



RHS

Top *tips* for garden designers

RHS Flower Shows



Judging and Client's Brief

You will submit your first version of the Client's Brief with your application, and it forms the basis upon which your garden is judged. The Selection Panel will review this Brief as well as your drawings, and give initial feedback on how you have fulfilled the Brief through your design.

Between four to six weeks before the show, you will have the chance to resubmit your Client's Brief to make sure it reflects any changes you made to your design. The judges receive this version of the Client's Brief only, and none of your drawings. You will be able to let the judges know of any last-minute changes to the Client's Brief in person, just before judging commences.

Keep your Client's Brief simple with one clear and strong message. There is no need to be overly specific about the plants and materials that will be used in the garden.

Planting

- Think about the density of your planting and allow plants to breathe. It is ok for soil to be on show if it is dressed with a mulch. Do not overstuff your borders, or plant too sparsely
- Leave maintenance pathways if, for example, there are shrubs or roses at the back of borders that will need pruning in the future
- Consider the sustainability of your planting, and avoid including plants that will get too large for their allotted space, or for the wider garden as described in your Client's Brief
- Use sensible planting combinations, with plants that enjoy the same conditions, depending on the stated aspect and soil in your Clients Brief. Avoid 'flower arranging' with plants
- Be flexible with your planting plan, and prepared to swap different cultivars of perennials depending on what plant suppliers have in stock when you come to buy. Ask the supplier for advice if you are struggling, and allow enough budget or additional quantities of other types of plants as a contingency
- Reserve your statement trees and mature shrubs early, as these are fundamental to your design and harder to source at the last minute

- The planting in your show garden informs and inspires the public to recreate this in their own gardens, so it needs to be horticulturally correct as well as conveying a message
- Don't forget to consider and include the mid-storey of shrubs, as well as your trees and plants
- Plan the delivery of your plants carefully. When will they arrive on site and who will look after them? Leave enough time (around two days) to get your plants in the ground and settled, so that they relax and start to look more natural.

Building your garden

- Consider constructing elements of your design before you come on site to save time, where possible
- Prepare a detailed build schedule to map out all aspects of construction, planting, and deliveries to site
- It is important that you choose a contractor who you have an effective working relationship with, and who has experience of building show gardens
- Bear in mind that the RHS requires numerous health and safety forms to be submitted before you get onto site, including a Method Statement, Risk Assessment, Construction Phase Plan and insurance documents. Check the deadlines for these and submit in good time
- Provide on-site shelter and contingency planning for rain, and be flexible and adaptable with your schedule. Turn up and make the most of the site hours and days offered for your build because things will not always go to plan
- Remember to plan the removal process of the garden carefully, based on future plans for the materials and plants following the show.

Sustainability

It is essential that you find a new home for your garden after the show, either in its entirety or in parts. If you are struggling to do so, get in touch with the RHS Shows team and we can help.

Relocating your garden can make a great PR story for you and your sponsor, and creates a lasting legacy for your hard work at the show.

- Consider your use of concrete, metals, virgin timber and plastic, using natural and reclaimed materials wherever possible.
- Use more sustainable materials such as:
 - Screw piles instead of concrete foundations
 - Jute instead of plastic membrane to protect the site where necessary
 - Recycled glass rather than sharp sand
 - Reclaimed materials such as timber and aggregate
 - Metal to line ponds (depending on the shape)
 - Cement alternatives such as those based on lime, hemp and mycelium
 - Rammed earth.
- Do not settle for the normal way of doing things, research or seek advice from your contractor to see if there is a better way, and share this with us so we can spread the word
- Use electric machinery and tools on site where possible – this also improves the air quality for everyone
- Design out waste and design in re-use and recovery. Think from the outset about what will happen to all the materials and plants after the show.

Plant health

Only bring visibly healthy plants to the show and ensure you are familiar with what plants are allowed on site. Check the Exhibitor Manual for further details.

Funding your show garden

Tell friends and family about your plans and ask them to help you spread the word - using social media is also a great way to do this. If you can, always try to attend events where you can meet businesses face-to-face: a real conversation is far more powerful than an email.

If you have already created a design and are seeking sponsorship, have some strong illustrations of the design. When inspiring a sponsor, the more visual you can be, the better.



When working with a sponsor, remaining flexible can really work in your favour - you may have to tweak the budget slightly or make changes to the design to better fit with their objectives.

Explore relocating your garden after the show as early on as possible, as this could be a source of sponsorship. Maybe your design has appeal for a local business, such as a hotel or restaurant, and a potential client could end up being your sponsor.

When emailing potential sponsors, keep it concise. Say who you are, what you are planning to do, and why they should sponsor your show garden. Offer to arrange a call or meeting to discuss further - and if they do not reply, follow up.

The RHS Shows team can assist in contacting potential sponsors, and can also attend meetings with you and potential sponsors - so do get in touch if you would like some support. Also, if you would like to bring a potential sponsor to a show to get them excited about the opportunity, we can arrange that and will meet you at the show.

Press and PR

When designing your garden think about how to make the garden stand out. Press are always interested in the new and unusual, things that haven't been done before or new themes or ideas that haven't been explored through garden design in the past. Think about ways to make your garden different - are there any unique or exciting stories informing your design?

Your Media form is the first port of call for the RHS Shows PR team and the BBC team to find out about your garden. It's really important that you complete this form as soon as possible and with as much information as you can, as we use this to create press releases and find interesting stories to pitch. No detail is too small, and it all helps to tell the story of your garden.

The role of the RHS Shows PR team is to promote the show as a whole, so you are welcome to write press releases and contact press specifically about your garden. Please follow any embargo dates, as these help us make sure any announcements have as large an impact as possible. Consider what elements of your garden make an interesting story and which journalists might be interested in them.

Once the show begins, there are plenty of opportunities to promote your garden, especially on press day. You may want to consider applying for a photocall timeslot to grab the attention of photographers, or provide us with a digital press pack that we can share with press attending the show.

Social media is a quick and easy way to engage with followers and share what you are doing at the show. Please note that due to our contract with the BBC, there are restrictions around filming onsite, whether it's for social media or for your website.

The RHS Social Media team can be reached on socialmedia@rhs.org.uk and you can contact the RHS Shows PR team on showspr@rhs.org.uk.

Show Admin – Paperwork, Exhibitor Manual, Health and Safety

Read the Exhibitor Manual in full for each show you are attending, as these contain all of the essential details about exhibiting at RHS Shows, with sections including:

- Awards and judging
- Environmental responsibility
- Promotional activities

You will need to provide full health and safety details for your garden. Your contractor can help with this, and we have a dedicated H&S team who can assist and can be contacted by email: showshs@rhs.org.uk

Remember – preparation is key.

