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Sharing the best in Gardening

Grass Roots

The RHS Community Update

Issue 24 • Winter 2015/16

rhs.org.uk/communities

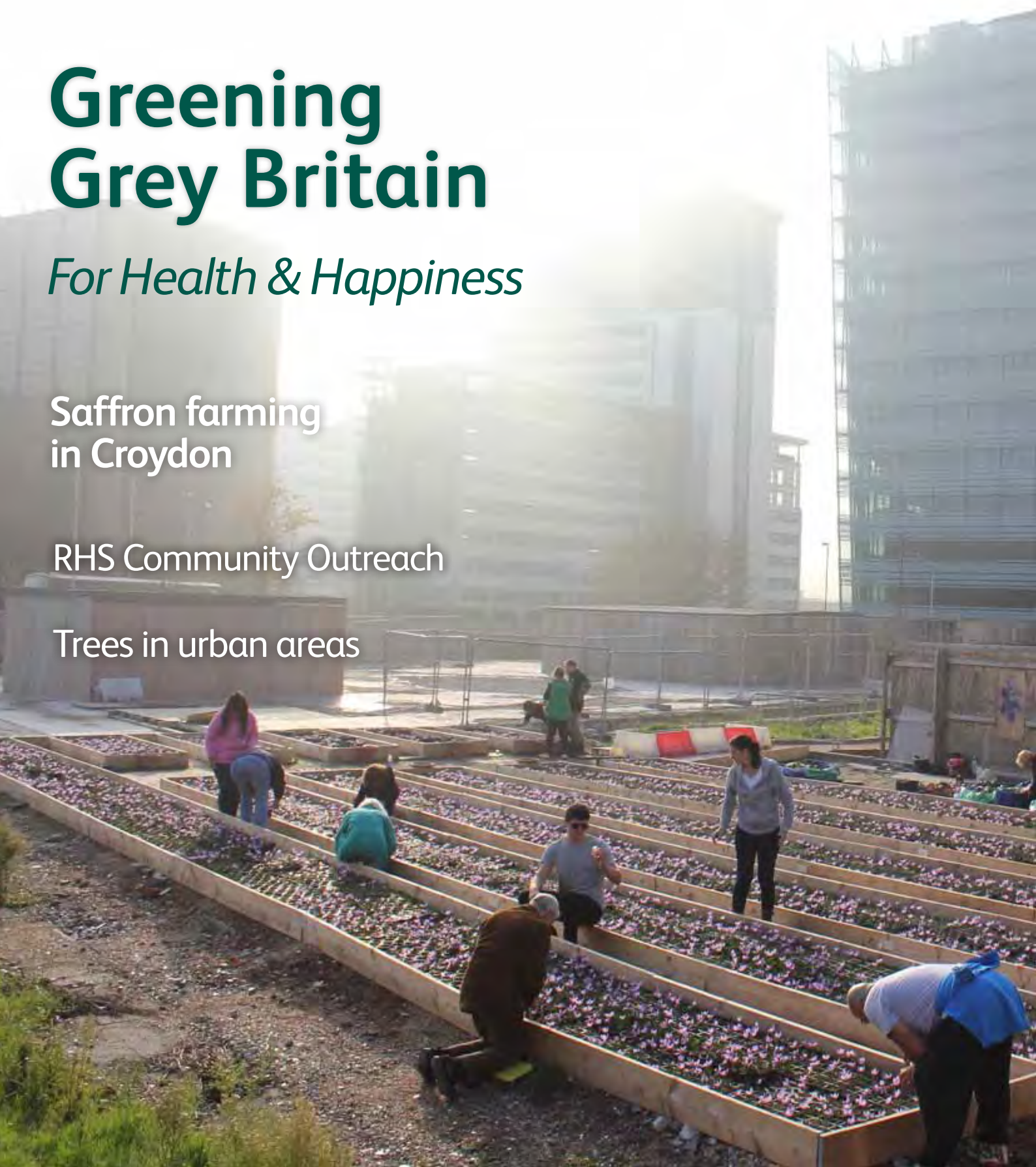
Greening Grey Britain

For Health & Happiness

Saffron farming
in Croydon

RHS Community Outreach

Trees in urban areas



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Cover image: *Crocus farming in Croydon.*
Credit: Ally McKinlay

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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



RHS / Carol Sheppard

Welcome

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

And a Happy New Year! This issue is packed full of ideas about how you can get stuck in to the 2016 Bloom theme: Greening Grey Britain for Health and Happiness (pages 4 - 6). This year groups can apply for RHS support for projects which support health and wellbeing in the community.

Also in this issue we bring you inspiration from groups that are greening urban spaces to grow food and building community in the process - such as House of Bread’s growing and cooking project in Stafford (page 10). Finally, the RHS Community Outreach team was formed just over a year ago to support communities to develop gardening skills. You can find out who works where and how to contact the team on page 7.

As always, please remember to keep us in touch with your news. Send your stories to: communities@rhs.org.uk / 020 7821 3118

Best wishes and happy greening!

Sophie
Sophie Dawson, Editor

Get involved - Inspirational Stories

The RHS is searching for passionate volunteers with inspirational stories

We want the world to know about the amazing work you do to positively change individuals, communities and the environment through gardening. We know that you have stories about the massive difference horticulture can make, but in order to inspire others to see the potential of gardening they need



to see what is possible, and that’s where we need your help. Have you or your friends and neighbours created an interactive green gym to improve the health of people in your area, changed the lives of people with mental ill health through gardening, or brought nature and wildlife to inner city children? Or have you transformed formerly derelict areas into thriving community spaces? Whatever your inspiring story, if your community has been transformed by an It’s Your Neighbourhood, Bloom or RHS community group project, let us know! Either fill in the survey at surveymonkey.co.uk/r/InspiringCaseStudies or if it’s easier, contact Siobhan in the RHS press office at: siobhanmacmahon@rhs.org.uk

Print correction: we’d like to apologise for the following errors in the Autumn 2015 issue of *Grass Roots*: Cupar in Scotland was the joint winner of the RHS Britain in Bloom Young People’s Award and not Coupar Angus; Rod Parr and Graham Bouchard received RHS Britain in Bloom Community Champions Awards, in addition to those named.

Award-winning hedgehog homes

Over 95 people entered their hedgehog shelters into the Wild About Gardens Week photo competition and the judges struggled to select just three winners. Helen Miller won the individual category prize, a professional trail camera, with her two-roomed, recycled plywood, twig and moss shelter (pictured), which she placed in the woods behind her house. Surbiton Wildlife Group won the group prize: an advisory visit from a hedgehog expert to help create better hedgehog habitat locally. Notley Green Primary School in Essex won the school

category and picked up a wildlife gardening bundle for their school. Pupils created their ‘Hedgehog hibernation hideout’ from recycled materials donated by parents. Kate Curtis, Forest School Instructor at Notley said the school, “wanted to try and do our bit to help these wonderful and sadly endangered creatures.”

Next year’s Wild About Gardens Week will take place from 24 – 30th October 2016 and we’ll be looking at the steps we can take to support bats in our gardens and green spaces. To find out more, visit: wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk



Helen Miller

Grass Roots survey: We are gathering feedback from readers to help us improve the magazine. Please take ten minutes to complete the short online survey and let us know what you think. We will use your feedback to develop the magazine’s future content. Complete the survey before 28th February and you could win an assorted selection of seeds for your group: surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GrassRootsMagazine

New RHS garden

The Society’s new, fifth garden, RHS Garden Bridgewater, is located in Salford, Greater Manchester on the site of the once magnificent but now lost Worsley New Hall. The hall was built in the 1840s, its garden boasting formal terraces, a 4ha (10 acre) kitchen garden, pleasure gardens and an ornamental lake. Just over a century later, in the late 1940s, the house was completely demolished and the gardens abandoned. Part of the Society’s plans include restoring the terraces in a contemporary style; bringing the kitchen garden back into production; and building a Plant Centre and Learning Centre. Follow the garden’s development at: rhs.org.uk/bridgewater

Woodland support

Making Local Woods Work is a lottery-funded pilot project to support woodland-based social enterprises across the UK. It will work with 50 enterprises over the next three years, providing a range of support tailored to their individual needs. Contact the team if your group is looking to undertake new activity that will help you to bring woodlands into active management; create jobs and training opportunities; increase access to and use of woodlands; or help those most in need to access woodlands. Applications are open until end of February 2016. For more information, visit: plunkett.co.uk/woodlands

New toolkit launched

A new online toolkit has been launched by The Prince’s Foundation which will help to shape new developments so that they are well designed and received by communities. BIMBY (Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard) supports people on the ground to inform planners and developers about what they would like new housing to look like. It sets out to empower people to take part in the planning process in a positive way: bimby.org.uk

Buzzing cities

Buglife will be running a three-year project to establish eight flagship Buzzing Cities across England and Wales; transforming mown and unused grass and urban sites into pollinator habitats.

Pollinators are vitally important to landscapes and people, but the UK’s pollinators are in decline. Thanks to funding from Biffa Award and the Garfield Weston Foundation, Buglife will be working with the following cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Ipswich, Leeds, Leicester, Plymouth and York; converting them into Buzzing Cities.

Urban Buzz will train 800 local volunteers to be ‘urban buzzers’ to be involved in pollinator habitat management and maintenance. To find out how you can get involved, visit: buglife.org.uk/urban-buzz

New RHS team member

Siobhán MacMahon recently joined RHS as Press Officer for Communities and Education, supporting the Bloom and It’s Your Neighbourhood campaigns.

If you have any media related queries or an inspirational story to tell please get in touch with her at: siobhanmacmahon@rhs.org.uk or 020 7821 3043



Volunteers Needed

We are currently recruiting volunteers to support the RHS Cardiff, Malvern, Tatton Park and London Flower Shows in 2016. If you are energetic and passionate about the work of the RHS and can commit to at least two days then we’d love to hear from you.

We have a number of different volunteer roles including membership recruitment and retail so please share this with your groups and get in touch if you are interested. Volunteer recruitment for the RHS Chelsea and Hampton Court Palace Flower Shows closes on 19th January, but if you’d like to be considered for next year please do send us your details. To find out more, email: volunteer@rhs.org.uk

RHS Britain in Bloom launch

Greening Grey Britain for Health and Happiness

This year's RHS Britain in Bloom launch will form part of the three-year Greening Grey Britain (GGB) campaign, aiming to transform grey spaces into green places. In 2016 we are focusing on how gardens and green spaces can support our health and happiness.

What's the idea?

Gardens and green spaces, as well as the activity of gardening, have been shown to have a positive impact on peoples' health and wellbeing. This is the result of both the physical activity and the use of the space for mental relaxation and stimulation. Simply viewing a green space through a window can relax people and reduce stress levels, whereas active engagement in a green space has been found to have even greater effect.

As community gardeners we also know that gardening together contributes to improved social interactions and community cohesion, which in turn can improve mental health and wellbeing. When gardeners share their knowledge, skills and experiences with each other, relationships and support networks are developed. People with strong social networks have an increased life expectancy,

greater resilience to stressful life events and fewer visits to the doctor.

This is why this year we are encouraging groups across the country to organise community gardening activities to support health or happiness.

How can we get involved?

Groups can get involved by co-ordinating a greening project to improve health or wellbeing in the wider community. Choose something that works for your neighbourhood. For example, you might be making a new garden in a hospice or nursing home or co-ordinating a hanging basket workshop for local residents to share skills, create connections and increase



community spirit. Have a look at some of the examples overleaf for ideas about the kinds of things you might do.

All groups are encouraged to kickstart their greening projects as part of the nationwide Bloom launch during National Gardening Week (11 - 17th April 2016).

What support is available?

Groups can access information and branded resources on the RHS website, including posters and press release templates to help publicise your launch activity.

In addition, the RHS Community Outreach team will be offering support to a number of groups in 2016 to help them carry out their greening projects (below).

To download advice and resources, visit the online hub for Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups:

rhs.org.uk/bloomiyn

Greening Grey Britain: Promise to plant

Help us transform 6,000 grey spaces into living planted places by the end of 2017 - add your promise to plant to the website: rhs.org.uk/GreeningGreyBritain

GGB Support from RHS

For the GGB year of Health and Happiness, we are looking for projects that will improve the health and wellbeing of your wider community. This could be by using gardening to reduce social exclusion or bring new groups of people together, to encourage outdoor activity in the fresh air, reconnect people with seasonal food, share skills and the joy of growing or simply to promote good mental health and relaxation. You may want to transform a local space or undertake a specific community activity.

The nationwide team of RHS Community Outreach Advisors will support a number of projects across the UK – by training new gardeners, helping to organise events, deliver workshops or galvanize more volunteers. The RHS will also provide up to £500 worth of materials to each successful group to help make your project a reality, as well as press office support to ensure activities are publicised. Planned projects must show how horticulture can promote health or happiness in your wider community and must be completed between April - September 2016.

How to apply

To apply for this opportunity, please tell us how you'd like to use horticulture to support health or happiness in your community. Complete the online SurveyMonkey form before 22nd February 2016:

surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GGBprojects

You will also need to confirm that:

- you are a Bloom or It's Your Neighbourhood group
- your proposed project can be completed between April and September 2016
- you have plans for the ongoing maintenance of your project/ any planting
- you have permission for the work that you want to do
- you are able to cover any additional costs your project might have.

We will contact the successful groups by 25th March 2016. Only the successful groups will be contacted; however all groups can access online support and templates from the RHS hub: rhs.org.uk/bloomiyn



Making up hanging baskets to share amongst the local community

New greening links to local pensioners

In Leeds, Woodlesford in Bloom, with support from the RHS Community Outreach team, helped residents to transform an end of street flowerbed. In addition to planting up the previously empty bed, the group ran a 'make one take one' hanging basket workshop, where residents could make up one basket for themselves and one to be gifted to the local nursing home.

The event drew in 80 residents and free cups of tea and bacon butties were provided by local traders. Jonathon Davis, Woodlesford in Bloom Chairman said, "The RHS Greening Grey Britain initiative has enabled the volunteer group to green areas with the vision and conviction as to why they are being done, creating spaces for the community to enjoy, instead of just walking by. The impact created by the event went wider than the green transformations on site; the day brought together residents and increased neighbourliness."

Sarah-Jane Mason, RHS Yorkshire Regional Development Officer who supported Woodlesford in Bloom also praised the support of Leeds City Council. "The council prepared and edged the raised bed prior to the event, so that residents didn't have to do any of the heavy work," she explained. "The council also provided hanging baskets and plants on sale or return and at a discount, which they do for all the community gardening groups in Leeds."



Greening Grey Britain for Health and Happiness: Ideas & Inspiration

Boosting wellbeing through pride of place

In Glasgow, residents from the Molendinar Housing Association in Dalmarnock transformed grot spots on their estate into new mini-gardens in a bid to boost community engagement.

Volunteers planted a variety of winter crops at the Baltic Street Adventure Playground and in four un-used spaces around the estate, using plants that will provide year-round colour, impact and biodiversity value. Liz Stewart, RHS Development Manager Scotland, who

supported the activity, said, "This project has encouraged the housing association to try a new approach to managing their land, with greater emphasis on community involvement and using planting to help tackle issues such as dog fouling and flytipping. We hope it will engage more people in gardening so that they can experience the benefits."



Above: One of the grot spots on the Molendinar estate in Dalmarnock, Glasgow, before and after its transformation by the community

Willow weaving workshop creates new connections

Working with Suffolk Mind, the mental health charity, RHS Community Outreach Advisor Alison Findlay helped volunteers to create a new garden on a disused, litter-strewn allotment. With support from the housing association which owns the land, 20 volunteers came together to clear the site and lay out a new sensory garden. A willow weaving workshop was organised with artist Liz Cooke, from Lark Valley Willow, to create a circular seat. The workshop was open to other groups in the area, as well as Suffolk Mind volunteers from across the county so that they too could gain skills to take back to their own allotment projects. The day was sociable



Volunteers plant up the new woven willow seat

and everyone made their own willow sculpture. Alison then helped the group to plant up the seat with chamomile, which, once fully grown will provide a soft and fragrant seat cover.

Create green spaces for health and happiness: nine ideas

1. Reduce pollution
Some plants excel at trapping particulate (dust) pollution that can cause breathing difficulties. Look out for the rough and hairy as it is these stem and leaf characteristics that do the trapping.

- Plant a dense evergreen hedge between the garden and the street. Consider using a variety of plants such as yew (*Taxus*), *Pyracantha*, *Griselinia* and *Thuja*.



2. Contact with nature
Contact with nature has numerous benefits for both our physical and mental health. Spending time outdoors in a natural environment helps us to feel less stressed, reduces the symptoms of depression, and enhances our concentration and attention by allowing us to recover from mental fatigue.

- Encourage wildlife by planting pollinator-friendly plants; create log and leaf piles to encourage invertebrates; add a water source, like a shallow-sided pond, to benefit all wildlife. For more information visit wildaboutgardens.org.uk



3. Flooding
Unlike hard surfaces such as driveways and paths, the soil in beds, borders and lawns can soak up rain water. This helps to prevent localised flooding.

These garden features are a vital part of your community's flood defences – particularly during flash flooding after summer storms.

- Try to keep as much space as possible green, and avoid any unnecessary paving. Where you can, add in new green spaces, such as green roofs installed over bins or rain-planter containers under downpipes.

4. Healthy diets
Gardening often improves diets. For example, children who grow their own food have a greater preference for, and increased consumption of, fruit and vegetables.

- Create a new community growing space - this could be anything from a few planters filled with herbs to renovating an overgrown allotment site to create new plots.



5. Restorative elements: Touch
For sighted and non-sighted gardeners and garden visitors, touch is a key sense in the garden.

- Try to introduce a diverse range of different textures with plants and landscaping materials to help stimulate this sense - for example, soft and furry leaves like *Stachys* and pebbled mosaics.

For more information visit: sensorytrust.org.uk

6. Cooling
Plants are like air-conditioning units for towns and cities! They cool by providing a shady canopy and, by giving off water vapour, they cool the air around them. This cooling effect is localised, so can help reduce summer heat waves by 2-4°C in your street.

- Plant a climber against a wall or fence. For advice about how to do this, visit: rhs.org.uk/advice

7. Restorative elements: Smell
Fragrance can significantly effect our sense of wellbeing. Some scents, like lavender, can calm us down; others energise us. Scents are reminiscent of past experiences and so can bring feelings of great calm or joy.

- Try to plant a year-round selection of fragrant bulbs, perennials, shrubs and climbing plants such as hyacinth, rose and jasmine. To find a list of fragrant plants to suit your conditions, visit: rhs.org.uk/plantselector

8. Create social spaces
Social interaction and becoming part of a community can improve mental health, reduce isolation and increase overall life satisfaction. Community gardening is an excellent way to pull people together - transforming spaces and providing different ways that people can join in.

- Try to create areas within your green space where people can meet - well positioned benches or paved areas/hshelters where group activities can take place.
- Consider access and inclusivity - is your garden or green space accessible to wheelchair users; are there ways for those with limited mobility to engage, perhaps through raised bed planting activities.



9. Restorative elements: Sound
Natural sounds in gardens and green spaces can help to calm us down and root us in the moment.

- Create a moving water feature or use plants that make rustling noises when they move in the breeze, for example bamboo, grasses or trees such as poplar (where appropriate to site).

RHS Community Outreach in Scotland



Liz Stewart, Development Manager, Scotland



Mairi Coxon, Horticultural Development Officer, Scotland



Angela Smith, Horticultural Development Officer, Scotland



Libby Goodacre, Development Manager, Yorkshire



Sarah-Jane Mason, Regional Development Officer, Yorkshire

RHS Community Outreach in Northern England



Brian Senior, Community Outreach Manager, North



Anne Gunning, Community Outreach Advisor, North West



Christine Wright, Community Outreach Advisor, North East



Tracey Medlyn, Community Outreach Advisor, West Midlands

RHS Community Outreach in Southern England



Vacant, Community Outreach Manager, South

Alison Findlay, Community Outreach Advisor, East of England



Merryn Preece, Community Outreach Advisor, South West



Chris Young, Community Outreach Advisor, London

RHS Community Outreach in Yorkshire

RHS Community Outreach
Supporting groups across the country

The teams offer training and advice to schools and volunteer groups to help develop gardening skills. Together they transform communities, making them cleaner, greener and healthier. Over the past couple of years we've been increasing our involvement in communities around the UK, and today we have advisors based in the East of England, London, South West, Midlands, North West, North East, Yorkshire and Scotland.

- The teams are developing a range of projects and partnerships which aim to:
- Support volunteers to transform spaces
 - Increase the number of people who are actively gardening in their community
 - Train and up-skill teachers and community groups, helping groups make a positive difference where they live.

To contact the team in your area, please email communities@rhs.org.uk and we will make sure your enquiry reaches the right person.

Providing secondary school pupils in the South East with a horticultural challenge

Last autumn, RHS Community Outreach teamed up with the Education Development Trust (EDT) to create industry related challenges for teams of secondary school pupils in the South East. While opportunities for younger children are becoming more widespread, there is a dearth of opportunity for senior school students to engage in horticulture in a stimulating way. This impacts on their perception of the industry, leading to a lack of interest and awareness about career opportunities, further education courses and training.

To engage pupils, RHS and EDT invited 13 local schools to take part in an 8-week horticultural challenge competition. Over 70 children aged 12 - 15 took part and designed gardens for their schools or communities. They were mentored throughout by passionate and highly skilled retail horticulturalists from Squires Garden Centres and RHS Wisley, who they also visited at work to see first-hand some of the job opportunities available in the horticulture industry.

In December, the school teams pitched their ideas to the assessors at a celebration day at RHS Wisley, with three groups winning top prizes and garden vouchers for their schools.



Pupils present their design to the assessors

RHS Advice

Trees in urban areas

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 / 020 7821 3118

Author: Leigh Hunt, RHS Principal Horticultural Advisor

Towns and cities are urban forests, containing over 29 million trees. They reduce pollution, support wildlife, keep our towns warmer in winter and cooler in summer, and help reduce flooding. Yet with pressure on council budgets, maintaining the existing stock and adding new plantings can be challenging. That's where support from community groups, particularly on planting trees, can really help to keep places green. And, get it right, the effort of planting young trees can give a very long-lasting legacy.

Trees at risk?

The rate of tree loss in cities is not fully understood, but a number of current issues have been highlighted. Removing trees where they pose a risk to highways and private property is sometimes considered a cheaper option than managing the risk (e.g. pruning to make the canopy safer). And, recently, the risk to road/car users has been cited as a reason to fell, despite the fact that they have not been implicated in accidents more significantly than lampposts and road signs.

Community groups often have a key role in protecting trees, indicating which are valued by people in the area and championing their preservation. Likewise, initiating tree planting in new areas can turn previously grey streets into leafy ones, boosting community pride, and bringing associated environmental and social benefits such as a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Charter for Trees

The RHS is supporting the Woodland Trust in calling for a charter that roots trees at the centre of national decision making, and back at the heart of our lives and communities. **Be the roots of the charter - become a Charter Champion today.** Orientation days will take place around the UK in February 2016. For more details or to apply visit: treecharter.uk



Trees transform urban spaces, providing myriad benefits for people and wildlife

Tree Preservation Orders

A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is the legal mechanism to protect and preserve trees for public enjoyment, environmental and aesthetic purposes. Woodlands, garden trees and non-commercial orchards are covered, but bushes, shrubs and hedges are not.

If you wish to protect a tree in your area, write to the Planning Authority stating your reasons. An immediate, six month TPO can be put in place while the Authority informs neighbours and interested parties, who can raise objections. After six months, the temporary TPO could be confirmed and made permanent, or allowed to lapse.

For more advice on any gardening topic, including tree selection and planting, visit: rhs.org.uk/advice

Five trees for small spaces (within 5m of buildings)

- *Crataegus laevigata* 'Paul's Scarlet' pink flowers, fruit; ideal for greens, front gardens and verges
- *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer' narrow, suitable as a street tree, with white blossom
- *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Gum Ball' small, standard tree shape with vibrant autumn colour
- *Sorbus vilmorinii* small, slow grower with pink berries, but not the best choice for the street.
- *Acer campestre* 'Elsrijk' a form of the native field maple that can be used on the street.

Top barriers to tree planting and their solutions

Undermine foundations/ cracks in buildings

Less than one per cent of the trees in towns and cities are actually thought to be the cause of damage to buildings. When they do occur they can, obviously, be worrying, causing movement and cracks in walls.

Roots rarely cause the problems directly; instead the usual issue is where roots extract water from the soil, making it shrink away from foundations. However, the only types of soil that shrink under these circumstances are clay based. If the soil isn't clay, the risk is reduced.

The next main factor is the quality of the foundations. Homes built since the 1950s are more likely to have strong foundations - older or poorly constructed properties are more at risk.

Finally, the tree does make a difference. Some are known to be 'safer' such as *Malus* (apple and crab), *Betula* (birch), *Prunus* (plum), *Crataegus* (hawthorn) and *Sorbus* (rowan). These can usually be planted within 5m (16ft) of buildings, but the closer they are, the more risk. Conversely, *Quercus robur* (English oak), large *Salix* (willow) and *Populus*: these need to be more than 15m (49ft) away to reduce the risk.

Pavement lifting

Trees can lift paving slabs and tarmac. While some trees such as cherries and birch are known for surface roots and so aren't

always the best choices to line streets, there are ways to prevent problems. On a street, this usually involves engineering a better tree pit. This can include a wider area of flexible, porous paving around the base. Likewise, 'root deflectors' that reduce lateral roots in the upper layers of soil and promote deeper rooting and so better stability. Or choose deeper-rooted trees, such as hawthorn.

More information is available on page 111 of the online booklet, *Trees in the Hard Landscape* at: tdag.org.uk

Dropping leaves/ seeds

Sometimes trees are seen as messy. Leaves, seed and fruit can be unwanted. It is usually possible to minimise their impact by choosing the right tree for the site. Fruit (ornamental and decorative) might be great in a park, but less desirable in a street of cars.

Expense/ Ongoing pruning requirements

Much of the initial expense with a tree is at the time of planting and establishing. However, ongoing costs can be incurred, particularly if the tree is unsuitable for the location. For example, *Platanus* (plane) were traditionally pollarded (cutting branches back to stumps) annually to keep the size in

check on narrow streets. Ideally, choose trees that fit the site that can grow to full, mature size without needing pruning. This just leaves some formative work on younger trees such as removing lower branches and occasionally removing deadwood that may occur naturally.

Health and safety

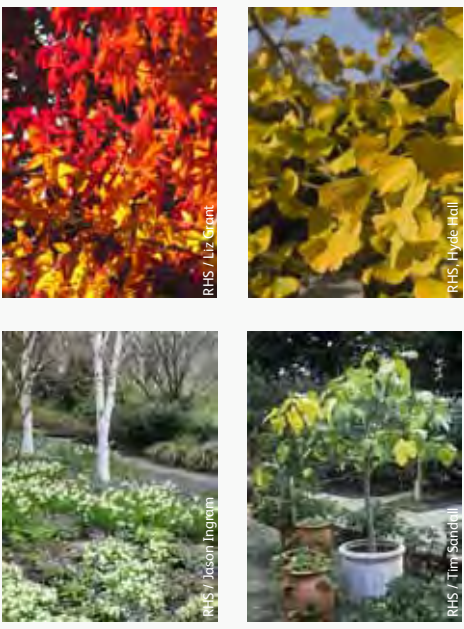
Health and safety issues can be very wide ranging, unfortunately. As a result, it is worth assessing the site before planting as how it is used is just as likely to influence the level of risk as the tree itself. Here are examples about considering and avoiding unnecessary risk:

- Is it near a playground? Trees with low but weak branches may not be suitable if they are likely to be climbed.
- Does the proposed tree compromise road safety by blocking views? Set trees further back or reposition.
- Will the trees be accessible all the time? Parks can be closed, for example, when storms are forecast, but streets cannot.

Mature trees come with different issues. They can drop branches in high winds or environmental stress, such as drought. It is best to work with council Tree Officers to find out how they inspect trees and manage this risk in your area.

Where a tree is not possible, next best options?

- Trees can be grown in pots, but they will need daily watering from April to October. It can still be a useful way of bringing a large amount of greenery to a grey area.
- Otherwise, consider different options such as green walls or smaller pots with a high level of visual impact that literally become the centre of attention.



Images from top left: Autumn colour from *Liquidambar styraciflua*; and *Ginkgo biloba*; a pot-grown fig tree; the bark of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* catches the eye all year round



New community allotments turf out anti-social behaviour

“We had a serious needle problem”, says local resident Sharon Craig about the empty patch of grass behind houses in Craigneuk, North Lanarkshire. The swings had been removed first, to try and dissuade anti-social behaviour, and then the connecting alleyway gated. Even so, the space was still attracting the wrong kind of attention.

It was Sharon who had the idea for a community allotment. As Chair of the tenants and residents association she approached the council’s regeneration officer and secured a grant of £4,000 to kickstart the project. Together with local residents and the kids she worked with at the youth club they started clearing rubbish in October 2006. Beds were dug in with a tractor and 22 allotment plots laid out. By the following spring the site was open, with all plots taken - several by local primary schools.

“The children’s involvement brings in the parents”, says Sharon. “Some families even have allotment spaces in their back gardens now. Before most of the gardens round here were empty.”



The community allotment before (above) and after (left) the group’s work

The transformation has inspired further greening across the region: other communities have seen the change at Craigneuk and set up their own growing spaces in otherwise unloved or problematic areas. The drug-taking problems have long since moved on.

Freecycling is at the heart of everything they do, as is taking an organic approach. A donated portercabin provides space for tea and a chat and found items are regularly donated to those in need. Any fly-tipped metal is sold for scrap to raise funds for the site and surplus produce is donated to pensioners via the local church. “We try to never buy anything!” says Sharon, rightfully proud of the group’s resourcefulness. “We have the whole community involved now, we’ve been able to reach out to so many people in different ways. It’s made such a change for the area.”

Craigneuk is a ‘Level 5 – Outstanding’ award-winning RHS It’s Your Neighbourhood project.

Growing and cooking brings together the community

As the frost thawed in February 2015, House of Bread, a small Christian charity in Stafford, began to develop a community garden. In an unassuming corner plot donated by the local church, the outline of raised beds took form.

The charity has provided home-cooked meals to those in need for the last five years. With the new community garden these will now be home-grown too.

Funding from the People’s Health Trust enabled the group to employ gardener Matt Long to develop the site. With volunteers’ support, nine raised beds were built over the course of 2015. By the end of the year these were producing most of the vegetables needed for the weekly soup meal.

“It’s amazing that it was just a piece of grass in February and now we’re able to provide all the vegetables we need each week,” says Matt. Every Friday, Bread Church sees volunteers harvest produce and prepare a hearty

vegetable soup, accompanied by home-made bread. Around 30 people drop in each week for a meal, a cup of tea and a chat.

“Some people are homeless, some in supported housing, for many it’s about just getting out and having a cup of tea, reducing the isolation,” says Matt.

This year their achievements were recognised by the RHS It’s Your Neighbourhood scheme.

hobstafford.co.uk



Images: House of Bread



Clockwise: weekly soup; the allotment’s early days; tending the beds



Community project champions Croydon’s lost crocus fields

Central Croydon wins the prize for most spectacular edible transformation after a pop-up saffron farm was installed over the rubble of the recently demolished Croydon Council HQ, Taberner House.

In August 2014 “Croydon Saffron Central” successfully crowdfunded £4,265 to plant 20,000 *Crocus sativus* corms on the temporarily vacant site. Crocus was chosen as it is believed that the name Croydon derives from the Anglo-Saxon *croh*, meaning “crocus”, and *denu*, “valley”, indicating that, like Saffron Walden in

Essex, it was a centre for the cultivation of saffron.

Last September around 150 community volunteers potted the vast majority of the corms, returning to harvest the crop in early November. Following the harvest the 20,000 plants were made available to community gardens, friends of parks groups and schools across the borough to create their own saffron farms – helping to raise the profile of this heritage crop even further.

The project’s creator, Croydon Radio DJ, Ally McKinlay, is positive about its

potential legacy. “If looked after the corms will produce more corms and the 20,000 could be more than 100,000 within three to five years,” he said.



Clockwise: the bulbs go in; saffron harvesting begins; the finished product



Images: Ally McKinlay



New competition for young horticultural photographers

Fresh talent discovered in new competition, RHS Young Herb Photographer of the Year

Indra Woodward, aged eight, from 11th Newham West Scout Group and 11-year-old Theo Harding-Rolls from Thomas's Clapham School have been announced as the winners of a new competition, RHS Young Herb Photographer of the Year.

The runners-up are Sophie Henderson (aged six) from Stonham Aspal C of E VA Primary School and Rowan Aitchison (aged fifteen) from Lomond School.

The competition was launched by The RHS Campaign for School Gardening in partnership with Vitacress, the UK's largest grower and supplier of fresh herbs. More than 340 entries were received, illustrating a huge variety of herbs growing in school gardens, kitchen gardens, allotments and exotic holiday destinations.

Both winners have received an iPad Air for themselves and £500 worth of horticultural materials for their school or group. The two runners-up received an iPad Mini for themselves and £250 of horticultural materials for their schools.

The competition will open again in June 2016 and details about how to enter will be available at: rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening

Runner-up in the 11 - 17 year old category was Rowan Aitchison from Lomond School, Argyll and Bute, Scotland, with his photo of Greek basil



Rowan Aitchison



Indra Woodward



Sophie Henderson

Left: Indra Woodward, 8-years-old from 11th Newham West Scout Group, London won the 5 - 10 year old category for her photo of borage, *Borago officinalis*. Above: Runner-up was Sophie Henderson, 6-years-old from Stonham Aspal C of E VA Primary School, Suffolk, with her picture of cardoon, *Cynara cardunculus*.

Theo Harding-Rolls from Thomas's Clapham, London, won the 11 - 17 year old category with his picture of rosemary (*Rosmarinus*) in the sun and rain.



Theo Harding-Rolls

For advice about school gardening, visit: rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening

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 or call 01483 212387



Ian Beaney (right) judging the UK Finals of RHS Britain in Bloom

My Bloom: Ian Beaney, Grounds Manager, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Northern Ireland, and RHS Britain in Bloom UK Finals Judge.

Why do you volunteer with Bloom?
It has to be the infectious enthusiasm of people from all walks of life that Bloom brings together. It has no barriers and absorbs the skills of all comers. It is this eclectic mix that just leaves you physically tired but mentally enlivened at the end of each Bloom day. If you ever doubt human nature a day with a Bloom group will restore your faith in society.

Of which Bloom achievement are you most proud?
I think I have to pick two as I just cannot separate them. The first has to be the RHS Britain in Bloom Permanent Landscape Award for Bangor Castle Walled Garden in 2009. This project was ten years in the making and was a career highlight. The second has to be being selected by the RHS as a Britain in Bloom judge. There are few things in my professional career that have been so enjoyable, rewarding and enlightening as well.

What are you working on at the moment?
A new vision for Ward Park in Bangor which is being developed by Ards and North Down Borough Council - a £2.7 million project set to enhance the space while reflecting its historic roots. Still at planning permission stage, the project proposals include creating a larger adventure-style children's play area, providing picnic facilities, improving the footpath network and upgrading existing bird enclosures to enhance viewing opportunities, as well as improving the park's ecology to provide protected areas for wildlife.
Ward Park is one of the few Victorian style town parks that still exists in Northern Ireland and remains a popular place for all ages to visit and enjoy recreation and sports. From tennis and bowls, to Sunday strolls and summer band concerts, to a children's play park and bird watching, it provides a diverse range of facilities and is widely used by families, sports clubs, and schools. The project is about enhancing popular features of the park and improving its ecology so that it continues to be a space that is used and enjoyed for many more years to come.

If you'd like to share your volunteering news in the My Bloom column, please call 020 7821 3118 or email sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk

Supporting Grassroots Gardening

Liz Stewart is the Regional Development Manager for Scotland and part of the RHS Community Outreach team.

Why is community gardening important?

Gardening in the heart of communities has never been more important, with a need for everyone to take positive action to help tackle factors like climate change, food poverty and declining biodiversity. But the good news is everyone can make a difference through hands-on gardening.

The RHS already supports community gardening throughout the UK through the RHS Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood campaigns, and as part of our Vision for the future, the charity is now actively supporting grassroots community gardening around the UK even more directly.

What's the RHS doing?

Started as pilot projects in Scotland and Yorkshire nearly three years ago, there is now a growing team of Community Outreach Advisors working in different regions around the UK, to encourage people to get passionate about gardening. Our job is to support people to transform their own community spaces through gardening, bringing people of different ages and backgrounds together and helping them to learn new skills so they can garden successfully and with confidence. We do

this by developing and delivering new activity programmes around the country and sharing our successes (and sometime failures!) amongst our team so that we can identify the best practice approaches to get people gardening.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

The RHS Campaign for School Gardening teacher training programme continues to be an important part of our work in Scotland, and we are delivering courses on Edible School Gardening, horticulture in the science curriculum and enterprise and design projects. We also hope to offer a gardening course tailored for youth leaders, in response to demand from youth groups.

The RHS Skilled Volunteer Programme has been piloted successfully in the South West of England and we are working on a similar pilot project here in Scotland. The aim is to match skilled garden volunteers with schools to help them progress their school garden projects; we provide volunteers with training, materials and guidance to give them the knowledge and confidence to work within schools and the schools gain from a wealth of gardening know-how.

We have also provided active support for It's Your Neighbourhood groups, by bringing together representatives from a number of groups in the West of Scotland. This was a chance for the groups to learn about winter growing techniques via an RHS workshop, but also for groups to share their community growing experiences. And as part of our Greening Grey Britain campaign our whole Community Outreach team has worked with community volunteers to transform grey spaces into green, through a series of funded projects UK-wide.

Where does the RHS Community Outreach team work?

We currently have Community Outreach Advisors in Scotland – East (mainly Central Belt & Borders) and West – and across England (in Yorkshire, North East, North West, Midlands, East of England, South West, London and South East).

How can groups contact the team?

To contact the team in your area, please email communities@rhs.org.uk or call 020 7821 3122 and we will make sure your enquiry reaches the right person.

A year of celebrations

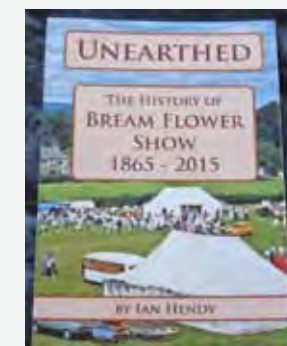
Celebrating 150 years requires special attention – and Bream Gardening Society in Gloucestershire is leading by example.

The committee is recovering after a jam-packed year of events to celebrate the milestone. Bream Gardening Society (previously Bream Horticultural Society) has been successfully drawing together gardeners in this Forest of Dean village since 1865. Marking the anniversary required a plan, explained Secretary Jennifer Lang. “The decision was made to get more involved in our community and also go the nostalgia route for many of our activities,” she said.

One especially exciting project to come out of the anniversary was the re-instatement of the village maypole. Bream's maypole once stood in the middle of the main road but was removed in 1925 by the county council as it was said to pose a danger to motor traffic. In partnership with local resident Bill Parker, who offered a corner spot near the original site for the pole to be installed, the group started work to identify a tree.

Programme Secretary Di Standing, who helped to strip the tree ready for painting said, “Maypoles were once a common sight in English villages and were the centre of May Day festivities. It would be very special if, after it's in place, local children could dance around it again.” With Bill's approval the group also planted a new native hedge around the corner plot where the maypole will go. “We look forward to this providing an attractive entrance into Bream,” said Di.

Other anniversary activities included the creation of a celebratory quilt for the society's craft displays, a barn dance and formal dinner and group visits to local gardens. To mark the landmark year, Bream author and historian, Ian Hendy, wrote a history of the society. The book revealed that in 1926, mine closures saw the cancellation of the annual show, with local miners unable to exhibit produce as they needed it to feed their families. Also recorded were tales of carnivals and extraordinary events, such as horseback musical chairs!



Clockwise: The Bream Dibbers prepare to dance; a new hedge is planted around the maypole plot; the local history guide produced for the anniversary; Di Standing selects the tree which will be used to make the maypole.

In August, Bream was featured in BBC Radio Gloucestershire's 'Village of the Week' programme, with committee members interviewed about the history of the group and the year's celebrations.

All of this history was celebrated with an exhibition at the Dean Heritage Centre, with displays including pictures of carnival queens and princesses (many of whom still live in Bream), prizes, cups and rosettes from the past to the present and the handmade quilt made to commemorate the anniversary. In addition, several committee members marked the occasion by assembling a Morris dancing team called 'The Bream Dibbers' to learn and perform their own dance at the Bream Community Centre.

What will the 151st year bring? “At this point we don't know, but Bream Gardening Society soldiers on happily with an increasing membership,” said Jennifer. “2015 was definitely a memorable year, not soon forgotten.”

breamgardeners.net

Special offers for groups

Community groups can access great rates to visit RHS Shows and Gardens in 2016. Book your ticket today and enjoy a fantastic day out.



Be inspired by captivating displays and discover stunning show gardens

Group rates for RHS Shows

We have fantastic rates for groups, simply call our groups booking line on **0800 358 0058** (opening times Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm) and quote **COMM**.

Find out information at rhs.org.uk/shows

RHS Flower Show Cardiff, 15 - 17 Apr

Bute Park, Cardiff Castle

Join us in spring for a flower show extravaganza, filled with spectacular floral displays, talks from celebs and more. *Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £8.50pp; Individual £9pp.*

RHS Chelsea Flower Show, 24 - 28 May

Royal Hospital, Chelsea
Marvel at innovative Show Gardens and lose yourself in the Great Pavilion, or seek inspiration from the wonderful Artisan Retreats. *Advance full day prices: No group rates available; Individual £61pp.*

RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, 5 - 10 Jul

East Molesey, Surrey
Enjoy a dazzling summer celebration, packed with new features such as City Gardens and favourites like the Floral and Rose Marquee to inspire you. *Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £26.50pp; 40+ £22.50pp;*

Individual £31.50pp.

RHS Flower Show Tatton Park, 20 - 24 Jul

Knutsford, Cheshire

Join us at the height of summer for stunning Show Gardens and our new Evolution themed gardens and beautiful Art in the Garden sculptural displays.

Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £22.50pp; 40+ £19pp; Individual £26pp.

Group rates for RHS Gardens

Here is just a selection of the many events taking place at each of the four RHS Gardens. To book your next group visit to an RHS garden call **0207 821 3170***.

For information please visit rhs.org.uk/gardens

*Affiliated societies should quote their affiliation number to claim their one free annual garden visit for up to 55 members. RHS members plus one accompanying family guest go free to the gardens.

RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Yorkshire

- Spring Plant Festival, 30 Apr - 1 May
- Harlow Carr Flower Show, 10-12 Jun
- Sweet Pea Show, 9-10 Jul
- The Orchid Show, 6-7 Aug
- Autumn Plant Festival, 3-4 Sept
- Real Ale & Cider Festival, 10-11 Sept
- Autumn Food & Woodfest, 1-2 Oct

Minimum group size 10 adults. Groups of 10+ £9pp.

RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Essex

- Essex Plant Heritage Spring Fair, 16-17 Apr
 - Essex Craft & Design Show, 29 Apr-2 May
 - Roses and Posies, 11-12 June
 - Hyde Hall Flower Show, 4-7 Aug
 - Essex Plant Heritage Autumn Fair, 17-18 Sept
 - Food Festival, 7-9 Oct
 - Christmas Sparkle Gift Fair, 3-4 Dec
- Minimum group size 10 adults. Group of 10+ £9pp.*

RHS Garden Rosemoor, Devon

- Spring Flower Show, 12-13 Mar
 - RHS National Rhododendron Show, 23-24 Apr
 - Spring Craft & Design Fair, 30 Apr-2 May
 - Devon Chilli Fiesta, 7-8 May
 - Rose Weekend, 18-19 Jun
 - Vintage Weekend, 23-24 Jul
- Minimum group size 10 adults. Groups of 10+ £9pp.*

RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey

- Butterflies in the Glasshouse, 16 Jan-6 Mar
 - Spring Plant Fair, 18-20 Mar
 - Contemporary Craft & Design Fair, 28 Apr-2 May
 - Surrey Sculpture Society Trail, 20 Aug-25 Sept
 - Wisley Flower Show, 6-11 Sept
 - Autumn Woodfest, 8-9 Oct
- Minimum group size 10 adults. Groups of 10+ £11.70pp.*

All dates correct at time of print.

