

Growing well

Health and wellbeing special



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 @RHSBloom
 rhscommunitygardening

Cover image: Volunteers at Daubuz Moor, Truro in Bloom, Champion of Champions in the RHS Britain in Bloom 2018 UK Finals.
(RHS/Jim Wileman)

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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/get-involved



RHS / ADAM DUCKWORTH

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

As we enjoy the last of the autumn harvests and the nights continue to draw in, it's the perfect opportunity to take stock and consider the year that's been. For the 76 RHS Britain in Bloom 2018 UK Finalists, it's a time of celebration, with each group rewarded for their outstanding efforts with a Gold, Silver Gilt, Silver or Bronze award at a ceremony in Belfast on 19 October. The Regional and National Bloom competitions are also holding their end of year celebrations across the UK, recognising the thousands of volunteers who give up their time year-round to make the places we

live better for people and the environment. It's been a particularly challenging year for gardeners in the joint-warmest summer on record, with groups struggling to keep their thirsty plants thriving. The RHS is partnering with Cranfield University to recruit and train the UK's first garden water scientist, which will help us offer the latest expert advice on coping with similarly difficult conditions. Best wishes and happy gardening,



Emily
Emily Braham, Editor

Your news – restoring sand dunes in Angus, Scotland

Work to remove invasive species from the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in East Haven began in May, following two years of research and planning. During our community bioblitz in 2016 it was identified that certain non-native species, such as snowberry, were at risk of damaging the fragile ecosystem of the dunes. Such species also threaten *Rhinanthus angustifolius* (greater yellow rattle), which is found in the SSSI – the only place in Scotland where it grows naturally. Residents worked in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage to explore options for removing and restoring the fragile dune system. This included the possibility of latex binders, but the use of native grasses such as lyme, marram and



Festuca to bind the dunes was favoured, allowing wildflowers and other native plants to thrive. Volunteers grew hundreds of grasses, which we are now planting out. It's a shining example of how good horticultural practice can extend beyond bedding plants to land management and biodiversity.

Wendy Murray, East Haven Together, Bloom 2018 UK Finalist

Share your news with us on Twitter @RHSBloom, email your letters to communities@rhs.org.uk, or send by post to RHS Community Horticulture, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE. Letters may be edited for publication.

News



HMP HULL

Hull wins Windlesham

HMP Hull has been named best UK prison garden 2018, winning the coveted RHS Windlesham Trophy for the first time.

Fresh produce is harvested for the prison kitchen, with surplus donated to a food bank. Bird boxes made by prisoners have also been gifted to nearby schools.

Dave Wilson, Horticulture Instructor at the prison, said it was the culmination of

several years' hard work. 'The way the prisoners have got involved, while working towards their NVQs in Practical Horticulture Skills, has been an absolute joy to see. Knowing people are using horticulture to turn their lives around is what the competition is all about, and it makes getting up for work a real pleasure, for both myself and my colleague Steve Whitehead.'



RHS / PAUL DEBOIS

Celebrating allotments

At the tail end of a hot summer, RHS Affiliated Societies across the UK flung their gates open to celebrate community food growing for National Allotments Week.

Southlands Road Allotment and Garden Association in Bromley, South London, tied in its annual show with the week. Group secretary, Sandra Eder said the day inspired many visitors to ask how they might get involved. 'At the end we auctioned off all the produce and the food miles were less than one!'

Chris Moncrieff, RHS Head of Horticultural Relations, welcomed the allotments' moment in the spotlight. 'The continuing resurgence of allotments with their sense of community spirit is fantastic to see.'

A fitting legacy

Buckinghamshire mental health gardening charity, Lindengate, used its annual garden party to celebrate their new raised beds – the result of the Elspeth Thompson Bursary. The bursary is offered by the RHS and the National Garden Scheme to support community gardening projects. Grants for 2019 are open for applications until 31 December. www.rhs.org.uk/bursaries

Go on show in 2019

RHS Flower Show Cardiff 2019 is inviting community groups, clubs and societies to have a display in 'Discover and Grow'. Exhibits should encourage people to get involved, find fresh inspiration, learn a skill or visit somewhere new. For more information, contact: annaskibniewskiball@rhs.org.uk. To get involved in other RHS shows, contact: exhibitorapplications@rhs.org.uk

BBC blooms again

The BBC's successful *Britain in Bloom* series, which showcased the UK's favourite community gardening competition in April, will return for a second series in 2019. The spotlight will be on 15 groups, providing a snapshot of the amazing range of volunteer-led efforts that take place year-round.

Soup sharing en masse

Schools and groups around the UK enjoyed the fruits of their labour with celebratory meals this month in the Big Soup Share. The competition was launched last year to celebrate 10 years of the RHS Campaign for School Gardening. We'd love to hear how you joined in, so send us an email at communities@rhs.org.uk or tell us your stories on social media.



RHS / LUKE MACGREGOR

The blooming best of 2018

Since the first signs of spring, Bloom volunteers have been hard at work to bring our towns, villages and cities to life with plants. Their fabulous efforts have been engaging communities and improving local environments all around the UK. This year 76 community groups put their best gardening clogs forward in the UK Finals. On 19 October we celebrated their achievements at a ceremony in Belfast. The finalists for each category are listed to the right, with category winners marked ‘CW’.



VILLAGE

Bothel	Cumbria	Silver Gilt
Castlecaulfield	Ulster	Gold + CW
Chipping	North West	Silver Gilt
Clovelly	South West	Gold
Elmton	East Midlands	Silver Gilt
Gorey	Natural Jersey	Silver Gilt
Spofforth	Yorkshire	Gold
Tanfield	Northumbria	Silver Gilt
Woburn	Anglia	Silver
Wolfscastle	Wales	Gold

LARGE VILLAGE

Dalston	Cumbria	Gold
Draycott	East Midlands	Gold
Forest Parish	Floral Guernsey	Gold
Hillsborough	Ulster	Gold + CW
Scholes	Yorkshire	Silver Gilt
Upton	Heart of England	Gold

COASTAL UNDER 12K

East Haven	Keep Scotland Beautiful	Gold + CW
Filey	Yorkshire	Gold
Fishguard & Goodwick	Wales	Silver Gilt
Hunstanton	Anglia	Gold
Lytham	North West	Gold
St Clement	Natural Jersey	Silver Gilt

COASTAL OVER 12K

Bournemouth	South	Gold
Deal	South East	Silver Gilt
Falmouth	South West	Gold
St Helier	Natural Jersey	Gold + CW

URBAN COMMUNITY

Bankside	London	Silver
Evington	East Midlands	Silver
Halesowen	Heart of England	Silver Gilt + CW
Stanwix	Cumbria	Silver Gilt
Wolverton & Greenleys	Thames & Chilterns	Silver Gilt

Top left
A schools' Zero Waste display at Perth Leisure Pool, Scotland.

Left
Castlecaulfield's floral tribute to Emmeline Pankhurst and women's right to vote, Ulster.

SMALL TOWN

Cranbrook	South East	Silver Gilt
Ham & Petersham	London	Silver Gilt
Kingsbridge	South West	Gold + CW
Ponteland	Northumbria	Gold
Rhuddlan	Wales	Gold
Wareham	South	Silver Gilt
Whalley	North West	Gold

TOWN

Amersham	Thames & Chilterns	Gold
City of London	London	Gold
Immingham	East Midlands	Gold
Linlithgow	Keep Scotland Beautiful	Gold + CW
Morpeth	Northumbria	Gold
Tewkesbury	Heart of England	Silver Gilt
Thornbury	South West	Gold
Ulverston	Cumbria	Silver
Wimborne	South	Silver Gilt

LARGE TOWN

Ballymena	Ulster	Gold
Beverley	Yorkshire	Silver Gilt
Bury St Edmunds	Anglia	Gold
Colwyn Bay	Wales	Gold
Congleton	North West	Gold
Oswestry	Heart of England	Silver Gilt
Penrith	Cumbria	Silver Gilt
Perth	Keep Scotland Beautiful	Gold + CW
Royal Tunbridge Wells	South East	Silver Gilt

SMALL CITY

Derry	Ulster	Gold
Durham	Northumbria	Gold + CW
Rochdale	North West	Gold
Shrewsbury	Heart of England	Gold

CITY

Aberdeen	Keep Scotland Beautiful	Gold + CW
Belfast	Ulster	Gold
Northampton	East Midlands	Silver Gilt
Norwich	Anglia	Silver Gilt
Reading	Thames & Chilterns	Silver Gilt

BIDS* TOWNS & CITY CENTRES

Falkirk	Keep Scotland Beautiful	Gold
Leeds	Yorkshire	Silver Gilt
Paddington	London	Silver Gilt
St Austell	South West	Silver Gilt
Wisbech	Anglia	Gold + CW

**Business Improvement District*

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS

Didsbury	North West	Gold
Market Bosworth	East Midlands	Gold
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Heart of England	Gold
Sidmouth	South West	Gold
Truro	South West	Gold + CW
Usk	Wales	Gold



Left
Beavers get stuck in for Amersham in Bloom, Thames & Chilterns.

RHS Britain in Bloom Discretionary Awards 2018

These awards are presented to finalists who demonstrated genuine excellence in a particular area of judging.

RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM DISCRETIONARY AWARD WINNERS

Britain in Bloom with the RHS Involving Children and Young People Award	Amersham, Thames & Chilterns
Britain in Bloom with the RHS Growing Communities Award	Aberdeen, Keep Scotland Beautiful
Britain in Bloom with the RHS Gardening in a Changing Climate Award	Sidmouth, South West
Britain in Bloom with the RHS Wild About Gardens Award	Joint winners: Newcastle-under-Lyme, Heart of England and Ballymena, Ulster
Britain in Bloom with the RHS Parks and Green Spaces Award	Riverside Park, Perth, Keep Scotland Beautiful

Britain in Bloom with the RHS Community Champion Winners

Steve Catanach, Amersham	Julia Moffett, Fishguard & Goodwick
Kay Laverty, Gorey	Wendy Murray, East Haven
Tom Lowdon, Perth	Joyce Shaw, Beverley
Bob McClure, Castlecaulfield	Ron Smith, Linlithgow
Brian Massingham, Wisbech	



RHS / CHRIS BULL

It's Your Neighbourhood National Certificates of Distinction

Each year, a selection of the very best RHS It's Your Neighbourhood and Parks projects are recognised for their achievements, following excellence in their regional competition and nomination by the coordinators.

Friends of Parsonage Gardens in Didsbury, Greater Manchester (pictured above), is part of the area's Champion of Champion's entry and was also honoured with a National Certificate of Distinction. For full Bloom results, visit rhs.org.uk/bloomawards2018

Truro triumphs

The Cornish cathedral city of Truro has been crowned RHS Britain in Bloom 2018 Champion of Champions. The group has been taking part in Bloom since 1974, and this summer decorated its streets with more than 1,200 colourful hanging baskets, planters and tubs, aided by a productive partnership with Truro City Council's parks department. Some of its more formal beds have been replaced by wild areas and sustainable plantings, while the team works alongside conservation organisations including Cornwall Wildlife Trust. The judges praised the group's creative use of partnerships, which has helped it engage people from all walks of life.

Truro's exceptional efforts earned the group a Gold award, giving the South West a total haul of six – the highest of any competing region. It was a tight race for Champion of Champions, with fellow contenders Didsbury, Market Bosworth, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Sidmouth and Usk all also awarded Gold.



RHS/JIM WILKMAN



RHS / MARK WAUGH

Left David Chatton Barker leads a flower pressing class for local residents at the Petrus Community Allotment and Garden in Rochdale. Why not consider running classes to broaden your membership?

Seeding ideas for modern horticultural groups

When RHS Affiliated Societies came together to exchange ideas earlier this year, they found they had many challenges in common, and hopefully some of the same solutions.

In April, RHS Garden Wisley Surrey hosted the first forum for RHS Affiliated Society members, where groups from the South East shared top tips for overcoming some of the main obstacles they faced. Familiar themes included involving the next generation and educating the local community. Some of the most useful advice is listed below.

Teach

Hold classes for people of all ages, or just for children. Seed sowing, wildlife drawing or flower pressing are all good options.

Small plots

Offer school groups their own mini plots in allotments, which can be celebrated and given awards at the end of the season.

Get out

Hold days out to attract members, but ask that they register by a specific date to ensure there is enough interest to make the trip viable. Hunt for minibus deals and contact RHS Partner Gardens to ask about their group rates. This could also be a chance to meet speakers for future talks.

Reduce rules

People can be put off by strict criteria. Consider 'friendlier' categories for shows, such as wonky veg, or reduce the number of items required to enter.

Invite questions

Consider running open advice sessions; one group runs a successful 'Gardeners' Question Time' at their meetings.

Fundraise

Sell any excess produce and plants to raise funds. This is also a fantastic way to meet people and attract new members.

Maintain affordable fees

Keep membership fees low, if possible, but consider charging extra for events with a speaker. Review prices annually to keep accounts in the black.

Set challenges

Encourage the community to grow with a target incentive, such as the longest carrot, heaviest potato or tallest sunflower. Award prizes at an event such as a picnic.

Legal checks

Consider getting at least two people per club DBS-checked (formerly CRB) to allow working with children and vulnerable adults.

Partnerships

Join up with active community groups such as Girl Guides, schools or Men's Sheds.

Be welcoming

Start members off with a small welcome pack, including some 'how-to' guides and a calendar of events.

Name change

Consider changing the group's name from 'society' to 'gardening club' – some have found this has led to new members.

Another forum is planned for next year in a different, more central location. If you have more ideas that could be shared with community groups, or there is a particular 'how to' guide or resource you would like to see on the RHS website, please let us know by contacting communities@rhs.org.uk, with the subject line: resource request.



RHS / NEIL HEPMORTH

Sensory gardens

RHS Chief Horticulturist Guy Barter celebrates growing to delight the senses, with top tips for your group's own sensory garden.

It might seem odd limiting a plant palette to those with sensory properties, but when gardens aim to educate, heal and rehabilitate, a sensory approach can be wonderfully rewarding. So-called sensory gardens – those with mindful planting combinations, such as tactile foliage, stems that rustle in a breeze, aromatic blooms, edible produce and considered colour palettes – can offer a real refuge to visitors. At the same time, they may help educate people about plants and provide diverting experiences for people with varying degrees of distress or illness.

We've all felt the benefit of spending time in a beautiful garden, whether it's one containing myriad tones of green, a multitude of colours and scents, or a minimalist-style seating area with a water feature. Whether or not we can pinpoint all the elements in a garden that combine to such a pleasing effect, plants and gardens can truly appeal to all five

senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Usually plants offer sensory stimulation in at least two areas – colour and scent are often found together, for example, and the stimulation of more than one sense is said to be especially therapeutic.

There is a risk that a multitude of sensory aspects can lead to 'less', with overloaded senses, so most gardens wisely use sensory plants with a light touch. Happily, there is a broad range of plants to choose from, so it is possible to create a visual show-piece, while delighting the senses.

Some of these plants are often best appreciated at close quarters, so guiding paths and, for smaller plants, raised beds or pots can be useful. Alongside the plants, the hard landscape itself can also provide sensory stimulation. The sound of crunching gravel underfoot may help those with limited vision navigate garden paths, while also providing variance in sound. Similarly, boundary fencing and walls do not need

to be utilitarian – they could make use of tactile patterns, while building edges may offer a shady place to sit in peace, or to bask in sunshine. Running water could provide a calming backdrop, serve to help orientate people with limited vision and perhaps even offer a place for visitors to dip their toes.

Sensory science

The scented substances in the leaves of plants such as lavender and geraniums are part of their evolutionary survival strategy, serving as natural insecticides, or aiding cooling through evaporation. Mint offers scented (and tactile) leaves that, unusually, thrive in shade. Other sensory properties strengthen plants – lignin in grass stalks and leaves or silica in bamboo foliage – making foliage hard and sharp and letting them rustle attractively in the breeze. Sensory gardens also tend to be inhospitable to pests and diseases, a definite bonus.

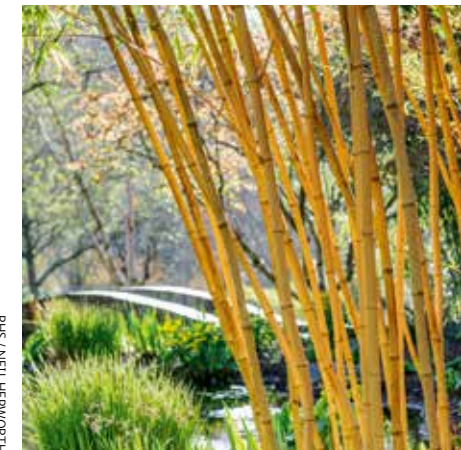
Tips on choosing sensory plants for your own garden



RHS / NEIL HEPMORTH

Colour

Colour can, of course, be found in all your favourite flowers, but could also be sought in less expected plants. The coloured leaves and stems of chard and beetroot* look pretty in the off-season; heucheras, a low-growing groundcover perennial with charming, crinkled heart-like leaves, is available in yellow to deep purple (*Heuchera* 'Pauline' is pictured above).



RHS / JASON INGRAM

Sound

Love-in-a-mist*, (*Nigella damascena*) seedheads follow blue flowers; grasses (*Miscanthus* and *Briza* in particular) are good for sunny, dry spots; bamboos are less dry-tolerant and can run, though *Phyllostachys* (*Phyllostachys bambusoides* 'Holo-chrysa' above at RHS Garden Rosemoor) is usually well-behaved. Annual grasses such as millets plus sweetcorn can suit smaller gardens.



DORLING KINDERSLEY

Patterns

Cyclamen have curiously patterned silvery-green leaves, particularly *Cyclamen hederifolium*, the ivy-leaved cyclamen. Ivy itself is also an option, as is the shrub *Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Variegatus', with holly-like leaves but less prickly. Garden centres are full of variegated shrub options, while snakebark maples (*Acer*) provide winter patterns.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

Scent

Houttuynia cordata 'Chameleon' with lemon-scented foliage; mints** – there are a surprising range of mints, useful for light shade. Both *Houttuynia* and mints spread rapidly, which can be welcome in a sensory garden, as repeated touching could curb their vigour. Chives, with their pretty pink to purple flowers also tolerate shade and have a mild onion scent and taste. Plants that give their best scents on warm days include curry plant (*Helichrysum italicum***), lavender**, oregano*, rosemary**, sage**, thyme** and many geraniums, such as *Pelargonium***. Winter-flowering honeysuckle produces scented flowers in midwinter, but needs a sunny spot and shelter from winds to be appreciated.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

Touch

Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantine*), rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria*) and *Salvia argentea* offer felt-like grey leaves. Rabbit tail-like seedheads of grasses, such as *Pennisetum* are rewarding; *Cistus*** and petunias** are curiously sticky, in contrast with leathery-leaved hostas and sedums. Mexican orange blossom (*Choisya ternata***) has scented leaves and flowers, plus tactile, finger-like foliage; castor oil plant (*Fatsia japonica***) has hand-like leathery foliage. Avoid yucca and other heavily armed plants, but sempervivums** and other robust succulents are pleasantly tipped and robust enough to take some gentle patting. Consider ornamental sedges such as *Carex* and heathers.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

Taste

Chard* and beetroot leaves* for an earthy flavour; nasturtiums* provide caper-like edible fruits and vivid warm-coloured edible flowers, atop charming rounded foliage, but are frost sensitive. Alpine strawberries* are easy to grow, relish shade, make good ground cover and have small, highly flavoured fruits all summer. Grapes have curiously jointed stems and big soft leaves, with fruits that are sharp and unattractive to birds, but tingle the human tongue in late summer. Herbs, basil*, coriander*, dill*, fennel*, parsley* and sage* all make fine tasty summer plants for sun.

*Usually raised from seed

**Good for pots and troughs



Left
A Thrive volunteer and trainer at work in the charity's garden

Below
Ben Brace leads a discussion on the forthcoming Wellbeing Garden for RHS Garden Bridgewater.



Gardens for all

RHS Horticultural Projects Manager, Ben Brace, has been hard at work designing the Wellbeing Garden for RHS Garden Bridgewater, which opens in 2020. He shares what he has learned.

Designing a garden for anyone can be a challenge, but designing a garden for everyone is a daunting prospect. The Wellbeing Garden I conceived for RHS Garden Bridgewater in Salford is set to become the centre of a new therapeutic horticultural programme for the local community, benefiting people of all needs and abilities.

This type of project was a first for me, as well as for the RHS. We knew that we couldn't find all the design answers ourselves, so our first step was to invite people in to share their ideas. These early workshops, led by Bridgewater Programme Director Anna da Silva and her team, included in-depth discussions with a range of health and social care organisations to explore the specific needs of the community. The sessions gave us a great starting point – a design brief direct from the communities that would be using this garden.

When the initial design had been better developed, we invited the same group back

to hear whether we'd got it right. We asked if we had met their practical and aesthetic needs, and discussed a potential programme of events for the space, including typical gardening activities such as seed-sowing, as well as things like yoga and tai chi. It was an open and frank forum, with everyone keen to input, which is exactly what we needed.

One of the main comments was that people felt the growing space was too small. They also questioned whether positioning the private, reflective spaces just off a main path would provide the desired sense of seclusion. We took these thoughts on board and altered the design accordingly.

One group of people with a range of complex needs and disabilities, supported by local charity Aspire, told us through their group leader how pleased they were to contribute. 'It's a really exciting opportunity because people don't always consult with the local community,' they

said. 'We want our voices to be heard and to help make a change for the better.'

We also sought advice from Thrive, the national therapeutic horticulture charity. We visited its head office and therapy centre just outside Reading, and heard how the staff manage its programmes, helping us understand how we could respond to specific user needs.

For me, the most interesting thing about this whole process was the number of common threads that emerged, such as suggestions to build in choices of activity for visitors. By including everything from spaces for quiet reflection to group activities, it allows for a sense of progression through the garden. This very different range of user needs was reassuring and helpful, as it allowed for lots of flexibility in the design.

See pp8–9 for more on creating sensory gardens and p14 for welcoming volunteers.



Learning from the visitor

The consultations were invaluable in informing the design and ensuring the garden meets the needs of visitors. Here are some of the key learnings I took away from the process, which could be useful for others looking to design an inclusive garden:

- ✿ Always consult with your community before embarking on a new garden design. This is key to its success and will undoubtedly reveal a number of unknowns.
- ✿ Even if your user groups are very distinct, there may well be consistent needs across your audiences. Try to tease these out during your consultations, with the aim of making the space welcoming to as many people as possible.
- ✿ Personal ownership of the space is important, as it helps foster a feeling of progression and control. Traditionally this comes in the form of dedicated growing spaces, but it could also be specific jobs for individuals, such as tidying a shed or organising seed packets.
- ✿ If your garden has an area for growing or social interaction, think about also providing secluded spaces where people can spend time alone.
- ✿ Ensure that the space is as secure as is required for your most vulnerable visitors, but aim to keep it open to the general public and passers-by if you can. It should be a space where everyone is welcome, as this can help break down preconceptions and barriers between groups.
- ✿ Think about those with limited movement or who are restricted to a wheelchair. If possible build in spaces where they can get a different view of the garden – these could include raised areas to lie down and skygaze, accessible trampolines, or perhaps just places to experience rain drops on heads.
- ✿ Provide a variety of textures and interesting forms within your planting to encourage 'soft fascination', where visitors are able to experience something intently without undue stress or tension – think sunflower seed heads or angelica shoots, for example.
- ✿ Consider where or what could be the next step for your user group when or if they 'outgrow' your space. At RHS Garden Bridgewater, we see the Wellbeing Garden as a gateway into the wider garden, and users will be encouraged to take up a plot in the community growing spaces.

Growing well

Emily Braham finds out more about the potential of community gardening as a remedy for better health and wellbeing, and hears from just some of the groups applying it to great effect.

Most of us can testify to the restorative powers of time spent outdoors, but there is growing evidence that gardening, particularly in a social setting can be a powerful antidote to a wide range of health issues. An overwhelming number of surveyed schools participating in the RHS Campaign for School gardening (95 per cent) report being motivated by a perceived benefit to student's health and wellbeing. At the same time, 66 per cent of surveyed participants in Britain in Bloom list improved mental wellbeing as a key benefit to taking part.

Senior Lecturer in Nursing at Salford University, Dr Michelle Howarth, a keen gardener and former nurse, is a key advocate for the use of gardening as a tool to help address issues from social isolation to chronic illness. 'We found in our research that gardening can benefit all populations – a person could be elderly and recently widowed, or they may have a mental illness – there's no one group that's suited to horticulture therapy,' Michelle says. She also cites research by Dr William Bird, founder of the successful Green Gym initiative at TCV, who found outdoor exercise can calm the body as well as the mind, reducing inflammation and improving cardiovascular health. Green Gym Managing Director, Craig Lister describes the charity's work as physical activity with a purpose. 'Participants

benefit from physical activity, but more importantly, social interaction and the knowledge that they've helped their community,' he says.

Supporting vulnerable people

Petrus, a homeless charity in Rochdale, north of Manchester, uses community gardening to support people at risk of social isolation. This year the charity partnered with Kashmir Youth Project to create a 'green corridor' between its allotment and a nearby medical centre, as part of the RHS Greening Grey Britain campaign. Project Lead at the charity, Rachael Bennion describes the difference such projects make: 'Increased confidence is one of the first things that you notice,' she says. 'And confidence reduces anxiety. For a lot of people we work with, having pride in what they have done gives a huge boost to their mental health, it provides a sense of purpose and a role in the community.'

Rachael also says the project's use of mixed groups, with people with a range of different needs and motivations can foster a sense of equality. Long-running horticulture therapy charity and It's Your Neighbourhood group, St Mary's Secret Garden, in Hackney, London, takes a similar approach: 'We generally work with people with long-term health

RHS / MARK WAUGH



Left
Rachael Bennion, Project Lead at homeless charity Petrus, in the group's community allotment.

issues and learning disabilities or other disabilities, because the health inequalities they experience tend to be much greater than for others,' explains Director Paula Yassine. 'We've found though over the years, that mixed groups work better, it allows peers support and development. Like gardens, we are all individuals, but on the whole, coming together to work on a shared goal helps people feel connected to each other.'

The garden runs a 'Talking Shed' project, in partnership with Tavistock Portman NHS Foundation, combining talking therapy with gardening, or in this case, insulating a shed. 'We had someone who had suffered a breakdown, someone with HIV and a neurocognitive disorder, others with a range of other issues and they all come together to try to solve a problem,' Paula explains. 'They see it as work and they forget about their other issues, or forget they are in chronic pain for a little bit.'

Paula describes how activities can also be tailored to suit people with different needs, such as people requiring physical rehabilitation: 'Sowing seeds helps with dexterity, filling up the bird feeder helps with hand-eye-coordination. If there is someone that has left-hand-side neglect, for example, an activity could be set up where they have to scan to the left or use their weaker hand to loosen pots.'

Bringing people together

In Dunbar, east of Edinburgh, Scotland, another Greening Grey Britain project has seen a new garden created for people with dementia and their carers, with help from pupils from Dunbar Grammar School. The garden sits between houses and the town's main street, serving as a place for resting and meeting



LORNA BUNNEY

Centre

Dunbar Grammar School pupils and volunteers add the finishing touches to the new sensory garden.

Left

Members of Dunbar Dementia Carers Support Group with bath bombs made by the pupils.

others, as well as remembering those they have lost. Plants were chosen specifically in tribute to members that have passed away this year, while one gardener wanted to plant forget-me-knots, which he'd always associated with his parent's former garden. Dunbar Dementia Carers Support Group leader Lorna Bunney says the real benefit of the project has been about encouraging and allowing connection. 'Many of the people in the group are couples and it is something that they can do together,' she says. 'Lots of people when they get the diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's think that it means the end of their life as a couple, but it's not that. I think it's also about having space, having the opportunity to be outside and to be able to wander around, whether that is putting in plants, going home with some lettuce, or just watching something grow and change.'

While not all community gardening projects focus specifically on improving health and wellbeing, Dr Michelle Howarth points out that people taking part will benefit, regardless. 'Bringing people together and encouraging the sharing of skills, knowledge, connection to nature and to each other is in itself therapeutic,' she says. 'It taps into those broad areas of National Economic Foundation's Five Ways to Wellbeing – connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give.'

See RHS website for more on Five Ways to Wellbeing: rhs.org.uk/communitywellbeinggarden
Thrive provides training in the use of gardening for health, for individuals and groups: thrive.org.uk

Welcoming volunteers

The team creating the RHS's newest garden is working to include volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds. Communications and People Coordinator, Kimo Morrison, and Volunteer Coordinator Lissa Davenport, share some tips on opening your garden gate a little wider.

RHS Garden Bridgewater is still two years away from being open to the public, but we want the local community to feel invested in the project from the outset. We want them to feel that it will be their garden – a place for everyone to come to learn, contribute or simply enjoy.

Unlike the other RHS gardens, Bridgewater is in a large urban area, where access to green space is limited. We've been running a number of programmes that invite people who don't have their own green space, or who wouldn't generally consider themselves gardeners, including a 12-week programme for young care leavers with complex needs. Some of the young volunteers are using their experience to contribute to their Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Cutting and burning rhododendron has been a particular favourite, as has helping us paint and renovate the old Scout Hut, which will be used to welcome future volunteers. Young people have shared their ideas for future areas in the garden too, such as zip wires and chill-out zones.

One of the first young people that came to spend regular time volunteering with us was 17-year-old Molly Pendleton. 'My mum heard about Bridgewater and said "Molly, you'll love this!" My best friend died very suddenly and that's part of why I'm here. I've been coming every week since. I've

done lots of clearing and a bit of planting, and I've found that being outside in nature really helps me.'

In opening up the garden to people from a wide range of backgrounds, including those that may have faced challenges or setbacks, we found the following principles to be useful:

Be welcoming

It may sound obvious, but a welcoming and enabling environment is key, particularly if you are trying to reach people who may not have had positive experiences in the past with adults or authority figures, or who may not have felt valued. A positive tone from the outset will help people feel safe and welcome.

Be flexible

Try to be adaptable to people with different behaviours and cultures, including to those using a different language. Consider the boundaries you are willing to set and try to accommodate variations where you can.

Time

It takes time to build relationships and trust, especially with people who haven't experienced much of this in the past. Build time into your programmes or interactions to get to know individuals, offering consistency in attention.



Above
Molly Pendleton, one of
the first volunteers
at RHS Garden
Bridgewater.

Vulnerable people and safeguarding

As trust builds with your volunteers, they may disclose sensitive or personal information. Have a policy for safeguarding and DBS checks where appropriate.

Responsibility

There are tremendous health and wellbeing benefits in allowing individuals ownership of a project or task, because it creates a sense of worth. This is particularly true of young people who haven't been allowed a voice, or who may have experienced adults not listening to them or valuing them.

Cultivating passion

Engage people by finding something they really care about. One of the care leavers we've worked with is a talented artist, so we have invited her to paint a mural. She recently told us, 'I love coming here; I always feel so peaceful'.

Finding calm in the school garden

Last year's RHS Young School Gardener of the Year, Fraser White, from Dairsie Primary School in Fife, Scotland, shares how gardening has helped him deal with his anger issues and find new confidence.

A few years ago I didn't enjoy school at all. I got cross quite often and I didn't like to ask for help. I suppose back then I didn't really know how to ask! My family and the school had some chats with the folk at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and together they slowly helped me get back on track.

Around that time, my teacher was starting a school and community garden and I decided to assist her with this – I found it really helped me clear my head. We were given a small plot of land near our school and set about raising funds. The project was well supported and we soon had raised beds and plans for a polytunnel.

Our school garden grew and I was able to have a role in planning the space and helping to organise the other gardening club pupils. Looking back, I can see that this helped to build my self esteem, and just made me feel great! Helping with planning is fun, but it also taught me new skills like researching plants and keeping records for crop rotation. When things were tough in the classroom and I didn't feel like I was getting anywhere, I could go out into the garden and just get on with sorting things out; I would instantly feel calmer and more in control.

I've found that another great benefit of working outdoors is having things to look forward to throughout the year. I love checking on strawberries ripening in the summer sunshine and waiting for the right moment for potatoes to be dug up and enjoyed in autumn.

My family has always been interested in gardening, so I had already done a bit of seed-sowing and planting things out in my own garden. This helped me to take a leading role in the school garden project, but anyone can sow seeds. That's one of the things about gardening – it's easy to start small, and then there's always more to learn!

The RHS invited me to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2018. I was amazed they could make the gardens look so good in so little time! I was struck by how many exhibits featured foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*). As I have a couple of foxgloves growing wild at the bottom of the garden, I decided to find out how to grow more. I discovered that once the flowers have gone brown you can cut the withered heads off and shake them into a big paper bag. If you pick out the insects and leave the tiny seeds to dry indoors, you can sow them in late summer.

This autumn, I'm starting secondary school. A few years ago I would have struggled with the change, but thanks to the confidence I've gained out in the garden, I'm actually looking forward to it. My new school doesn't have a garden (yet!) so I'll be visiting my old school as much as I can to check on the plants, help the children look after them, and just enjoy being in nature!

RHS / JULIE HOWDEN



Above
Fraser White, RHS
Young School Gardener
of the Year 2017.

Grow more and better together

Do you want advice on starting a gardening project, raising funds or getting the word out? Or maybe you want to encourage others to branch out with a new group, or even set one up yourself.

Head over to our online community gardening toolkit and get some top tips!

If there is guidance you would love to see that you think is missing, or if you have your own bright ideas we could share, get in touch at communities@rhs.org.uk

rhs.org.uk/communitygardening/resources

