

# Greening Grey Britain!

*Transforming a  
Bristol street*

**Wild About Gardens Week**  
*- Get involved and  
help the 'hog!*

Rocket Science

Advice: Giving a talk



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Giving a successful talk

Cover image: Community Gardener Grenville Johnson in Kensington Road, Bristol.  
Credit: Guy Harrop.

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Our community campaigns support thousands of groups in creating greener and more interconnected communities. For more information, please visit: [rhs.org.uk/communities](http://rhs.org.uk/communities)



# Welcome

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

We're continuing to green grey Britain with the new three-year RHS campaign.

This month a special Hampton Court Show garden will help a Bristol community to green their street (see pages 4-5).

Groups across the UK are getting involved, transforming grey grot spots into green spaces for people and wildlife. We hope as many groups as possible will join in and if you do, please add your greening pledge to the website at [rhs.org.uk/ggb](http://rhs.org.uk/ggb)

There's a bit of a wildlife focus in this issue, with the humble 'hog taking centre stage for October's Wild About Gardens Week (pages 6 - 7). Hedgehog numbers have fallen 30 percent in just over 10 years, with fewer than one million thought

to be left in the UK. So as part of Wild About Gardens Week we are encouraging communities to take small steps together that will make a difference. Visit the website for more information about how you can get involved: [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)

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

Best wishes and happy greening!

Sophie Dawson, Editor

## Your Letters Greening Grey Britain

*Our school recently joined the RHS Campaign for School Gardening, but apart from two very small areas, our grounds are mainly tarmacked and paved which makes gardening with our pupils a bit of a challenge! We thought we'd pledge to the "Greening Grey Britain" campaign as it is such a good idea to brighten up communities with plants!*

*We have invested in 10 raised beds and three large window boxes and have*



*placed them anywhere that needs brightening up. Some of the raised beds will be used to grow vegetables and fruit so that our children can learn about growing healthy food.*

*Pupils are growing young plants in class to plant outside later in the year. We often get comments from visitors about how the flowers brighten up their day!*

*Gill Higham  
Keighley St. Andrew's CE Primary School*



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

## Let's get Greening Grey Britain

The new three-year RHS campaign\* continues apace, with Greening Grey Britain gardens at the major RHS Flower Shows and lots of stories in the media.

Over 500,000 nasturtium seeds were distributed to community groups involved in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood in April, to help fill grey corners with colour this summer. And hundreds of groups have now added their pledges to the RHS website to turn a grey space green. We hope as many groups as possible will get involved. We're aiming to change 6,000 grey spaces into thriving, living green spaces by 2017. Help us – and pledge your support at [rhs.org.uk/ggb](http://rhs.org.uk/ggb)

If you planted nasturtiums this year,



The first of the 6,000: London's Cody Dock was transformed with support from the RHS and garden designers Adam Frost, Chris Beardshaw and Nick Knowles

please also share your photos with us on Facebook or Twitter [#GreeningGreyBritain](https://www.facebook.com/rhshome) [facebook.com/rhshome](https://www.facebook.com/rhshome)

\* Please note the campaign name has changed from Greener Streets: Better Lives to Greening Grey Britain

**New school gardening website:** The RHS Campaign for School Gardening has a new website. To find out how the campaign can support your school, with downloadable teaching resources and gardening ideas, visit [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)

## New travel fellowships

The RHS has partnered with the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to create and fund a series of Travelling Fellowships aimed at supporting the development of the UK horticulture industry. The scheme, which will run until 2017, will see two Fellowships offered each year to horticulturalists and garden designers to discover new perspectives, generate innovative solutions to inform and further the UK's reputation as a global centre of horticultural knowledge and expertise.

Applications for travel in 2016 are now open, and close at 5pm on 22 September 2015. For more information please visit [wcmf.org.uk/apply](http://wcmf.org.uk/apply)

## Chelsea plants donated to community groups

As part of the Greening Grey Britain campaign 2,000 plants from this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show were donated to 11 community groups across London. Groups benefitting from the initiative transported their top-quality perennials, shrubs and trees to sites across the city, where they will be used to enhance existing displays.

## Bloom group inspires film

Residents of London Road, Ipswich set up their Bloom group to help the community come together following the tragic events of 2006 when five prostitutes were murdered in the area. Their story has inspired a play and now a film.

Long-time London Road resident Julie Hyland had the idea to start a Bloom group to make people feel better. "We needed to feel better and proud of where we live, and the Bloom competition really brought people together," she said.

The film and play have raised money for the Icen project, a drugs rehabilitation charity working with local prostitutes. London Road is in cinemas now. For more information visit [londonroadfilm.co.uk](http://londonroadfilm.co.uk)



Bloom celebrations in the London Road film

## Enter the competition!

Enter the Greening Grey Britain photo competition for the chance to win 2016 RHS Chelsea Flower Show tickets! Add your before and after photos of the space you've transformed by 18 October 2015. Enter on Facebook by clicking the 'More' tab at [facebook.com/rhshome](https://www.facebook.com/rhshome)



The Yorkist procession

## A Royal welcome

In March 2015, the remains of Richard III passed through Market Bosworth on the way to his re-interment in Leicester Cathedral. Over 8,000 visitors came to witness the cortege passing through, along with local, national and international media. For this special occasion, the village's Bloom group re-dressed existing floral displays to reflect the presence of a Yorkist king with the emphasis on Richard's colours of mulberry and blue as well as the Yorkist white rose. A spectacle fit for a king!

# Greening Grey Britain at Hampton Court

RHS Flower Show champions the critical importance of gardens and green spaces in towns and cities.

The central feature at this year's RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show makes the case for keeping our gardens and community spaces green. Community Street examines some of the impacts of covering gardens with paving instead of plants (see below).

Garden designer Nigel Dunnett, Professor of Planting Design and Vegetation Technology at the University of Sheffield, says, "Now, more than ever, it is essential that we champion

the role of horticulture, gardens and plants as being in the vanguard of how we address the multiple challenges of climate change in our built environments. We need to fill our cities with plants, and to be radical and innovative in how we do it. We need to start a revolution!"

After the show, elements of the garden will be relocated to the St Mungo's Broadway hostel in Kensington Road, Bristol, where the local Bloom group is already encouraging greening.



The Community Street garden at Hampton Court illustrates the many benefits that plants provide

The garden illustrates some of the scientifically-proven benefits that plants and gardens bring to the places we live:

## 1. 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 environment around them. This cooling effect is localised, so can help reduce summer heat waves by 2-4°C in your street.

**What can I do in my garden?** Plant a tree to provide shade, or try a climber against a wall or fence to provide cooling.

## 2. 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; otherwise, clip your plants to create dense structures that act as a filter.

**What can I do in my garden?** Plant a hedge, particularly along the street or in a front garden. Use evergreens such as yew, western red cedar (Thuja) and privet.

## 3. Flooding

Unlike hard surfaces such as driveways and paths, the soil in beds, borders and lawns can soak up rain water. This helps prevent localised flooding. These garden features are a vital part of your home's flood defences – particularly during flash flooding after summer storms.

**What can I do in my green space?** Keep

your front lawn and borders, rather than paving them over. If you need to park your car – consider parking strips and plant up corners and edges wherever possible.

For more information about how gardens and green spaces benefit us, visit: [rhs.org.uk/ggb](https://rhs.org.uk/ggb)

## Greening Grey Britain: The facts

Gardens (with plants) help to:

- Reduce flooding and air pollution
- Prevent our towns and cities getting too hot
- Improve mental and physical health
- Support biodiversity

Britain's homeowners are paving over their front gardens and reducing plant cover: today **one in four** front gardens are completely paved and nearly one in three has no plants.

We need **10 percent more planting** to help combat predicted rises in temperature due to climate change.

## Get involved!

The RHS is calling on everyone to make a stand against concrete sprawl and turn unloved and unspectacular parts of your neighbourhood into something beautiful for the benefit of the whole community. Help us – and pledge your support at [rhs.org.uk/ggb](https://rhs.org.uk/ggb)



## Bloomers greening Bristol Street

Residents in Kensington Road, St George, have been transforming the grey spaces in their neighbourhood for over a decade and today they coordinate a highly successful Bloom group.

In 2004, local resident Grenville Johnson led a campaign to re-instate the street's trees and this success led on to other projects. The local 'grot spot' was reclaimed and planted up with shrubs, vegetables and flowers. Next someone proposed joining the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) community gardening scheme. "We were so proud of the new community garden we entered it and the first year we got 'Outstanding!'" says Grenville.

IYN helped the group to engage more and more people along the street in greening the fronts of their houses. Containers and window boxes were

acquired and street-tree pits filled with flowers. In 2013, they were awarded the Gordon Ford trophy from South West in Bloom for their efforts to green the neighbourhood and in 2014 they received the RHS IYN National Certificate of Distinction. This year, they're focusing on planting for pollinators as part of Bristol University's Urban Pollinators Project. "It's now become a bit of a tourist hotspot!" says Grenville with a chuckle.

Today, several other local streets and community groups have joined in and together they form St George in Bloom, participating in the 'Urban Community' category of South West in Bloom. In 2014, they achieved a Gold Pennant in their first year in the campaign.

The planting has helped to tackle problems such as fly-tipping and the police say crime in St George is down. Local PC Matt Clement believes the improvement in the neighbourhood's appearance and growing sense of community has



Volunteers transform a local 'grot spot' into a community garden. Left: Residents lobbied to reinstate street trees and then underplanted these

contributed to this. "It has had a positive effect on reported crime and anti-social behaviour," he says, "these have been in decline in recent years for this neighbourhood, when compared to adjacent areas."

This summer, Bloomers will install the new garden from Hampton Court around Kensington Road's St Mungo's Broadway hostel. The site offers temporary housing to vulnerable adults and works closely with the Bloom group. Residents at the hostel have helped with communal planting days, which Grenville believes has been good for everyone. "Some have led challenging lives and have become very socially isolated," he says. "This has been one way of bringing them out into the community and encouraging

collaborative working."

Darren, one former resident who became homeless after his relationship broke down says the gardening has inspired him and helped him to recover and move on. "It's made me realise there's more to life than just sitting in my room - I can get out, I can do a bit of gardening and not be bothered by things," he says.

Adam Rees, Regional Director for South and South West England at St Mungo's Broadway, said, "We are delighted that this amazing Hampton Court garden will be a part of the lives of staff and clients at Kensington House for years to come. Gardening and other meaningful activities play an important part in people's recovery, helping to improve mental health and wellbeing. This exciting project is testament to the work we are doing to build community relations and help support our own clients to be active citizens in St George."

[stgeorgeinbloom.org.uk/](https://stgeorgeinbloom.org.uk/)

## Hedgehog festival celebrates town's ancient emblem

The ancient Welsh kingdom of Eryng was named 'land of the hedgehogs' by Anglo-Saxon invaders and today the animal still appears as the emblem of the Welsh borders town of Ross-on-Wye.

Two years ago, local conservationist and eco-therapist Yolande Watson began a hedgehog festival in Ross to raise awareness of this small endangered creature. This year, in addition to Ross's traders having hedgehog-themed window displays, events, art and poetry workshops took place in three of the town's primary schools, with children encouraged to go home and become hedgehog heroes, making holes in their garden fences with their parents.



A new wildlife-friendly school garden

Yolande and some members of the Ross in Bloom team have helped to create wildlife-friendly gardens at the schools and new eco-committees have been established to involve pupils. The hedgehog festival committee has also fundraised to create a new wildlife-friendly garden at the local children's centre, which has established hedgehog habitats and raised awareness of hedgehog ecology amongst the under-fives.



Hedgehog stories for children at the library during the festival



# Go a bit *wild* this autumn

This October's Wild About Gardens Week will celebrate all things wildlife gardening, with a special focus on things that we can do together to help hedgehogs. We hope as many groups as possible will get involved and organise something during the week to support wildlife in your community.

## Here are a few ideas for how you might get involved, and some inspiration from other groups around the UK!

If you run an event and you'd like to attract extra volunteers or visitors, make sure you add it to the Wild About Gardens Week website (for free): [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)



### 'Hedgehog Highway Challenge'

Organise an event in your street to help raise awareness of the need for small gaps between gardens and green spaces to allow hedgehogs to roam for food, mates and shelter. You could give out leaflets, put up posters, bake spiky hedgehog cakes or run a 'Hedgehog highway' photo competition.

### Dig a community pond

If you have a suitable space a pond will provide a valuable resource for local wildlife. Of course any pond's siting will need to be carefully considered to ensure access and safety. For advice about how to create a pond, visit [rhs.org.uk/advice](http://rhs.org.uk/advice)



### Build a bug hotel with a local school

A 'bug hotel' left undisturbed for insects to colonise will attract other wildlife to the site, including feathered friends and mammals such as hedgehogs - and it's great fun to build using recycled materials such as old pallets!



### Organise a community planting day

Do you have a community garden that needs a bit of a revamp? A wide range of planting will help to attract a wide range of wildlife to your green space, so think about trying to provide a selection of plants that flower throughout the year, as well as a mixture of trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs. The RHS Perfect for Pollinators list is a good starting point:

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

## A new mowing regime in Dunnington, Yorkshire

Author: Jim Boam,  
Dunnington in Bloom

The 'In Bloom' team cut the majority of the grass in this large village of 3,000 souls. Following In Bloom advice over the years we have eventually managed to train our grass cutters not to cut back more than a meter from the roadway. This suits everyone with special emphasis on the wildlife, leaving a much greater area for pollinators to work. It looks better too, comments about being 'over manicured' are now very infrequent.

The ecological advantages of limited cutting are accepted by the entire Bloom team - initially the thought was that the judges would think that we were 'unwilling to make a thorough job of it' if we only cut back for a metre - now they understand that more than just village people live here! The new grass cutting regime also saves time and, we estimate, some 12 gallons of fuel across the four mowers in the 7-month cutting season.



No more mowing than necessary in Dunnington

I jointly cut the large new Dunnington cemetery and as a spin off to that, we have been able to reserve a large plot to the north of the graveyard which we intend to leave as a wild meadow. It is ideal for hedgehogs among other wildlife and we have designated a corner, accessible through a passageway in the hawthorn hedge, as a hedgehog reserve. We have heaped up old branches and leaves and left the hedgehogs to develop the site. On two occasions when hedgehogs have been found wandering on the road at night, they have been placed in the safety of the meadow.



## Trackside wildlife

The Hither Green Community Association in South East London - an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group - conserves the varied wildlife habitat along a railway embankment. Author: Anne Parker.

We are a Network Rail licensed community group and we look after two embankments at our local station where we 'conserve' rather than garden; we're encouraging the weeds and wild growth which people often remove from our gardens at home.

There are distinct areas of habitat providing a variety of spaces for local and passing wildlife to colonise and visit - everything is interconnected - more plants, more insects = more birds, more mammals!

We began by removing fly-tipped rubbish and tackling large bramble thickets. Some brambles have been left by design for forage and as nesting sites for ground nesting birds. Every month local residents maintain the space by planting suitable woodland plants and removing commuter litter. We now have hedgehogs living in the embankment.

The Hither Green railway embankment is not public space - while it can be seen from the street, there is no right of public access. I think this is one of the chief reasons we have hedgehogs. Despite commuters rushing to and from the station, and cars whooshing by, the embankment remains quiet and undisturbed.

There are heavily wooded sections, where little light penetrates, and open sections of canopy which encourages grasses and woodland flowering plants like umbellifers. Where we cleared rampant bramble and sycamore seedlings along the fence line on parts of the embankment slope, cow parsley and wild carrot cover much of the site from late April and throughout May.

This is a large space and volunteer time is limited, so over the years we have tackled the area in sections. As we have made our way along the embankment, we have



created piles of sticks, twigs and leaves. When recently we had dead, potentially dangerous and overhanging trees removed and pollarded, the tree surgery team left all resulting lumber on site and over 30 loggeries were created to provide habitats and shelter for local wildlife.

Much of the tree canopy cover is provided by sycamores and we noticed that where tree and shrub cover is more varied, there is more wildlife - so we remove most of the new sycamore saplings. Working with the Woodland Trust, local residents have planted up small copses of attractive, berry and nut forming trees and shrubs - oak, rowan, hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn and crab apple. We are also planting a wildflower meadow with a specially selected 'woodland edge' seed mix.

[ourhithergreen.com/](http://ourhithergreen.com/)

### The group's advice for encouraging hedgehogs:

- As well as the manicured lawns and pristine borders try to have an undisturbed, un-curated 'wild' section.
- Ease up on the clearing up - in your wild section have plenty of leaves and sticks, piles of straw, hay and logs - place it all behind sheds or compost heaps if necessary. It's all material for the creation of nests for birds as well as hedgehogs and to encourage insects like caterpillars and beetles which in turn encourage hedgehogs.
- Have a nut/ berry bearing tree - there is lots of choice with possibilities for small urban gardens too.
- Concern about slugs and snails, yes they will love the piles of leaves, but hedgehogs will Hoover up slugs! No pellets or expensive nematodes necessary.
- Work with your neighbours - a row of gardens would be a nice territory for a hedgehog. Try to leave gaps under fences, and grow mixed, fruiting hedges.
- And if you have a pond - even better!



## Working together

From fly-tipping magnet to wildlife and community hub: the transformation of two forgotten allotment plots in Stony Stratford.

For years, plot holders at Wolverton Road Allotments in Stony Stratford had dumped their waste on the two shady plots full of old fruit trees, finding no other use for the area. But two years ago, gardeners Karen Parker and Sue Bryant decided to make something of this area.

There followed a whirlwind of activity to create a wildlife friendly, community area out of the unprepossessing, neglected corner. In March 2013, the pair put up a sign saying 'No more dumping', and set about using the wood that had been left there to effect a miraculous transformation. Two stumperies were created along with numerous bird and bat boxes and feeders, which were hung in the old fruit trees.

Re-cycling, upcycling and wildlife conservation were their goals - and as much as possible they wanted to acquire for free. A donated plastic pond was dug in; pallets and upended cable reels used to make benches and tables; a dilapidated shed revamped into a tea-shed with a gas burner. They also built a facility for wood

storage - a free for all - the wood being used by plot holders for repairing sheds or making planters.

As new developments in the orchard became apparent more allotmenters were drawn in, and donated items flowed thick and fast. A second shed was converted into a communal tool storage area and an old bedstead planted up with flowers, with a hedgehog shelter created underneath by edging it with recycled fencing.

The allotment is an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood project, supported by the local Stony Stratford in Bloom group. Judy Deveson, Stony Stratford in Bloom Coordinator says, "Karen and Sue have created a magical environment, transforming other people's cast-offs into attractive plant-holders or community amenities - providing a place where birds, bees, bats and hedgehogs love to be."



Images clockwise from top: Signage in the new space; the plots before work began; the recycled pond; welcome area; and communal tool shed.

## RHS Advice

## Gardening for hedgehogs

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

Authors: RHS Principal Horticultural Advisor, Leigh Hunt and RHS Plant Health Scientist Anna Platoni

Nobody knows for sure why hedgehogs in the UK are declining though it is probably due to a combination of factors including hedgerow loss in the countryside, road deaths, pesticide use reducing the insect prey available and smaller, tidier gardens with fences that stop hedgehogs roaming over the large areas they need. As a comparison it is likely that hedgehogs in the UK are declining at around 5 percent per year, the same rate of decline that tigers are experiencing globally.

The good news is that gardeners can help to conserve and help these charming creatures. Gardens (public and private) can represent nearly half of green space in cities and so the potential for gardeners to make a difference is large. A new hedgehog action pack, a collaboration between The RHS, The Wildlife Trusts and Hedgehog Street, is being released to coincide with Wild About Gardens Week this October. See below for some top tips about how you can help hedgehogs in your patch and visit the website to download the pack: [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)



Hedgehogs are usually nocturnal garden visitors, travelling between 1-2km per night looking for food

## Wildlife ponds

During the past 100 years, the UK countryside has lost almost 70 percent of its ponds, so the creation of new ponds in parks and gardens has never been more important. Garden ponds are great news for hedgehogs as they ensure a regular water supply and plenty of insects.

Hedgehogs can swim, but never forget that if your pond has steep sides you should add wooden or chicken wire ramps to help hedgehogs and birds escape. Even frogs can drown if there's no way out.

Wildlife appears to make no distinction between natural and man-made ponds. However, try to incorporate at least one side of the pond with a long, shallow slope. This is referred to as the 'drawdown' zone since it is the difference between the winter and

summer water levels. A large drawdown zone not only allows easy access for wildlife into and out of the pond, but is a damp ground habitat vital for many beetles, bugs and flies. Butyl liners are the easiest way to create a slope. Pre-formed plastic or fibreglass ponds without this feature are best avoided.

A depth of 20-60cm varied across the pond will suit the majority of pond flora



Sloping sides reduce drownings

and fauna. Shade over at least part of the pond as this is beneficial for keeping down algae and is tolerated by many pond plants and animals. Siting a new pond to incorporate shade should therefore be considered.

## Planting types

Marginal plantings provide important areas of cover and plant stems at the water's edge are needed for emerging damselfly and dragonfly nymphs and provide cover for hedgehogs drinking. Aim to achieve 65-75 percent surface coverage with floating aquatics. Some submerged planting (often called 'oxygenators') is equally important.

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

## Long grass lovers

While hedgehogs are regularly seen crossing tightly clipped lawn, they prefer more secret routes through gardens and parks. As well as making their way through hedges and borders, areas of long grass

can provide more covered pathways. In addition, long grass is a safer place for hedgehog families to spend the daytime.

Long grass areas can be created by simply not cutting the grass. Initially the grass will be strong and coarse, so mowing in late August (including taking away the



Leaving areas of long grass will provide habitat for hedgehog prey as well as good cover for the animals

## Control slugs organically

Slugs are so abundant in gardens that some damage has to be tolerated. Evidence suggests that slug pellets rarely directly kill hedgehogs but, as slugs are an important food source, indiscriminately reducing their population in your garden can leave hedgehogs hungry.

If you have problems with slugs in your garden why not try some of the organic control methods listed below to protect your most vulnerable plants:

- Transplant sturdy plantlets grown on in pots, rather than young vulnerable seedlings.
- Microscopic nematodes (eelworms) are available from any large garden centre with a chiller cabinet or via mail order. They can be watered into the soil to attack slugs and snails. This biological control has no adverse effect on other animals.
- Place traps, such as jars part-filled with beer and sunk into the soil near vulnerable plants. Check and empty these regularly, preferably every morning.
- Place barriers, such as copper tapes around pots or stand containers on matting impregnated with copper salts.



A 13cm<sup>2</sup> hole is all the space they need to get through

clippings) is needed to help reduce its strength. If all goes well, you will notice that the grasses become progressively finer with more wildflowers appearing.

More plant diversity attracts more diverse hedgehog prey, so why not supplement the wildflower content by inserting plug plants (available by mail-order; or grow your own from seed) in spring. Paths for people can still be cut through the long grass areas, usually along 'desire lines', to reduce trampling to the surrounding long grass. Do remember, however, to check the grass areas for hedgehogs before mowing and strimming.

Do also bear in mind that solid boundaries prevent hedgehogs roaming to search for food, mate and nest. Aim to leave a 13cm<sup>2</sup> (5in<sup>2</sup>) square hole in the base of fences and walls to help provide access.

## Help hedgehogs hibernate

Hedgehogs hibernate when their prey, e.g. beetles and other invertebrates, become too scarce for them to keep active. In autumn hedgehogs start to construct a home, called a hibernacula, in sheltered spots such as under logs, compost heaps, hedges and leaf piles.

If you don't have any suitable sites in your garden and want to encourage hedgehogs consider buying or making a purpose-built hedgehog house. Leaving your garden a little untidy helps hedgehogs to find enough materials such as grass, leaves, and bracken to make their nests. Be careful of disturbing sites where hedgehogs might be hibernating during the winter. If burning garden waste relocate the pile before setting fire to it to ensure hedgehogs aren't inside.

## A hedgehog's year

**May onwards**  
Breeding

**June onwards**  
Young born in litters of up to five. Babies leave the nest after around four weeks.

**October/ November**  
Depending on the weather and their body condition they enter a state of torpor between October/November to March/April. They prepare a home in places such as hedgerows, compost heaps or old rabbit burrows sometimes as late as December or January.

Wild About Gardens Week  
26 October - 1 November 2015

What will you do for hedgehogs this autumn? Check out our online resources to help you get started and then add your hedgehog events at:

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



# Helping the 'hog

Henry Johnson is Hedgehog Officer at People's Trust for Endangered Species and coordinates the Hedgehog Street campaign with the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. Hedgehog Street is about communities working together across the UK to help wild 'hogs. The campaign is a partner in this October's Wild About Gardens Week and Henry explains what makes green fingers so compatible with brown spines.

## RHS: What's the situation right now for hedgehogs?

Deteriorating rapidly. The hedgehog is still a widespread and common animal in Britain, but current rates of decline are so high (4 or 5 percent per year) that they are becoming rare or absent from large areas. The usual drivers, such as the way we farm, are certainly involved but the picture is complex, since hedgehogs can happily live in a huge range of places. We know what hedgehogs need in our towns and cities, so we can act here right away.

## RHS: How can gardeners help?

There's huge scope for action. Hedgehogs can thrive in gardens and suburbia can have the highest densities of hedgehogs of all habitats. What is key is that gardens are connected (a 13cm<sup>2</sup> hole) as we now know hedgehog populations need access to hundreds of different gardens. Beyond this there are lots of small things gardeners can do to help them, just have a look at [hedgehogstreet.org](http://hedgehogstreet.org).

## RHS: Can you feed hedgehogs? What about rats/cats?

Meaty dog food or cat food is ideal, and water to drink. If you don't want to feed the local moggies, set up a feeding station using a clear plastic storage box with a 13cm<sup>2</sup> hole in it, weighed down with bricks. Cats and hedgehogs can coexist quite happily. Avoid putting out food, particularly grains, if you see rats; focus instead on encouraging insects with flowers and dead wood and these will provide natural food for 'hogs.

## RHS: Why is Hedgehog Street so compatible with gardening?

Our gold medal garden at Hampton Court last year demonstrated that any style of garden can be hedgehog-friendly, and what's good for hedgehogs, is good for everything else. This is empowering as it is very flexible to people's tastes. It's all about encouraging a diverse range of features that are good for insects: untreated wood, standing water, nectar,

pollen and a structural diversity of plants. For too long wildlife gardening has been focused on things that can fly, and there's a whole suite of interesting creatures that are very threatened by impermeable fences and walls.

## RHS: What's it like being a 'Hedgehog Officer'?

Varied and sometimes eccentric! In general people love hedgehogs, so they are a fantastic tool for engaging people with wild nature. They can also handle suburbia, an environment where the world's population increasingly lives, so this is an important interface for sustainability issues.

## Fascinating Hedgehog facts..

- Hedgehogs are excellent swimmers and have been radiotracked crossing fairly major rivers.
- They are omnivorous and often eat other dead animals, and they can catch and eat frogs too.
- The top six favourite food items are worms, beetles, slugs, earwigs, millipedes and caterpillars.
- There is a wild hedgehog population in Regents Park, right in the centre of London.
- The hedgehog has been twice voted as the UK's favourite wild animal.

For ideas and resources to help you take action for hedgehogs in your garden or community green space, visit [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)



Images, clockwise from main: Henry Johnson (right) and Monty Don at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show; Hedgehog houses offer winter shelter; Meaty dog food or cat food is ideal for hedgehogs, with water to drink.

## Rocket Science

### Gardening project takes pupils on a journey to outer space

The RHS Campaign for School Gardening has partnered with the UK Space Agency to embark on an innovative educational project, to give around half a million children the chance to learn how investment in human space exploration contributes to our knowledge of life on Earth.

Rocket Science will involve 2kg of rocket seeds sent to the International Space Station as part of British ESA astronaut Tim Peake's six-month Principia mission. After several months on board, orbiting the planet at 17,000mph, the seeds will be returned to Earth and sent to thousands of UK schools, alongside a batch of seeds of the same cultivar that have stayed on Earth. Over the following months pupils will grow and compare the seeds as they embark on a voyage of discovery to see whether we can sustain human life in space through the production of our own food.

The results of the nationwide citizen science experiment will then be analysed to discover whether space travel has impacted on the growth of the seeds.

British ESA astronaut Tim Peake said, "I hope that Rocket Science will inspire

the next generation to think scientifically, and to consider the fulfilling careers in STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths]."

Minister for Universities and Science Jo Johnson said, "Britain's space industry is going from strength to strength, and for this to continue it's right we inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. 'Rocket Science' is doing just



For the last 50 years humans have experimented with growing plants in space. One of the first plants grown in space was *Arabidopsis thaliana* (thale cress or mouse-ear cress) - pictured here at RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

that by giving thousands of schoolchildren the opportunity to play a part in Tim's mission to the International Space Station, while learning new skills in a fun and unique way."

## Get your school involved

Up to 10,000 schools can take part in this nationwide horticultural 'citizen science' experiment. Schools are able to apply for seeds from September 2015 via the RHS Campaign for School Gardening website.

Along with the seeds, schools and other educational organisations will be able to use a comprehensive suite of Rocket Science teaching and learning resources. Resources for both primary and secondary



schools will be available, and will include suggestions on scientific investigations and experiments inspired by the project and even details on how to design and build a table-top Mars greenhouse.

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

Does your school get involved in community gardening? If so we'd love to hear from you and we may be able to feature your story in *Grass Roots*. Please contact Alana Tapsell, RHS Schools' Communications Officer, with the details: [alanatapsell@rhs.org.uk](mailto:alanatapsell@rhs.org.uk) or call 01483 212 387



Denise (kneeling) with HEFs in Bloom celebrating their year in the UK Finals

**My Bloom:** Denise James, South West in Bloom Coordinator, Judge and RHS It's Your Neighbourhood Assessor

#### Why do you volunteer with Bloom?

I have been involved with Bloom for over ten years now. It all started when I was co-ordinating the Bristol Clean and Green campaign. I worked with Bristol in Bloom and other community groups across the city introducing them to the Bloom initiative.

I volunteer with a whole range of groups, schools, 'Friends of' groups, traders, HEFs in Bloom, St George in Bloom, supporting and giving them advice. I also co-ordinate hanging basket and window box workshops for residents who want to improve how their street looks. I already have four workshops planned for this year. After spending so much time as an officer with community groups, I decided I wanted to give something back to my own community, so I have been Chair of my local Keynsham in Bloom group for two years now.

In Bloom certainly makes a huge difference to enhancing local neighbourhoods, and the best thing is that it's fun and it helps to promote civic pride and community spirit. Two years ago I was fortunate to be selected by South West in Bloom as a judge and an It's Your Neighbourhood assessor. This allowed me to meet lots of groups across our region, also great for networking and sharing best practice.

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

#### What's the best thing that happened in 2014?

Taking voluntary severance from Bristol City Council, after 16 years. Big decision but looking back it was the best one I've made for a very long time. This now enables me to work much closer with groups. HEFs in Bloom (Hillfields, Eastville & Frome Valley) repeated their 2013 Gold win and were selected to represent the South West in the 2015 UK Finals. This was a fantastic all round effort and I am so proud of what their community has achieved.

#### What are you planning for this year's Bloom?

Supporting HEFs in Bloom with their UK entry and I'm looking forward to seeing the RHS Hampton Court Community Garden being brought back to Kensington Road in St George. I'll also be working with the residents of Morgan Street in St Pauls for the fourth year running to help them with their planting. It's now an annual event which all the residents look forward to and one of my favourite workshops. And we have some 'Pollinator Tea Parties' planned for Fishponds residents as part of the Get Bristol Buzzing initiative. And of course, hoping that Keynsham in Bloom achieve a Gold this year!

## Affiliated Society updates

### Affiliated Society membership renewal

The new membership year begins on 1 February 2016 and renewal letters will be sent out to all RHS Affiliated Societies in November 2015.

If your contact details have changed, please contact the Affiliated Societies team at the RHS as soon as possible by emailing [affiliated@rhs.org.uk](mailto:affiliated@rhs.org.uk) (if you do not have an email address please call 020 7821 3069).

### Keep in touch by email

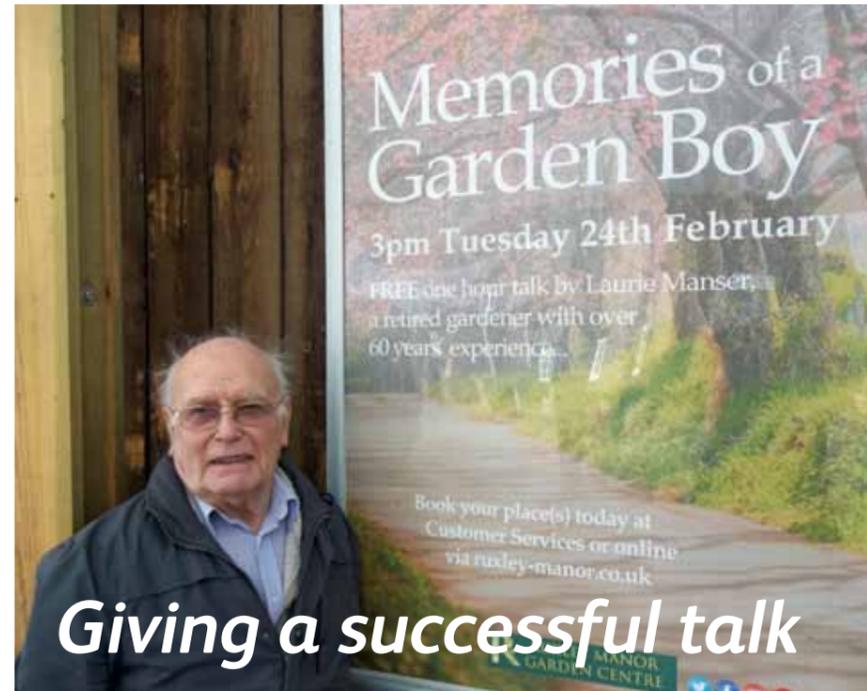
Email helps us keep in touch quickly and affordably and reduces our environmental footprint. The team can quickly contact you with updates about your membership, the renewal process, any medal orders, or offers or events at our Partner Gardens. To keep in touch this way, please add your email address to your membership renewal notice in November.

### Get involved in Wild About Gardens Week

Affiliated Societies are invited to join this October's Wild About Gardens Week campaign and take action to save hedgehogs.

Why not organise a wildlife gardening talk for your members or an event to raise awareness of the actions people can take in their own gardens to make a difference. You might want to reach out to potential new members with a fun 'Hedgehog Gardening Challenge' or cake/ plant sale.

Whatever you decide to do, add your event to the Wild About Gardens Week website and we can promote it more widely as part of the week. You can also download resources and activity ideas from the website: [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)



## Giving a successful talk

Recently retired, 84-year-old Laurie Manser has delivered talks to over 700 gardening groups throughout his career. Here he shares his story and his top tips for giving a good talk.

Author: Laurie Manser

I started as a gardener boy in 1948, aged 17, in a private garden in Tunbridge Wells apprenticed to a Mr Butcher. He recommended me to Eridge Castle, owned by the Marquis of Abergavenny. I then went into the army for national service, serving with the Gurkhas in Malaya as a vehicle mechanic. After my service I worked in a general plant nursery and then at Ingestre Hall where I was in charge of all the fruits, inside and out. I then joined Wallace and Barrs nursery in Tunbridge Wells in the shrub department until 1959; from there to private gardens for the next 51 years. I finally retired fully in 2011 when I was 80 years old.

Gardening has changed so much in time. We used to polish the brass greenhouse door handles and scrub the brick floors with coarse sand to clean them ready for the weekends. All pots were clay and washed in cold water and when walking from a gravel drive onto a lawn we would tap our shoes together to make sure there were no bits of grit to damage the mower blades. I got quite severely told off once for whistling while working!

I gave my first talk to a Townswomen's Guild in 1964 as the group that my mother belonged to had been let down. I wrote many notes, not thinking that once the lights went out I could not read them. All went well and that was my first try. Since then I have spoken to over 700 groups of all sorts and have set myself some ground rules:

- I will only speak about things I have personally grown or done and I always start by saying "All I can tell you and show you is the way I grow things, it may not be according to the book but I will show you my results and you judge for yourself." I do not believe I am right as there are so many ways of doing the same job. And if, when questions are being asked, I do not know the answer I say so, as I believe it is wrong to just waffle on as there are so many things I do not know.

## Find a speaker or judge for your event

The RHS produces lists of speakers and judges who are available for events. The registers feature the contact details and biographies of those available, their subjects and fees. This is a free service provided by the RHS to assist speakers, judges and gardening groups; however all speakers and judges are independent of the RHS. To view the registers, visit [rhs.org.uk/speakersjudges](http://rhs.org.uk/speakersjudges)

## Join the registers

Anyone can add their details to the registers if they have horticultural speaking or judging expertise. Add your details online at [rhs.org.uk/speakersjudges](http://rhs.org.uk/speakersjudges)

[lauriemansergardenhints.blogspot.co.uk/](http://lauriemansergardenhints.blogspot.co.uk/)



An eight-year-old Laurie Manser in 1939

Enter our photo competition for the chance to win one of three fantastic prizes - visit the website for more details!



# Wild About Gardens Week

26 October - 1 November 2015

**Make a difference for the wildlife in your area**

Wildlife needs our help and this October, the RHS is urging community groups across the UK to join together to make a difference for their local biodiversity.

To find out more, visit:  
[wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)

