

Pulling in the pollinators

Groups get grey spots buzzing



Talking herbs
with Jekka McVicar

Bee Creative with
Wild About Gardens

Watery homes for
wildlife – top tips

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 @RHSBloom
 rhscommunitygardening

Cover image: Perfect for Pollinators Pot Competition at RHS Chatsworth Flower Show (RHS / Georgi Mabee)

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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



Welcome...

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

If your patch is anything like mine, it will have burst into life with the heady mix of sunshine and water that visited most of us earlier this summer. But unlike my plot, many of your gardens will soon be under the keen eye of our Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood judges, as all your hard work is put to the test!

Whether or not you come away from the season with a host of top prizes, it's more than clear that your efforts reach far beyond the garden gate. We've loved seeing and hearing about your wonderful efforts to invite wildlife into your gardens, and to support new and seasoned gardeners to take part. There's not space

in these limited pages to include mention of all of your great stories, but we do read every contribution, share them on social media where possible and squirrel them away for future use.

We've also loved getting your feedback on **Grass Roots**. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey, we are considering all of your thoughts and we will be announcing the winner of the prize draw in the next e-news.



Best wishes and happy gardening,

Emily

Emily Braham

Your views – Dear green place

Over the past two years, the gardens at Turning Point Scotland, a service for homeless people, have gradually been transformed from a bland and tired space into an oasis in the heart of the city, thanks to the hard work of our 'handyman' Dennis Curran and our service users.

The service users have landscaped, planted bulbs, made timber planters from old office furniture, created wildlife and vegetable gardens and planted a vast array of flowers for every season. They have taken enormous pride in raising seedlings in their rooms, which have gone on to become delicious-tasting strawberries, onions, potatoes, garlic, Brussels sprouts, carrots, herbs and leeks. The gardeners love seeing their produce – they even compost their own food waste to help generate the next crop!



Turning Point's resident gardeners Anthony, Annemarie and James

Having such a beautiful garden is important to our service users (above) and to staff, providing a tranquil, therapeutic space for respite. We also receive many emails and telephone calls from strangers to say how the garden cheers them up on their way to work as they glimpse the green from Glasgow Central train station.

Glasgow translates as 'dear green place', and here at the service, it couldn't feel more apt.

Claire Gallagher, Turning Point Scotland

Please send your letters and your community garden stories to communities@rhs.org.uk or to **Grass Roots**, RHS Community Horticulture, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE. Letters may be edited for publication.

News



Streets in London and Manchester could get a bit leafier with new funding from TD Green Streets

RHS / JULIAN WEIGALL

City greening grants up for grabs

Two of the UK's major cities are set to get a bit leafier thanks to new tree-planting grants totalling £20,000.

The TD Green Streets programme, being delivered by Trees for Cities in London and City of Trees in Manchester, is seeking innovative urban forestry project ideas, such as for rain gardens, community orchards and new woodlands.

Tree planting projects that provide training opportunities, take place in deprived areas and/or where few trees have previously been

planted, as well as those which have secured match funding will be favoured. The winning projects will be selected in September and must be delivered between October 2017 and March 2018.

For more information and to apply in Manchester, contact kevin@cityoftrees.org.uk, and in London katehtreesforcities.org.uk, before the 31 August 2017.



RHS / JASON INGRAM

Future proofing gardening

Scientists say our gardens are going to need to work harder to withstand climate change and associated extreme weather events, but they may also be able help alleviate some of the pressures. The RHS *Gardening in a Changing Climate* report, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Sheffield and University of Reading, was released at the end of April. It recommends climate-change-resilient planting choices and garden design. The report also outlines ways in which gardeners can help enhance carbon uptake and flood alleviation.

To read the full report, visit rhs.org.uk/climate-change



PAUL DEBOIS

Growing up at Hampton Court Flower Show

A green-fingered group of East End school students who designed 'pocket sky gardens' for people living in high-rise flats will have its creation unveiled at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show (4–9 July).

The innovative balcony gardens were designed by six pupils from Swanlea School, Whitechapel for a nearby tower block as part of last year's RHS Green Plan It Challenge.

The prototype garden includes plants such as marigolds, poppies and hollyhocks to reflect many of the residents' Bengali heritage, along with herbs and vegetables used in Bengali cooking.

The RHS is currently recruiting for mentors for the 2017 challenge. For more information, visit schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/greenplanit.

Planting for spring pollinators

There's still time to order your discount crocus bulbs as part of the RHS partnership with Rotary International.

The partnership is part of Rotary's Purple 4 Polio mission to eradicate polio around the world and the RHS campaign, Greening Grey Britain for Wildlife.

Planting crocus bulbs in the autumn provides a useful source of pollen in the early stages of spring for emerging bees and other pollinators.

Get your group's orders in before 31 July, at the special price of £95 per 5,000 corms.

Download the form online rotarygbi.org/what-we-do/purple4polio/.



RHS / NEIL HEWORTH



RHS / PAUL DEBOIS

Partnerships sprout green shoots

Bloom groups and young people are banding together to transform grey corners across the UK, but it's not just the wildlife that's benefiting, as Emily Braham finds out

In rural mid-Wales, children are learning about the mysterious waggle dance of the honeybee; in Yorkshire they are making use of old army boots as portable planters, while in West Suffolk, young catering students are learning the ethos of paddock to plate in their kitchen garden.

These are just some of the many (46 to be exact) creative ways that RHS gardening groups and young people around the country are transforming public spaces this summer as part of Greening Grey Britain.

"We really wanted to build lasting partnerships across generations and encourage skill sharing," explained Head of Outreach Development at the RHS, Andrea Van-Sittart. "But it was also about connecting with educational programmes such as the John Muir Award and current OPAL citizen science surveys to ensure real-world relevance.

"The other aim was to make places more wildlife friendly through specific planting choices. We know that over half of animal and plant species in the UK are in decline,

and gardens are one of the easiest ways to make a difference, while benefiting ourselves and the places we live at the same time."

All abuzz in Wales

In Llanidloes, a small town in rural mid-Wales, performance artists Kirsty McIver and Hazel Maddocks who are both parents of children at Ysgol Gynradd Llanidloes, have been donning bee and flower costumes to give performances to school groups on pollination. They realised it was working when, in week two, a student presented a picture of a bee, a heart and a flower: "Bees love flowers," she explained to Hazel.

"It's about putting it into context, because we've actually found that a lot of people are scared of bees and try to kill them, so we're looking at the children's relationship to nature," says Hazel. Llanidloes is also one of Wales' 'Bee Friendly towns', part of the country's Action Plan for Pollinators.

In London, at Hammersmith Academy, secondary school students are working to create a sensory garden at the



ABOVE & LEFT: Hammersmith Academy students work with service users at Elgin Resource Centre to plant edibles and scented herbs in wheelchair-accessible beds

RHS / PAUL DEBOIS



LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL



RHS / SIRA STUDIO

▲ Moira Primary School and Rowandale Integrated Primary School plant wildflower seeds at Moira Demesne park, Northern Ireland

◀ Planting at Dishforth Airfield, where palettes and old boots were put to use as planters

neighbouring Elgin Resource Centre, for elderly people and others at risk of isolation through disability, supported by RHS South East Outreach Advisor, Chris Young and Hammersmith Community Garden Association.

Patrick Kirwan, a science teacher at the academy, says the students first grew plants on the classroom's small balcony, but they quickly outgrew the space. The students now have their own garden on the grounds and have partnered with several nearby public gardens. "They get so much out of it," Patrick says. "A lot of them live in apartments and don't get a chance to engage with nature at all. For me, it's also about mental health – it's just a completely different environment; there's no behaviour management in the garden, they just get on with it and work together, and sometimes you even catch them quizzing each other on chemistry or about growing seedlings!"

Abdur-Rahman Khan, 13, says he was surprised how much he enjoyed the sessions. "I thought it would be muddy and

boring, but it is actually a lot more than that. Everything else is in the classroom, so it's great to be able to work outdoors at your own pace with no pressure. It's also really great to see the plants we planted as seeds actually work."

'A world of difference'

Workers at the resource centre report that access to the outdoor space and working with the students makes the "world of difference". Richard Townley, a day visitor to the centre sat happily among the students when I visited, helping with the planting of herbs and vegetables into the wheelchair-height raised beds. "I never realised how strong mint was, it's amazing," he said, rubbing it between his fingers. "My dad was a gardener, but I've never done it myself. I just really like coming out here. It's like they say – a breath of fresh air, it makes me feel better."

For some of the groups – the opportunity to garden is a more obvious lifeline – with partnerships formed with youth offenders,

young asylum seekers, those that grew up in care homes and young people excluded from education.

At Scotland Outreach Advisor Mairi Coxon's first session with a young person's care home in Falkirk, one of the would-be gardeners was thrilled with the possibility of a new project, boldly stating: "I think this could be just what I need to turn things around." Another agreed, "Yeah, I need something too – I'm bored out my head in here – this could be it!"

See the full list of our Greening Grey Britain projects at rhs.org.uk/communities-ggb

We will be continuing to report on how we are working with young people and groups to Green Grey Britain for Wildlife, in *Grass Roots* and online. We would also love to hear from you – have you transformed a space? Share the before and after on social media with hashtag [#greeninggreybritain](https://twitter.com/greeninggreybritain).

Go wild for bees

'Bee Creative in the Garden' for wild bees with the Wildlife Trusts and the RHS

It will come as no surprise to you that our pollinators are increasingly under threat. You'll know too that this threatens so much more than our bees. Pollinators mean plants can bear fruit and flowers – food for us and other wildlife, but also the source of multiple industries.

The famed honeybee is often what springs to mind when we think of bees, but these busy creatures are already generating quite a buzz. That's why this year's Wild About Gardens campaign is focusing on the equally important wild bees and solitary bumblebees.

Rather than just one or two of these amazing winged insects, there are no less than 24 species of bumblebees and 200 species of solitary bees!

We're calling on groups and individuals to 'Bee Creative in the Garden' and invite the many wonderful and invaluable wild bees into our towns and cities, for the benefit of all wildlife (and people, too).



SNIDZIMH NOT

A match made in heaven

Look for some of these critters seeking out the sweet stuff in your garden

- ✿ Buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) on an *Echinops* (globe thistle), are also drawn to dahlias (single petal forms)



JON HAWKINS

- ✿ Early bumblebees (*Bombus pratorum*) on borage flowers, which also enjoy *Geranium* (hardy geranium, cranesbill)



PENNY FRITH

- ✿ Leafcutter bee (*Megachile*). Look out for the tell-tale holes in the leaves of single-petalled roses



GILLIAN DAY

- ✿ Red-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*) on a lavender plant; they also flock to *Borago officinalis* (borage)



PENNY FRITH

- ✿ Ivy bee (*Colletes hederæ*), a recent addition to the UK, visits late-flowering *Hedera helix* (common ivy) in southern England, Wales and the Channel Islands



RICHARD COMONT

- ✿ Red mason bee (*Osmia rufa*) on borage flowers, also found on *Malus sylvestris* (crab apple) in spring



PENNY FRITH



BRIAN QUINN



BRIAN QUINN

▲ The revived border in its full glory

◀ Volunteers at work on the restoration of the historic herbaceous border, revived with wild bees in mind

A border by any other name...

A hundred-year-old herbaceous border in Southport has been revived as a sweet-smelling haven for bees, as well as a spectacle for visitors, despite its slightly ill-fitting name.

Volunteers have worked hard on the restoration of the Rotten Row borders since 2011, energising it with colour, perfume and interest throughout the year, culminating in the summer for Southport Flower Show.

"As well as 'wowing' the pedestrians and people in cars, we wanted to invite all the insects, birds and other wildlife to build-up an ecologically sound environment," explained Brian Quinn, one of the many volunteers that has kept the borders blooming, along with the support of Sefton Council. "We thought this would allow groups of schoolchildren to investigate life in the border for their science projects."

The restoration project was originally set up by Birkdale Civic Society and Sefton

Council, but following budget cuts, the volunteer-led Friends of Rotten Row was formed, an It's Your Neighbourhood group and the recipient of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

Bird boxes sit among the trees and bug hotels nestled within the half-a-mile long nectar-rich border that lines the road, while a large, handmade bee hotel serves as a sign for the attraction.

The borders are full of insect-attracting flowers, such as nepeta, phlox, single dahlias, single roses, foxgloves, spring bulbs, rudbeckia, with bees flocking to the borders throughout spring, summer and autumn. A designated wild zone, 'the copse' even permits the odd visiting rabbit.

A string of accolades and awards, including from Britain in Bloom, gives Rotten Row cause to claim itself as 'probably the best long border in the UK'. It seems the bees agree.

friendsofrottenrow.com

Where the wild things grow

Thankfully, the hard work of gardeners means some species of bee are doing well. Getting creative in your patch, however big or small, is one of the best things you can do for bees and other wildlife.

Gardens and community green spaces help to reconnect fragmented pollinator habitat, effectively increasing the foraging areas for bees. These patches are part of a huge network for 15 million gardens that criss-cross the UK.

How to get your garden buzzing

- ✿ Make it sweet: plant pollen and nectar-rich flowers (single, not double-petal varieties to make sure the bees can access the goods!)
- ✿ Mix it up: grow short and long grass for variety in habitat
- ✿ Hold fire: avoid treating your pests with chemicals, invite natural predators like beetles in instead!
- ✿ Add water: make sure there's a drink on hand for your thirsty workers.

For more tips, download your free Wild Bee Action Kit online wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk

Spread the word

Once you've 'bee-n creative in the garden' by planting your pollen-rich plants or building a bee hotel, tell us about it and inspire others. You could also win a stack of wildlife gardening prizes!

- ✿ Share your bee-friendly garden images online, on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #wildaboutgardens, indicating whether you're entering as an individual, group or school.
- ✿ Submit sightings to the OPAL citizen science site, Polli:Nation, remembering to select 'Wild About Gardens' when prompted to say how you found about it.

opalexplornature.org/polli-nation

Tell us about your bee-friendly garden! Share with hashtag #wildaboutgardens on social media, or email us at wildaboutgardens@rhs.org.uk

- ✿ Follow us on Facebook/WildAbtGardens
- ✿ Sign up to the Wild About Gardens e-newsletter at wildaboutgardens.org.uk

RHS Advice

Water for wildlife

Water can make a garden: providing coolness in summer, vibrant and varied plant options and a focal point for visitors. But we are also learning that 'blue space' within 'green space' may improve health and wellbeing.

And with many of our natural wetlands disappearing, adding water is one of the best things you can do for wildlife in your garden, offering much needed food and habitat for amphibians, invertebrates and other animals. Your wildlife visitors are also likely to be great natural pest controllers.

Join the campaign to turn grey spaces into beautiful green places for people and wildlife. We will share ideas throughout the year to inspire your group's Greening Grey Britain activities.

WILDLIFE TRUSTS / TOM MARSHALL

Pick of the pond plants to draw in wild visitors

✿ Flowering rush, *Butomus umbellatus* (1), is the perfect damselfly and dragonfly perch with its tall (60–120 cm) stems. It grows in pond-side shallows, and flowers in late summer.



RHS / GRAHAM TITCHMARSH

✿ Rigid hornwort, *Ceratophyllum demersum* (2), is a native oxygenator with delicate leaves that feed ducks, dragonflies, fish fry and tadpoles.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

✿ Bogbean, *Menyanthes trifoliata* (3), has pink summer flowers that are relished by bees, butterflies and moths. It also helps keep water cool and discourages algae.

✿ Dwarf water lily, *Nymphoides peltata* (4), grows in shallow water and has bright green rounded leaves. Its yellow summer flowers are enjoyed by moths.



RHS / CAROL SHEPPARD

✿ Marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris* (5), is a waterside plant with rich, yellow-spring flowers that provide nectar and pollen, as well as offering cover for frogs and newts.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

✿ Yellow flag, *Iris pseudacorus* (6) should be constrained in a pot, but its sword-like leaves and yellow flowers provide resting spots for dragonflies and damselflies and nourish insects.

✿ Marsh woundwort, *Stachys palustris*, produces pale, late-summer nectar-rich lilac flowers by the water's edge.

✿ Water mint, *Mentha aquatica*, has deliciously scented foliage in wet soil and masses of summer lilac flowers, serving as landing spots for dragonflies and damselflies and food for butterflies. Like marsh woundwort, it is a food plant

Finding the flow

As the *Gardening in a Changing Climate* RHS report highlights, we should expect more frequent heavy downpours that saturate the soil and in the worst cases, cause flooding. As well as being misery for people, flooding leads to pollution as sewers and drains are overwhelmed.

By making sunken areas at low points in the terrain, water can accumulate and seep into the ground, slowing the flow to storm drains and rivers.

These were once quite common in the British landscape: farmers would enhance natural depressions by lining them with clay to store water in periods of drought. Modern land management techniques have done away with many of these, but their restoration is now encouraged, and enlightened landscape architects are making use of them in urban areas, as 'swales'.

At the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in east London, dry swales made a colourful feature within wildflower meadows – so they can also be used to dramatic effect, even without water. Happily, they are easy to create.

Read the full climate change report on the RHS website: rhs.org.uk/science

Making a swale

- ✿ Note where water accumulates after heavy rain, this is your opportunity.
- ✿ Dig out an unlined pond in this spot. If the pond empties too quickly after rain, partially line it, perhaps with local clay.
- ✿ If it overflows, enlarge it, make another and connect to or lead the water away though an unlined ditch with little dams at intervals to slow the flow.
- ✿ For much of the summer swales will dry out. This is not a bad thing and suitable plants will grow under these conditions (see list below), and can be quite a garden feature.



A swale at Queen Caroline Estate in West London, part of Groundwork's LIFE+ climate-proofing project

MEET THE POLLINATORS



RHS / ANDREW HALSTEAD

BEETLES

Any insect that visits flowers can be a pollinator, beetles are no exception. There are thousands of beetle species in the UK, here are a few you might spot:

- ✿ Longhorn beetles (*Cerambycidae*), named for their long antennae, include some of the most spectacular British beetles. Often seen on flowers are the black and yellow longhorn (*Rutpela maculata* – above) and the wasp beetle (*Clytus arietis*). The larvae of a majority of the 60 UK species feed in dead wood.
- ✿ Adult chafers (*Scarabaeidae*) often visit flowers, including one of Britain's most attractive beetles, the 2cm-long, metallic green rose chafer (*Cetonia aurata*). While the larvae of some chafers feed on plant roots and can cause problems in lawns, rose chafer larvae are useful recyclers of rotting organic matter.
- ✿ The thick legged flower beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*) takes its name from the swollen hind legs of the males. This 1cm-long metallic green beetle is found throughout most of southern Britain. It develops as a larvae in dead stems of broom and thistles.
- ✿ Soldier beetles (*Cantharidae*) are common summer visitors to flowers. The reds, blacks, yellows and oranges of their coloration are said to resemble historical military uniforms. As larvae, these beetles are predatory in ground vegetation and soil and there are about 40 species in the UK.
- ✿ How to help: Provide for adults and larvae by growing a wide range of plants. Wood piles and compost will also support a wide range of beetles.

for green tortoise beetle and water ermine and large ranunculus moths. It is also one of the best for sheltering frogs, newts and other water-loving creatures, but will need controlling, as it spreads.

For near water features, consider:

✿ A bat box – bats love to hawk the many insects found over water.

✿ A supply of insects and water will also encourage nesting swallows and house martins in eaves.



5
RHS / JASON INGRAM

✿ Log piles – for frogs, toads, newts and insects to seek shelter from the weather and their many foes.

✿ A water butt to catch water from roofs – to top up ponds in dry spells.

✿ Long grass, ideally leaving an area uncut for variation in height for different creatures to shelter.



6
RHS / WILF HALLIDAY

✿ Plant a tree or shrub nearby – these act as roosting places for insects, including damselflies and for dragonflies devouring their prey.



How to...

Create a wildlife pond

The UK has lost 50 percent of its ponds in the 20th century and more than 80 percent of those remaining are thought to be in poor health. Creating a wildlife pond in your garden or a public space is one of the best ways support our vulnerable freshwater species.

In general, larger is better, and ponds with a surface area of more than 2sq metres is ideal. Having said that, smaller ponds have considerable value, and even sinking an old washing-up basin or bath is a good option where space is limited.

If free of algae or leaves, ponds need little serious maintenance, only needing

a clearing out every few years. Periodic thinning of plants and topping up water in dry spells may be necessary.

Of course, you will also need to get the permission of the landowner (if appropriate) before you create your pond.

And finally, all but the shallowest water is potentially harmful to children and they should be supervised near any pond.

For more information see wildaboutgardens.org.uk or freshwaterhabitats.co.uk also has a useful online guide.



1 Mark out the area for your pond, using canes or a hose. A pond is best placed in the sun for at least half the day, and avoid siting it directly under a tree, where leaves may clog the water and reduce oxygen levels. Start digging (but not too deep)! A wildlife pond should have a variety of depth and shapes; less than 30cm in height in any one place should suit most flora and fauna. If all very shallow though, the water could warm easily and be prone to thick algae that inhibits certain wildlife.

Your questions answered

Many schools and groups get in touch to ask how they might control slugs without using chemicals or pellets.

RHS Entomologist Hayley Jones responds:

There are lots of ways to help prevent your plants getting eaten by gastropods (slugs and snails), and they don't all involve mollusc-killing pellets.

A biological control that can be very effective against slugs is a species of nematode (microscopic worm) **(1)** that is watered into the ground and seeks out



the slugs to infect. It won't affect any animals other than molluscs, but is less likely to control snails (which spend most of their time above ground).

Cultural control methods are those that try to prevent damage before it has happened. It's a good idea



2 Add a liner. While butyl rubber liners are the most durable lining they can be costly; plastic liners are a cheaper alternative. Protect the liner from punctures with a thick layer of sand or a special 'geotextile' of impenetrable fabric. Clay, whether local and severely mashed-up (puddled) or the clay mineral bentonite can also be a good choice as a liner.

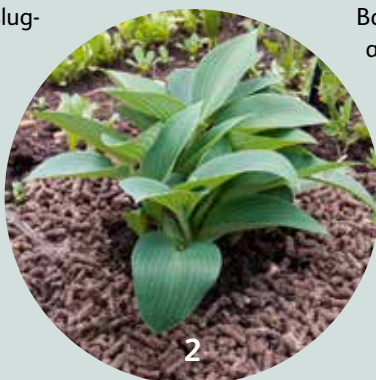


3 Add a long shallow slope to one side or staged edges to allow wildlife to access the water and to escape. For containers, a rough plank, some broken paving slabs or bricks provides this. A dead branch or two can enrich the environment for wildlife and also makes a good ramp. Mud at the edges can be used by birds for nest-building, while pebbles can provide a dry foothold for insects.



4 Fill your pond, ideally with rainwater, as tap water is often too nutrient-rich. You will find that pond life arrives almost instantly. However, adding pond plants is generally worthwhile at some stage and floating ones are crucial: aim for 65–75 percent surface coverage. To attract and support wildlife, ornamental fish should be avoided, as these stir up mud and devour frogs and other invertebrates.

to make your garden less slug-friendly by encouraging birds, frogs, moles, hedgehogs, slowworms and ground beetles which are predators of slugs and snails. Also turning the soil regularly can expose the slugs and their eggs to predators.



Barriers can be put up to attempt to prevent the slugs and snails accessing plants. These include eggshells, sharp grit, copper, mulch and wool (2) that are supposed to feel very unpleasant to the slimy foot of a slug and thus discourage them from crossing.

However most of these cultural control methods, while quite widely used, haven't had much scientific work to confirm their usefulness. That is why the RHS has launched research into gastropod control, to see if we can improve the advice we give to home gardeners and help them in the battle against the slug!

Visit the School Gardening website and search Slug It to get involved:
schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/sluginit



HMP WYMOTT

Blooming behind bars

A gardener at HMP Wymott in Lancashire, 2016 winner of the Wyndlesham Trophy, shares his Bloom story

When I first came to Wymott, I was allocated to the gardens compound. I had no experience of gardening and, to be honest, the prospect of working outside in the midst of a Lancashire winter did not fill me with joy. I couldn't have been more wrong.

I began with seeds in the potting shed and I soon graduated outside, learning as I went. One of the pleasures was discovering just how much knowledge some of my fellow workers had and how generous they were in passing it on. As a 57-year-old city boy, I was in a new world and I loved every minute of it. Each day was an adventure.

One of the by-products of working in the gardens is the chance to get close to nature. Among many other plants, trees and bushes, we are blessed with an abundance of buddleia, and for a short period during the summer these are invaded by swarms of butterflies. I became fascinated by these beautiful creatures and went to the library to find a book about them. I can now identify more than a dozen different species.

As the year progressed, I watched the garden display take shape. Working as part of a team gave me a real sense of camaraderie. At times I forgot I was in prison. I also realised just how much the gardens raised the morale of all who live and work in Wymott. When we won the Windlesham Trophy, judged by the RHS, I felt genuinely proud. The presentation day was fantastic. We had the great privilege of escorting visitors around the grounds. Their feedback confirmed what we already knew... Our gardens were bloomin' brilliant!

HMP Wymott won the RHS Windlesham Trophy in 2016 for the second time, eight years after first taking the prize. The awards were set up in 1983 to help develop prisoners' sense of worth and to encourage garden excellence, with gardeners able to work towards RHS qualifications at the same time. RHS judges will be touring participating prisons this summer ahead of the trophy – a redundant 'Green Goddess' fire engine bell – being presented in September.

Summertime in the playground

Sharon McMaster, RHS Campaign for School Gardening Champion of the Year 2016, gives us the view from the playground at Ballcarrickmaddy Primary School, Northern Ireland this summer.

Summer in the school garden can be tricky, especially in Northern Ireland where pupils are off for two months, right over summer harvest time. The risk of ripening produce falling to the ground with no-one there to harvest them is, for some, reason enough to not get started.

This is one of the reasons we (Kindergardencooks) started running summer programmes around Lisburn – to allow ongoing plant care, while opening up school gardens to more people. Some school-age children might not have gardens at home or school, so they really benefit from the first-hand experience. They love to pick the peas and beans, pinch cherry tomatoes, dig up early potatoes and smell the herbs. We cook with the produce from the garden, create birdfeeders from recycled materials and go on bug hunts.

The children love cooking and doing it outdoors is even more exciting. Making herb butter to spread on hot-off-the-griddle flat breads is a real pleasure and eating them together outdoors in our handmade huts or lying on the grass is what summer is all about.

At Ballcarrickmaddy, the hum of bees is in the air, tempted by the children's large wildflower area close to the polytunnel and raised beds. Their bee- and butterfly-attracting flowers they planted in March from seed have bloomed and are simply beautiful; so different to the organised bedding plants in a neat front garden. Like the children, these flowers are a little wild, yet each one unique, and all around them is the buzz of miniature life.



EMER DAVIDSON



EMER DAVIDSON

▲ Bug-hunting at Ballcarrickmaddy Primary School, connecting children with nature, gardens and food

◀ Preparing lunch with fresh ingredients from the garden



Stafford Manor High School: RHS School Gardening Team of the Year 2016

RHS / MARTIN PAGE

This year's top school gardeners

The 2017 RHS School Gardeners of the Year, supported by Gabriel Ash, have been unveiled.

More than 300 entries were whittled down to just 24 finalists across the three categories: Young School Gardener of the Year, School Gardening Team of the Year and School Gardening Champion of the Year. A judging panel made up of horticulturists, journalists and the Campaign for School Gardening team watched the short videos created by the finalists, all hoping to convince the panel they should be crowned the winner. Prizes include a Gabriel Ash greenhouse worth over £3,400, Gabriel Ash cold frames worth over £900, seeds, tools and unique opportunities to work with RHS and television gardeners.

In 2014, George Hassall (below) was crowned RHS Young School Gardener of the Year at just eight years-old, wowing the judges with his infectious enthusiasm, knowledge of gardening and love of wildlife. Since winning, George has gone on to become the first ever RHS Young Ambassador, made several appearances in the *Blue Peter* garden, and presented a bouquet to Her Majesty The Queen at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

See this year's School Gardeners of the Year results at schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/SGOTY2017.



RHS



RHS / TIM SANDALL

The spice of life

RHS Vice President and Ambassador, Jekka McVicar, began growing herbs 30 years ago at her Bristol terrace out of necessity. Now a renowned herb expert and teacher, her herbetum in South Gloucestershire has the largest collection of culinary herbs in the UK.

How did you fall in love with herbs?

My mother had a herb garden, so I could tell apple mint from spearmint before I started school. Then it was about food. Thirty years ago you couldn't find fresh herbs anywhere. I had a young family and I didn't want to use chemicals, so it was a practicality of life. Quite soon I started supplying to shops and garden centres and within three months I was supplying Fortnum & Mason.

Are we beginning to recognise the value of herbs now?

It's changed beyond recognition. Delia Smith on the TV revolutionised things and then there was the package holiday boom in the 60s and 70s – people started going to Italy and Greece and having fresh basil, oregano and thyme which they'd never had back home. Now of course you can buy herbs in any supermarket.

But there's still quite a way to go. Herbs look good, they smell good and they do you good, and they transform a meal into a feast. They can also be grown in small gardens or pots.

How adventurous should we be with herbs?

You don't have to limit yourself to peppermint; spearmint and ginger mint, for example, are great in the kitchen, and French tarragon is wonderful with chicken and fish. If you live in a town, you can grow more tender plants like lemon verbena and lemon balm (*Aloysia citrodora*), which makes a lovely tea, and there are endless cultivars of rosemary, which all taste quite different.

If you prune herbs at the right time, especially the *Lamiaceae* family (thyme, rosemary and oregano) after flowering, all of them will produce new growth throughout the winter. You can even dig up some mint root in early autumn and grow it in a cold frame or on the kitchen windowsill during winter for fresh mint at Christmas.

What does gardening mean to you?

We have to think about gardens holistically, not just as plants. Pollination is so important; we need to make sure we have diversity in our gardens for bees and other wildlife. We are part of a chain – if you

kill the lacewing, you then also remove a predator of the whitefly. If you kill green fly, as many people do, you are removing a natural source of food for blue tits when they are nesting.

For me it's also about being in the space in the moment. When you are watching that butterfly you are right there. We spend so much of our time in an unreal world and the garden is a very real place.

You're obviously much busier now than when you started out. How much time do you get in the garden?

I'll be home by 1pm today and in the garden by 1.15. I make the time. It's really important to get those quiet times in the garden especially after a week at RHS Flower Show Chelsea!

Jekka offers groups of up to 25 personalised tours of her garden with afternoon tea for £15 a head.

Jekkasherbfarm.com



DAVID MOORHOUSE

Digging in

Turning the tide on a failing gardening club

Retired teacher Barbara Stackwood shares how she helped bring Bacton on Sea Gardening Club in Norfolk back from the brink

After working in schools for over 30 years it was wonderful to join the local gardening club when I retired; I was part of a group, with no official responsibility. But this all changed last January when the two ladies that had managed the club for several years resigned. As there was no committee, the survival of the club was in jeopardy.

Partly to fill the silence, but also because I think you lose the heart of a community when you lose its groups, I found myself offering to pick up the reins. Thankfully, someone else offered to help me, and several others promised their support. Still, it was sink or swim – where to start?

Amazingly, a month later, we had the support of existing members and had managed to persuade some former members to return. We elected a

chairperson, secretary, treasurer and a committee.

We found that encouraging greater involvement from members and valuing their input helped people to develop a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the club. More people now contribute to meetings and the decision-making process. We vary the focus of the meetings based on members' suggestions; sometimes inviting speakers, or holding informal workshops. We also visit each other's gardens and those of local gardeners.

We created a Facebook page and email addresses to help us reach more people. Ahead of the Open Garden Day, we promoted the event locally as much as we could, and advertised it on the national open gardens website. This paid off: more residents opened their gardens and we tripled the number of visitors and the amount of money raised.

We are now working on building relationships in the community – we've made links with the school, the parish council, local garden centres and another garden club.

One year on, I can now step away from my role to give more time to my family and my own slightly neglected garden, knowing I achieved my aim. I enjoyed it too – it was one of those unexpected things that makes life more exciting.

It has taken a lot of dedication from many people but, we are now reaping the rewards. I would step in again if I had to, but I don't think I will need to as there is a dedicated team moving things forward.

Share your affiliated gardening story: affiliated@rhs.org.uk

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