."



The flower bed in all its glory, above, and inset, before work started.



One of the four reclaimed boats planted up by Gravesham in Bloom to welcome visitors

### Cul-de-Sac gardening

The Sow and Sows Community Allotment is made up of nine households – 29 people in total – who live in a cul-de-sac in one of Europe's biggest private housing estates, north of Bristol. The estate is made up of 9,000 houses, over 20,000 residents, but with no allotment plots provided. So the group of neighbours got proactive and decided to install



five raised 6x4ft pods in their street where they could grow food together. This has led on to other things and they have now created a pond and wildlife garden as well as a beautiful wood-fired clay oven. Visit their website for step-by-

step instructions about how to create your own! [thesowandsows.weebly.com](http://thesowandsows.weebly.com)



## Plotting a community allotment

Plot-holders in Greenford, Middlesex, enjoy the benefits of self-management in their quest to engage the local community. Author: Sophie Dawson

Just over a year ago, plot-holders at Horsenden Allotments in Greenford, Middlesex took over the management of their three sites from the council. The result has been more people engaged in the upkeep of the sites as well as new activities to attract members and support the on-site shop.

Chair of Horsenden Allotment Association, Milly Mills, explains, "Part of our aim for the allotments was to make

them a more sociable place, not only for the allotment tenants but also the community around us."

The first step was getting the word out about the site and encouraging people to visit. The new team decided to transform an overgrown plot at the street-side entrance into a community garden, open to all. "We started it back in February with a competition to design the area - and with the efforts of volunteers, generous donations from local builders merchants and funding from the local ward forum we are slowly but surely moulding it into shape," says Milly. The space now has a pond, a seating area, pergola, flowers and vegetables.

"So far we have held coffee mornings in the garden and have found a lot of older members, who can no longer look after a plot but still have an interest in the allotments, love to come along and enjoy the surroundings without the stress of having to look after it." There's also been a community BBQ and regular volunteering days, which are attracting more and more new faces.

The association is creating a space for local primary school pupils to grow vegetables and also provides volunteering opportunities for young people as part of the National Citizen

Service. This autumn the volunteer group will be asked to come up with a design for part of the site, which they will then build together. Milly hopes that some will remain involved, having had a stake in the allotment's development.

More people visiting the site also means more people finding out about the shop, which sells garden centre products at trade prices. The system works on a not-for-profit basis, with shop users signing up as members for £3 per year. "It's handy for people on site and also for those with gardens nearby, if they don't want to drive further afield to pick something up," says Milly. "It's also a social space, where people come in for a chat, open every Sunday with volunteers manning the counter."

The site is also looking better since



Young volunteers help out as part of the NCS scheme

the plot-holders took over as they are better positioned to keep track of plot maintenance and contact those neglecting their spots. "With the rest of the site looking good, people are now taking more care with their own," says Milly. "And our 120 plots are judged each year to select the top 25, so that's a helpful bit of extra pressure!"

The group hopes that getting more people involved will help to attract funding. "We want to set up a mini-greenhouse for the school groups coming to use the site, so we need to fundraise for that," explains Milly. "Showing how many people are benefitting from the project helps when you're going for funding. If you're a closed group, it's much harder. And the more you do the more you want to do!"

"I have lived in the area for 15 years or more and it's only since I have been a member of the allotments - and even more so since we took over management of them - have I truly felt part of a community."

[greenfordhaaga.wordpress.com](http://greenfordhaaga.wordpress.com)

National Citizen Service:  
[ncsthechallenge.org/](http://ncsthechallenge.org/)

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Do you have a story to tell? *Grass Roots* is always on the look-out for interesting stories from Affiliated Societies to share with readers. Send an outline of your story to: [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) or call 020 7821 3118

## Passing on the growing bug in St Ives

Local gardening clubs join together to get school children growing

Over 1,350 children in St Ives have experienced the excitement of competitive growing thanks to two local gardening groups. RHS Affiliated Society Hill Rise Allotment Association and St. Ives Gardening Club have jointly coordinated the Growing for Fun competition for the last four years, with support from Waitrose, Cranbrook Plants and St Ives in Bloom. Pupils at four schools grow a range of plants of their choice, with plants, materials and advice provided for free.

Robin Bletsoe, St. Ives Gardening Club coordinator says, "It has not just been about growing plants but linking the whole process to the national curriculum. Some classes have produced artwork, others poetry and writing, others recording mathematically the growth, size and weight. One class has even been reported singing each morning to their potato plants to encourage a bumper crop."

All the efforts of the four schools will be displayed at this year's St Ives Produce and Flower Show, where winners will be selected.

[sigc.weebly.com](http://sigc.weebly.com)



Pupils at Thorndown grew potatoes in bags around the school, which provided bumper harvests (above)



## WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU INJURE SOMEONE OR DAMAGE THEIR PROPERTY?

NFU Mutual, in partnership with the RHS, offers a range of insurance packages to suit the needs of Britain in Bloom with the RHS, Affiliated Societies, and Community groups. The annual scheme renewal date begins on 1 February 2016. Now is the time to plan for next year.

### EMPLOYERS & PUBLIC LIABILITY

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For Britain in Bloom and community groups, please find further details on [rhs.org.uk/communitiesinsurance](http://rhs.org.uk/communitiesinsurance)

For Affiliated Societies, please find further details on [rhs.org.uk/affiliatedsocietiesinsurance](http://rhs.org.uk/affiliatedsocietiesinsurance)

Alternatively, if you do not have access to the internet, please phone the Communities team on 0207 821 3122 or the Affiliated Societies team on 0207 821 3069 to request the full details and an application form

Cover can be purchased at any time throughout the year, although the full premium will be charged.



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