



Royal  
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Society

Sharing the best in Gardening

# Grass Roots

The RHS Community Update

Issue 25 • Spring 2016

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

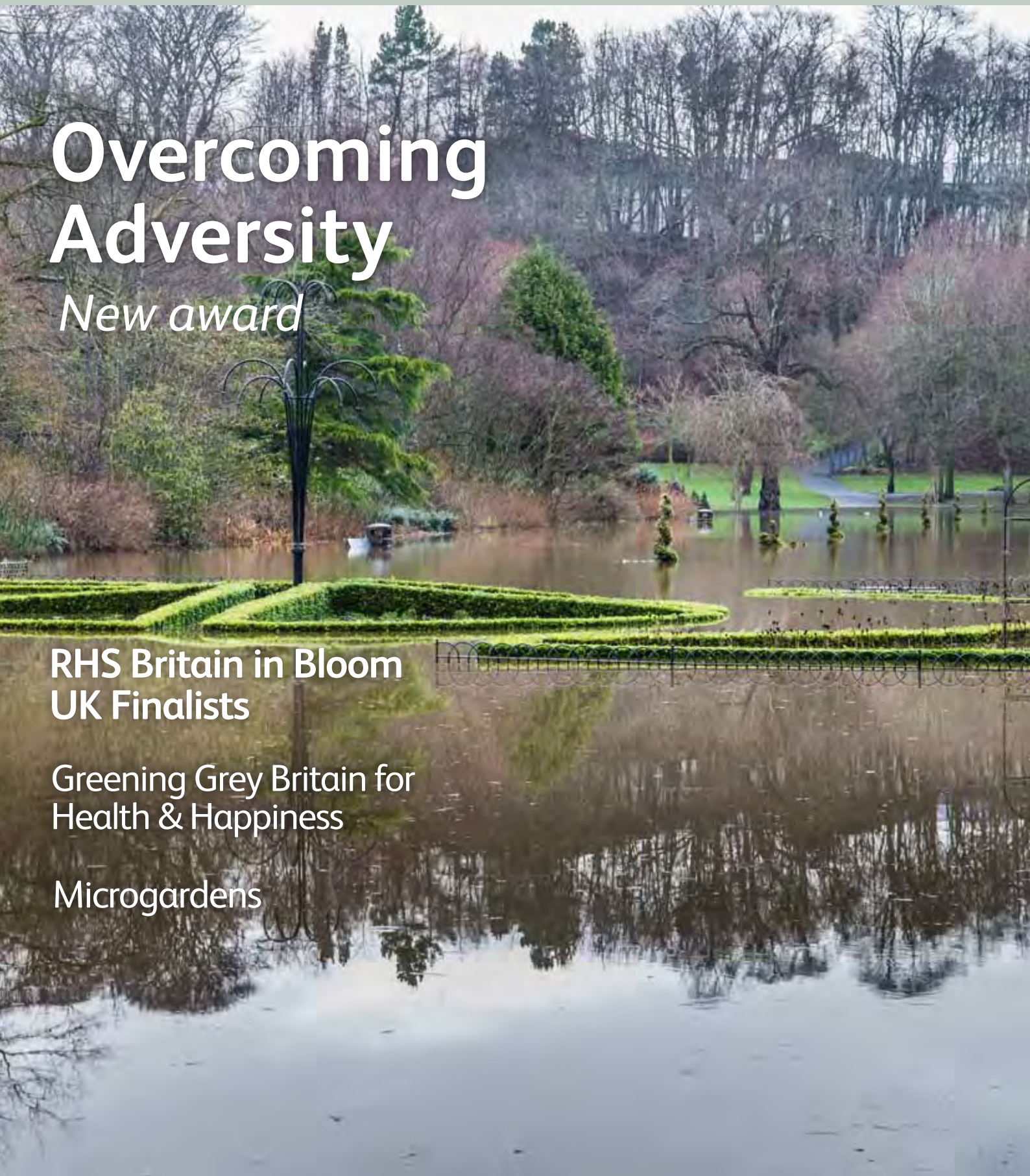
## Overcoming Adversity

*New award*

**RHS Britain in Bloom  
UK Finalists**

**Greening Grey Britain for  
Health & Happiness**

**Microgardens**





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Cover image: Seaton Park, Aberdeen, after the winter floods. Credit: Ian Talboys

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The Royal Horticultural Society is the UK's leading gardening charity, dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting gardening. Our community campaigns support more than 5,000 groups in creating greener and more interconnected communities. For more information about RHS Britain in Bloom, RHS It's Your Neighbourhood and RHS Affiliated Societies, please visit [rhs.org.uk/communities](https://rhs.org.uk/communities)



# Welcome

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

In this issue we've got more on the 2016 theme, *Greening Grey Britain for Health & Happiness*, with stories from groups that are using gardening to improve lives. We hope that groups across the UK will get involved in the campaign by organising gardening activities to boost health and wellbeing in your community. For more ideas, resources and a press release template, visit: [rhs.org.uk/ggb](https://rhs.org.uk/ggb) We're also thrilled to announce this year's RHS Britain in Bloom Finalists (pages 6-7) and we wish them, and all participating groups, every success. Please do remember to keep us in touch with your news - we're always looks for stories to share here.

This will be my last issue as Editor of *Grass Roots* as I am heading off to pastures new in April. It has been a great pleasure to share your stories over the past five years - a fascinating insight into community gardening and one that's left me thoroughly inspired by the difference that groups on the ground are making. I'd like to wish you all the very best of luck with your projects going forwards. Please keep up the good work!

Best wishes, and happy gardening,

*Sophie*  
Sophie Dawson, Editor

## Your Letters Supporting new groups

In Exeter we're creating a 'Mentor Bank' to support new groups. We have several people already on-board, professionals and experienced volunteers who donate their services by 'paying-in' up to 10 hours a year. New entrants can then 'apply' for free help and advice. For example, a group wanting to re-shape a piece of ground might want a



Horticulturist Annette Setterfield, 81, advising volunteers

landscape gardener to advise and make sure their ideas would work. Another group wanting to put a large planter near a road might want a highways expert to explain any legal restrictions. Having access to specialist advice, particularly at the start of a project, helps to ensure that the initial enthusiasm of the group doesn't fall away if they hit barriers or difficulties they were unaware of at the start, and helps to get groups over that hurdle. We are in the early stages of setting up the mentor bank and would be interested in hearing from other groups who have done similar things.

Many thanks,  
Christine Fraser, Exeter in Bloom  
Email: [info@bystock.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:info@bystock.eclipse.co.uk)

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

## New award for overcoming adversity

From 2016 a new discretionary award will recognise the enormous efforts of those finalist communities that have faced extreme challenges, such as the catastrophic flooding earlier this year (as in Seaton Park, Aberdeen, pictured). The RHS Britain in Bloom Discretionary Award for Overcoming Adversity will celebrate the resilience of those who work year-round to put the Bloom back into their towns, villages and cities after such



challenging circumstances. Roger Burnett, Chair of RHS Britain in Bloom judges, said, "My advice to this year's finalists would be to demonstrate how they have overcome the atrocious conditions we've seen in many parts of the country over the last couple of months. "Bloom groups are always very resilient and nature has a great way of bouncing

back, so we all look forward to meeting our finalists to see what wonderful work they are doing to bring their communities together under the banner of RHS Britain in Bloom." The winner of the new award will be announced at the RHS Britain in Bloom UK Finals awards ceremony in Birmingham on 14th October: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](https://rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)

**School Gardening Awards:** The RHS School Gardeners of the Year 2016 competition is now open. Nominate a pupil, colleague or gardening team for one of these prestigious awards. Prizes include £500 for the school, tools, a greenhouse worth £3,425 and unique opportunities to work with RHS and TV gardeners. Find out more at: [schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/competitions](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/competitions)

## Crocus planting opportunity

As part of its Greening Grey Britain campaign the RHS is joining forces with Rotary to get communities planting crocus this autumn. Up to 1,800 Rotary clubs across the UK will purchase corms and they are looking for your support to help plant them! Groups will also be able to purchase additional bulbs should they wish to make a bigger display. Packs of 5,000 *Crocus tommasinianus* can be ordered for £85 per pack, with all profits going towards Rotary's End Polio Now campaign. Keep your eyes peeled for full details about the scheme and how to get involved in the July issue of *Grass Roots*.



Bulb planting in St Pierre du Bois

Last November 65,000 crocus corms were planted in a joint initiative between the two Rotary clubs in Guernsey, Floral Guernsey and project sponsor, Ravenscroft. Every parish was given 5,000 bulbs and Rotary and Floral Guernsey worked with volunteers, community groups and schools to identify where the corms could be planted. Chairman of Floral Guernsey, Pat Johnson said, "This was a fantastic initiative which not only raised the

profile of Rotary's superb work to free the world of polio but also added a vibrant splash of colour across the whole Bailiwick."

## Bloom judge awarded MBE

Darren Share, Head of Parks at Birmingham City Council and RHS Britain in Bloom judge was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours list for services to the environment in Birmingham.



Darren has worked for the authority for 30 years after leaving school and joining as an apprentice. As well as being responsible for all the green spaces across the city and a 300-strong parks team, he has also headed up Birmingham's Chelsea Flower Show exhibits and Britain in Bloom entries, gaining success in both. After building up his horticultural experience, Darren undertook management qualifications and gained an MBA at Birmingham University, working up to become the head of the country's biggest parks department. Darren will be judging UK finalist communities this August.

## Value of trees in London

A new survey has highlighted the wide-ranging benefits provided to the capital by its trees. The London iTree Eco project found that each year, among other things London's trees remove 2,241 tonnes of

pollution from the air and prevent 3.5 million cubic meters of water entering the sewers. To read the full report, visit: [forestry.gov.uk/london-itree](https://forestry.gov.uk/london-itree)

## New RHS team member

Kay Clark has recently joined the central team as Community Development Manager, after 18 months managing the RHS Community Outreach programmes across the South and East of England. Her focus is now firmly on the development of Bloom and nationwide community outreach programmes.



## Trevor Leese, 1943 – 2015

We are saddened to report the sudden death of Trevor Leese on Christmas Day. Trevor was the regional organiser for North West in Bloom from 2003-2015. Bill Blackledge, Chair of North West in Bloom, said, "Trevor was instrumental in revitalising the workings of North West in Bloom and a leading player in coordinating the campaign and organising events such as the three prestigious North West presentation ceremonies. It is impossible to list all the duties he undertook. The region will always be indebted to what Trevor, his wife Valerie, and his family have done for Britain in Bloom North West. He will be sorely missed."



## RHS Britain in Bloom Impact Survey

The third UK-wide survey of Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) groups has revealed volunteers donate over 11.7million hours a year to environmental projects which benefit the community. Developing a sense of community was groups' highest-ranked benefit of participation, with cleaner and greener surroundings and increased civic pride the next highest rated. Together groups plant over 176,006 trees, 966,065 shrubs and over 10.6 million bulbs every year and overall 57 percent of planting undertaken is perennial and

43 percent seasonal. It is estimated that Bloom and IYN groups across the UK together raise at least £12.7million a year towards their community greening projects. We are grateful to all those groups who completed the survey. The prize draw was won by Hexham in Bloom, who received £300 of plant vouchers for their group, and the runner-up was RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group Working Worms, who won four tickets to RHS Flower Show Tatton Park.



Bloom volunteers donate 11.7 million hours a year to community gardening activities

Dyce in Bloom

## 2016 Anniversaries

### Beautiful Scotland – Flourishing at 50!

Beautiful Scotland, the Bloom campaign in Scotland, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The campaign supports and celebrates the achievements of communities throughout Scotland in their continuous work to improve local environmental quality. At its launch in 1966, 'In Bloom' in Scotland was run by the then Scottish Tourist Board and supported by the Scottish Women's Rural Institute, and provided a platform for beautification of villages, towns and cities across the nation. Run by Keep Scotland Beautiful since 1983, and now in partnership with the RHS, the campaign focuses on year-round horticultural and gardening achievements, environmental responsibility and community participation, and recognises exemplar work in areas such as tourism, biodiversity and sustainability. Beautiful Scotland provides the Scottish entrants to the UK-wide RHS Britain in Bloom competition, and has been extremely successful in recent years, with at least one category winner or discretionary award winner in every year since 1998. Scottish entrants have won the Champion of Champion award three times in the last 10 years, with two successes for the large village of Falkland in Fife, and one win for the small town of Alness in the Highlands.



St Monans in Bloom

To celebrate the anniversary, Keep Scotland Beautiful is providing Scottish groups with wildflower seeds and encouraging them to hold their own mini 'keep Scotland beautiful festivals' in May/June 2016. They are also calling for historical photos and memories to be sent in. If you have photos of Bloom activities in Scotland over the last 50 years please send these to: [beautifulscotland@keepscotlandbeautiful.org](mailto:beautifulscotland@keepscotlandbeautiful.org) or post to KSB, First Floor, Glendevon House, The Castle Business Park, Stirling, FK9 4TZ

### Anglia celebrates 20 years

Anglia in Bloom kicks off its anniversary year with a spring launch at Bressingham Gardens in Diss, Norfolk, hosted by its new Patron, horticulturist Adrian Bloom. Bob Ollier, Chairman of Anglia in Bloom, said, "For 20 years Anglia in Bloom has been promoting East Anglia's largest environmental community campaign, for all those that have taken part over the years and been involved in an exciting and rewarding experience in their community. Over the years we have continued to build strong community relationships and made a significant difference to the local environment in all of the six counties of the region." The spring launch event will include a series of master classes and tours of the gardens by Adrian Bloom and his team, and a commemorative tree planting.



Creative planting dazzles in Muthill and top right, St Monans

Muthill in Bloom

## Norwich blooms with sustainable growing media

In January 2014 and 2015 Friends of Norwich in Bloom received £14,300 to coordinate growing projects as part of the SHiP scheme (see box below). Volunteers worked in partnership with City College Norwich, Norwich City Council and local facilities company, Norwich Norse to cultivate sustainably-grown perennials for civic plantings across the city. The group increased the sustainability of its displays by replacing much of its bi-annual bedding with a selection of perennials and shrubs. Some seasonal displays were retained in key areas. Plants were grown from seed, or grown-on from plugs, using a variety of different peat-free growing media. These replaced the group's previous peat-based compost mix. City College students helped to grow plants at the council greenhouses and were

involved in measuring the relative success of the different growing mixes. Over 20,000 perennials have been grown so far in this three-year project, with Friends of Norwich in Bloom trialling different growing techniques. Key findings included the need to water more regularly in some cases; however all brands of peat-free compost trialled were felt to be satisfactory. Signs were added to the colourful displays around the city to help show how successfully plants could be grown in sustainable growing media. Terry Bane, Friends of Norwich in Bloom Ambassador, said "We are really pleased with the results of this project. Our sustainable perennial and barrier basket displays continue to look very attractive. The funding and partnerships gave our City College students the opportunity to



grow plants and learn about different types of composts as well as engage with many people in the community over a wide range of planting projects. We had excellent results from our plantings in several different locations around Norwich. Healthy plants with plenty of vigour were developed and they grew on well." For more information about the Norwich project, including the group's top tips for working with peat-free, visit the group's website: [norwichinbloom.co.uk](http://norwichinbloom.co.uk)



Images clockwise: *Armira maritima* in sustainable growing media along Cattlemarket Street; a new sustainably-grown perennial bed outside St Giles Church; pupils at City College get ready to plant out.



All images: Norwich in Bloom

### Defra/ RHS Sustainable Horticulture in Partnership (SHiP) scheme

The Defra/RHS Sustainable Horticulture in Partnership Scheme was developed to support a Government commitment to voluntarily reduce the horticultural use of peat to zero by 2015 for the public sector, by 2020 for home gardeners and by 2030 for professionals. Grants were awarded to Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups in England to increase their use of sustainable growing media. Funding was provided to cover the additional costs of using sustainable growing media and plants grown in sustainable growing media. The objectives of the scheme were to raise awareness within the wider public sector (including local authorities, the community and the procurement chain) about the use of sustainable growing media; to establish an evidence base on the performance of sustainable growing media and to initiate some market demand for sustainably-grown plant products with growers.



# Congratulations Bloom 2016 Finalists!

This year 72 communities have made it through to the UK Finals of RHS Britain in Bloom - the nation’s most prestigious community gardening awards.

VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bellingham	Northumbria
Castlecaulfield	Ulster
Elswick	North West
Fordham	Anglia
Mathern with Pwllmeyric & Mounton	Wales
Middleton by Wirksworth	East Midlands

LARGE VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Barwick in Elmet	Yorkshire
Beer	South West
Dalston	Cumbria
Dufftown	Scotland
Hillsborough	Ulster
Upton upon Severn	Heart of England



Llandudno in Bloom

SMALL TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Corbridge	Northumbria
Freckleton	North West
St Saviour	Jersey
Studley	Heart of England
Whitehead	Ulster

TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Amersham	Thames & Chilterns
City of London	London
Haddington	Scotland
Immingham	East Midlands
Midsomer Norton	South West
St Martin	Guernsey

LARGE TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Coleraine	Ulster
Colwyn Bay	Wales
Congleton	North West
Farnham	South & South East
Kendal	Cumbria
Market Harborough	East Midlands
Perth	Scotland
Portishead	South West
Ryde	South & South East
Wisbech	Anglia

Clockwise: Friends of Queen’s Park at work in Loughborough; pupils support Perth; planting out in Corbridge; floral spectacle in the centre of Durham; wildflower meadows gracing the streets of Oldham; Llandudno planting up



Loughborough in Bloom



Oldham in Bloom



Durham in Bloom

SMALL CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Canterbury	South & South East
Colchester	Anglia
Derry	Ulster
Exeter	South West
Harrogate	Yorkshire
Loughborough	East Midlands
Rugby	Heart of England

CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Aberdeen	Scotland
London Borough of Havering	London
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	London
Oldham	North West

LARGE CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Belfast	Ulster
London Borough of Ealing	London
Wigan	North West

COASTAL UP TO 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bute	Scotland
Filey	Yorkshire
Mablethorpe	East Midlands
Newcastle	Ulster
Silloth-on-Solway	Cumbria
St Brelade	Jersey
Tenby	Wales

COASTAL OVER 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bournemouth	South & South East
Deal	South & South East
Exmouth	South West
Great Yarmouth	Anglia
Southport	North West
St Peter Port	Guernsey

URBAN COMMUNITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Evington	East Midlands
Gogarth (Llandudno)	Wales
Kippax	Yorkshire
Mancroft, The Lanes	Anglia
St George	South West
Walthamstow Village	London



Perth in Bloom



Peter Rodger

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Ahoghill	Ulster
Birmingham	Heart of England
Cleethorpes	East Midlands
Durham	Northumbria
Lytham	North West
St Pierre du Bois	Guernsey



RHS Advice

# Microgardens

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 [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118

Author: Guy Barter,  
RHS Chief Horticulturalist

Microgardens are intensively cultivated small spaces - such as balconies, small yards, patios and rooftops. Many rely on containers such as plastic-lined wooden boxes, hanging planters and even old car tires.

The microgardens approach enables you to cultivate plants no matter how small your growing space. The benefits of the proximity of plants and the practice of gardening to human health and well-being are well supported by scientific evidence as well as general experience. There is evidence that it is not necessary to have extensive areas to benefit.

In Britain, growing space is limited for many people. Modern houses have small gardens, older houses have been subdivided or their gardens built on, allotments are too few to meet demand and opportunities for community gardens are not available everywhere.

However microgardens are not all about making do with less, many people have work and family commitments or perhaps health issues, which rule out larger scale gardening. They can still get much benefit from small scale activities.

### What do you need?

The best and cheapest growing material is garden soil with extra organic matter. For containers, two parts by volume of garden soil and one of peat-free growing media (see box to right) is usually effective.

Potting media, or more economically, growbag compost, ideally peat-free is of course suited to pots and boxes. For raised beds, a foot of soil from a soil merchants over enough coarse sand to raise the soil level to within 5cm (2ins) of the lip of the bed is an inexpensive way to get sufficient depth of growing medium.

Rainwater collected from roofs and stored in a water butt should be sufficient for a microgarden, but if tap water is required so be it. Grey water, from washing vegetables for example, is suitable in moderation, but the dirtier water, washing-



Microgardening in Walthamstow. Trailing squash and nasturtiums offer a large leaf area to transpire water and keep the house cool in hot spells. The urban heat island effect is ideal for fruit, at limited risk from frost while the warmth helps to build up sugars to produce well-ripened, flavoursome crops.

up water for example, is best used for short periods in summer on ornamental plants only. Bathwater is only suitable for ornamental plants.

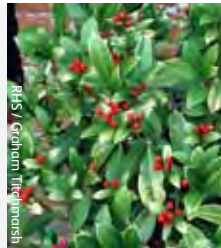
It does not pay to scrimp on feeding. Homemade compost is ideal and of course free; however if you don't have space for a compost bin, seaweed fertiliser is organic and reliable. Liquid feeds such as Miracle-Gro are also highly effective.



Salads and strawberries grow well in a properly watered and fed shallow rootzone. Strawberries trail to make use of adjacent space, and die back in winter, allowing a potential autumn crop of salad leaves.



Four options for shady corners, from top left: *Fatsia japonica*, *Skimmia japonica* 'Nymans', *Camellia sasanqua* 'Alba' and *Mahonia x media* 'Charity'



Four full sun options, from top left: potted basil; mixed pots of dahlias, purple heliotrope and scabious; nicotiana; mixed pots of herbs and succulents



### Best plant choices

Microgardens are often in areas shaded by nearby buildings, fences and trees. Shade is damaging to most fruit and vegetables, but offers excellent potential for evergreen ornamental plants such as aucuba, fatsia, mahonia, skimmia and viburnum that can fill unpleasant dry or dank, dark places with green vegetation. By using ericaceous potting media camellia, pieris and rhododendron are excellent potted choices for shady gardens.

A microgarden in a suntrap however offers great potential. Culinary herbs such as basil, coriander, rosemary and thyme will be well flavoured, while tender ornamentals such as canna, dahlias, night-scented nicotiana, pelargoniums and potted lilies are other options.

Spacing is an area where microgrowers sometimes get caught out. Container planting sees more light coming in from the sides allowing spacing to be closer, but only by a very little, say 10 percent. Carrots grown in rows 25cm (10ins) apart in a garden can be grown at say 20cm (8ins) apart in a 'microbed'.

Climbing crops offer a way to use trellis, walls and wigwams; climbing French beans, cucumbers, squash, climbing courgettes, and most productive of all, runner beans.

Even in urban heat islands winter is tricky but planting hardy salads, roots and greens in August and early September is highly productive. Baby turnips and kohlrabi offer tender roots and greens, chicories, endives and oriental greens can be grown for loose leaf salads and kales can be selectively picked over for greens all winter.

### Peat-free growing media

Due to concerns about the damage done to the environment, peat will be phased out of growing media used by home gardeners by 2020. The growing media industry is currently working on finding sufficient, sustainable non-peat feedstock and developing formulations of acceptable growing media that do not contain peat. The RHS has endorsed Sylvagrow, [sylvagrow.co.uk](http://sylvagrow.co.uk)

For more advice about using peat-free growing mixes, visit the RHS website: [rhs.org.uk/advice](http://rhs.org.uk/advice)



Chimney pot plants add vertical colour



Creative planting can enliven a drab alleyway



Mixed oriental leaves look and taste good and are reasonably hardy lasting into early winter

For more advice on any gardening topic, including container growing, visit: [rhs.org.uk/advice](http://rhs.org.uk/advice)





# Blooming solutions for everyone

Blooming Marvellous is a supported volunteer gardening project for those recovering from mental health problems, headed by Rushmoor Voluntary Services in Farnborough. Funded by Broadhurst Welcome Home Community Trust, they aim to empower those who want to volunteer but would like some support to do so.

The group looks after several sites across Aldershot and Farnborough including Aldershot Library garden, Westend Centre garden, and the Farnborough Rotary Access garden among others. They also maintain two allotment plots where their volunteers learn their gardening skills.

In addition, the project offers a free service that helps elderly residents and those with special needs to stay in their own homes by providing one-off visits to make-over their gardens.

"Sometimes residents just need a bit of encouragement," explains project lead Hazel Chant. "One recently bereaved lady had felt unable to go back into her garden following the death of her husband, as the garden was always the place they worked together. Our visit helped to motivate her to get back outside. She told us afterwards that she felt like a great weight had been lifted off her shoulders."

Blooming Marvellous made-over almost 50 gardens last year and is already booked up for the next few months. Kate, one of the volunteers says, "I like having something to do, rather than sitting around

getting depressed. The bonus is that we help people in need."

For clients, the service can be a lifeline. One lady in Farnborough says, "The volunteers did an absolutely marvellous job. I can't say how relieved I am to be rid of the overgrowth and weeds. I now feel encouraged to try to maintain it again."

Blooming Marvellous offers a supportive environment for those looking for voluntary opportunities. Some are retirees who want to keep active; most are struggling with mental health issues and looking for a supportive environment in which to recover. Newcomers to the group initially join growing activities on the allotment and after that they can opt in to help out with garden make-overs if they wish.

Their work has not gone unnoticed and last year volunteers picked up an award at Rushmoor in Bloom's awards presentation for the community gardening work they do in the borough.

Volunteer Alexandra Toomey says, "Blooming Marvellous goes far beyond gardening as the common interest. It is also a chance for members to socialise and get out and about. We go on trips throughout

the year - to gardens including Wisley and Hampton Court, the Isle of Wight, nurseries and garden centres, arboretums, walks in the countryside, and much more. We also have cookery sessions where we use produce from our allotment, including



Volunteers weeding at the allotment; the team starts a front garden clearance (top)



Jake and Alexander with some of the produce from the allotment; much of the produce is cooked up for the annual summer barbecue (left)

dishes for the summer barbecue which we hold on the allotment itself."

The project offers training courses in first aid, food hygiene, petrol mower and strimmer use. The team actively encourages members to progress and move into paid employment. Alexandra now works two days a week as part of the herbaceous

team at RHS Garden Wisley; another member has just started work in a local garden centre. Two further volunteers started their own garden maintenance business after the experience they gained with Blooming Marvellous.

"Even if we're just a stepping stone for a few months, it's finding a way through, like

a plant under concrete," says Hazel. "You can help people but ultimately it has to come from them. It's wonderful to watch the volunteers flourish and grow and find themselves again."

[rvs.org.uk](http://rvs.org.uk)

## Tony's story

Now in his fifties, Tony spent many years living rough on the streets. He had to resort to food parcels in the past and has not had his own home for many years. Now living with his brother and his wife, he was signposted to Blooming Marvellous by his social worker. At the allotment, he's learnt to prepare the ground, plant seeds, weed and harvest the crops and now also enjoys cooking with the produce.

"I love coming to the group," he says, "it's helped me build my confidence and make lots of new friends."



Tony creating runner bean frames at the allotment

## Eddy's story

Eddy suffered a mental break down around nine years ago and has been involved in Blooming Marvellous for the last three years. He now works in the core team, making-over gardens around the borough. He has taken qualifications to use a petrol strimmer and lawn mower and has recently completed a first aid course, skills which have helped him into employment.

Eddy has recently started working part time at a local garden centre; however he still joins the group once a week to benefit from the supportive atmosphere and being among friends.



Eddy is a core member of the garden make-over team



# An advocate for gardening

Dr James Davies was elected as the new Member of Parliament for the Vale of Clwyd constituency in North Wales in May last year and is a long-term supporter of Prestatyn in Bloom. Prior to being elected, he was a full-time GP and clinical lead for dementia, as well as a local councillor. He is now a member of the Commons Health Select Committee.

## RHS: How does gardening improve health and wellbeing?

For individuals, gardening has the potential to boost physical health through promoting cardiovascular fitness, weight loss, muscle strength and bone density. Certainly not to be overlooked however are benefits to mental health. Exercise, outdoor activity and social interaction all have the ability to tackle depression, isolation, anxiety and stress and even to help manage anger issues.

Communities too can benefit by schemes to brighten up the surroundings and improve biodiversity, creating a more general sense of wellbeing and pride. Through the engagement of those of a more disadvantaged background, there are great opportunities to provide increased confidence, motivation and self-esteem, as well as education. Encouragement can be given to home-growing of vegetables too, to provide a healthier diet at a low cost.

## RHS: What's happening in Prestatyn?

I have always been an advocate for Bloom initiatives. The Prestatyn in Bloom committee, which I chair, works collectively

with many community groups, businesses, schools and the local authorities with the aim of securing continued improvement in the town, year on year. Organisations we work with include Men's Sheds, which was established to help reduce isolation amongst men; Grow Wild, which has worked with children to improve areas in the town centre; and Incredible Edibles, whose volunteers have taken over some flower beds within the town and plant edibles for the public to harvest if they wish to do so.

The local Environment Association has created a community woodland and has coordinated the creation of pathways, making nature more accessible. The Friends of the Ffrith Group and Friends of the Railway Station have used wild flowers to increase biodiversity and also to beautify the town's main ingress points. A former civic amenity site has been transformed to provide raised bed allotments, supporting an allotment group and children's allotment club. There is a garden share scheme that operates in Prestatyn and helps to match budding gardeners with those who have gardens

that they find unmanageable. Prestatyn Horticultural Society also holds monthly speaker meetings.

We aim to ensure that Prestatyn in Bloom is at the centre of all major local decisions. Three years ago, there was an large shopping park development planned within the town centre and our committee worked with the local planning authority and the developers to ensure that there was sufficient, quality landscaping and that the aesthetics of the park were taken into full consideration. This was successful as we managed to secure trailing plants and living walls where we would have had brick walls. In addition, tree planting has been effective. Bloom has helped to act as a catalyst in Prestatyn to engender civic pride and unite the community.

## RHS: How do you see Bloom impacting the health and wellbeing of local communities?

Our experience is that Prestatyn in Bloom results in a cleaner, more attractive community which provides a feel-good factor for those who live here and in surrounding areas, brings in extra visitors

and encourages them to return. It also brings a more buoyant economy; a number of businesses have said that taking part in Prestatyn in Bloom has boosted their turnover. Equally there is evidence that investors see the town in a more positive light in view of its appearance and the national promotion provided by the winning of awards. They are then encouraged to enhance, expand and set up new businesses here. All of this helps boost employment which in turn contributes to the greater local wellbeing.

There is a continual effort to drive up standards in public areas, and the annual judging also provides a deadline to ensure grot spots and improvement projects are dealt with. In other words, it has performed an important regeneration function over the last several years, all contributing to improved community wellbeing. It has also ensured that environmentally-friendly practices are being followed which is important for the future wellbeing of us all. Certainly, Bloom engenders increased community involvement and pride - bringing people together from different backgrounds and helping to improve health, wellbeing, social outcomes and reduce crime.

## RHS: How can we encourage more gardening for health and wellbeing?

I believe it is important that schools encourage children from an early age to garden and grow their own vegetables. It is also important to spread awareness of the personal and wider health and wellbeing benefits associated with gardening through as many outlets as possible.

[prestatyninbloom.co.uk](http://prestatyninbloom.co.uk)

# Inspiring healthy eating

Happy Days Nursery Penair in Cornwall has developed a project to encourage children and their families to grow their own food. Author: Alana Tapsell.

Teaching children to make healthier lifestyle choices is a high priority for many schools across the UK and Happy Days Nursery in Penair is no exception. Located in an area of deprivation in Truro, the staff at the nursery created a project to encourage the children, who are aged between three months and five years, and their families to grow their own food. They hope to equip participants with skills and knowledge, which were otherwise limited, to build a healthier future.

Nursery Manager Nicky and Deputy Manager Rhett developed the project to offer families the chance to grow seasonal crops at the nursery. Participants are given the chance to learn key gardening skills, how to manage seasonal crops, what types of foods are easily grown, and how to maintain a small, manageable growing area – something they could then transfer to their gardens at home.

The children enjoy sharing their learning space with their families and friends, and many of them are now excited to be growing food at home too. Several families who were not enrolled with the nursery have also started their own growing areas at home. Esther, aged three, said, "I like the strawberries best. We can't pick them 'til they're red and we have to stop the squirrels from eating them!" and Satoshi, also aged three, said, "We grew baby beans. They were crunchy and we had them for tea."

Happy Days has always been a 'healthy' nursery meaning the children have access to nutritionally-balanced meals every day and wherever possible, they try to cook with their



own produce. In the growing area, the children cultivate strawberries, rhubarb, beans, peas, courgettes, marrow, pumpkins, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, and a variety of lettuce.

Nicky at Happy Days said, "We're passionate about young children learning where food comes from and supporting their families in this. I strongly believe that ideas and values that children learn at a young age stay with them as they grow and we hope they continue this experience into their future lives. We're really excited about expanding our work within the local community with the orchard we hope to start soon."

The nursery has been a member of the RHS Campaign for School Gardening since 2009 and recently became an RHS Five Star Gardening School due to their incredible passion for teaching young children about healthy lifestyle choices and for their dedication to spreading that message to the wider community.

[happydaysnurseries.com/truro-penair](http://happydaysnurseries.com/truro-penair)

Does your group support a school gardening project? 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)





# Growing connections

A small social horticultural charity and RHS Affiliated Society in Dorking is taking a simple approach to improving health and wellbeing - with great results.

The Patchworking Garden Project began in November 2014, initiated by local resident Carmel O'Shea. Carmel had had to give up her own job as a GP after struggling with mental health problems, but still wanted to help others. The idea for the charity came when she chanced upon a derelict walled garden at the foot of Box Hill.

"I knew gardening would help to keep me well but I still wanted to be helping other people," she said. "Creating a community garden offers the therapeutic benefits of gardening as well as the possibility of new friendships, enabling an improvement in wellbeing."

Directly opposite an Aviva office complex, the derelict two-acre site had lain empty for years, with part of it being used as a car park. Carmel approached the company offering to set up a charity to restore and work in the garden. "They wanted a way to use the land and therapeutic gardening was a good fit with their own positive approach to employee mental health," Carmel explained.

Aviva's groundsman helped to clear the site and from there volunteers took over, building raised beds and mulching paths. "The idea really caught on – people liked what we were doing so we had lots of help at the work parties."

One year on and there are more than 50 volunteers regularly involved, 24 helping to run activities and others supported by the group. The garden is open three days a week, with a range of activities available each day. "We always start together with a cup of tea by the shed and share out tasks," explains Carmel, "people choose what they feel like doing. If you come into the garden and don't feel particularly good you don't need to do anything. Just being

here makes you feel better. It's important for us to find the balance between creating tasks that are satisfying and not putting too much pressure on people. I'm always amazed at how much we manage to get done!"

Everyone is welcome at the garden. People volunteer to support others and the project works closely with local mental health teams to help those looking for volunteering activities to get back into employment. "One man was with us for four months and then went back to work," says Carmel, "he said that having the freedom to do as much as he wanted meant he'd come. He'd never gardened before, but said coming out regularly had really helped to get his confidence back."

Another supported volunteer had been scared to leave their house, but enjoyed coming to the walled garden as it felt like a safe space. And a recently graduated horticultural student had developed interpersonal skills needed for future employment after being given the opportunity to design a perennial border for the garden.

"All sorts of things can happen to people - a stroke, a traumatic event. If you lose your confidence you might stop going out and then you start losing your social skills. Friendships that come from this project have made all the difference," says Carmel.

Closing the garden over Christmas was a tough decision, with the regular sessions so valued by volunteers. But rather than miss out, a group of attendees instead made plans to meet at the nearby winery for a coffee and a walk. "One person told me this was the first time they'd made arrangements like this," said Carmel. "It's wonderful that the garden can help people in this way."

[patchworkinggardenproject.co.uk](http://patchworkinggardenproject.co.uk)



All images: Patchworking Garden Project



Clockwise from top: Sue and Lucy planting up Christmas gifts in the polytunnel; volunteers construct the raised beds; the garden in late summer; a pallet transformed with pyrography; Bob and Joe laying a dead hedge; ample provision for insects.



Sally Lean (centre) at the reopening of the refurbished, dementia-friendly rose arbour walk

## My Bloom: Sally Lean, Chair of Tessier Gardens Friends Group (TGFG), an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group in Torquay

### Why do you volunteer with Bloom?

It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction when seeing the difference a volunteer group can make. Having lived adjacent to Tessier Gardens for most of my life it is lovely to see them beautiful once again and giving so many people so much pleasure. The three-acre garden is a magical space. It was donated by Amy Tessier in 1933 with the proviso that it should be a place of rest and quiet for adults only. The garden contains a wisteria walk, large pond, rose arch, sensory garden, dahlia walk and many specimen trees and shrubs.

The friends group was constituted in 2007 and I was elected chairperson in 2011. Our aim is to promote and encourage the protection, conservation and enhancement of the garden and we've won many awards. There's so much to gain for body and soul in volunteering, gardening and celebrating the joy of our little 'green oasis of calm'.

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

In 2013 - 15, working in partnership with Torbay Dementia Action Alliance, The Rotary Club of Babbacombe and St Marychurch and Stanley Court - a managed development for retired people - we worked towards making Tessier Garden a recognised 'dementia friendly' garden. The money raised was used to widen the path through the rose arbour to enable

access to wheelchair users and to reinstate the flower beds. The outer beds now contain perennials to stimulate dementia sufferers, while the inner beds are planted with dahlias and spring bulbs. There is a magnificent display of colour. After the completion we held a celebratory garden party to coincide with presentation our 'Purple Angel' plaque. We have now achieved our aim thanks to the local community working hard for a common cause of which I am very proud.

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

We'll be creating a wildlife garden during our monthly 'dig ins'. Volunteers this year will be able to use our newly donated tools, stored in the refurbished gardeners' shed, courtesy of the Rotary Club.

The garden is visited daily by many people who enjoy the tranquillity, feed the squirrels and the fish. However, an incident which has made all the hard work most worthwhile involved a son walking with his mother who has advanced dementia. He was telling us that he had not heard a lucid word from his mother in many months until she said 'dahlia' on sighting the flowers. As he related this, his mother pointed to a dahlia and said, 'pom-pom'. Tears were not far away!

[tessiergardens.co.uk](http://tessiergardens.co.uk)

If you'd like to share your volunteering news in the My Bloom column, please call 020 7821 3118 or email [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk)





# Would you like to support community gardeners near you?

## Consider becoming an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood assessor

These vital volunteers support community gardening groups across the UK by helping them to develop their projects. If you're a gardening enthusiast with experience of working in the community or even a professional horticulturist who would like to help those starting out then please consider getting involved.

It's Your Neighbourhood assessors receive support and training to enable them to visit groups and provide feedback, with visits taking place during the summer months. More and more groups are starting up every year, transforming their towns and streets into oases of green. Help them to grow by becoming an assessor!

**Please register your interest** with your local Region/ Nation in Bloom and find out more about how you could get involved: [rhs.org.uk/bloomregionsnations](https://rhs.org.uk/bloomregionsnations)

\* Please note, some Regions/Nations may not have immediate opportunities but they will explain the process for getting involved in future years.