

Welcome to the Edible Britain - the 2013 Britain in Bloom launch campaign. In taking part you're joining hundreds of other community groups across the UK that are sowing edible community gardens in 2013.

Nothing beats the taste of home-grown fruit and vegetables and fresh herbs make a wonderful addition to many dishes. By creating edible communal gardens in your local area you will be helping people to enjoy adding more flavour to their meals - especially those without their own gardens - and reducing food miles in the process.

Please read the following pages for inspiration and advice about growing edibles in your local community and if you have any questions, please contact us using the details below.

Further resources:

- Once you apply for seeds we will send you advice about publicising your planting event in the media.
- For advice about growing your own edibles visit: rhs.org.uk/growyourown
- Download template press releases and posters to help publicise your launch event from: rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch

Contacts:

- For questions relating to Edible Britain, free seeds and your press activity: communities@rhs.org.uk
- All registered groups can contact the RHS Advice team with horticultural queries relating to their group's work. The details of how to contact the team can be found in the online hub for registered groups.

Inspiration from groups around the UK:

Group	Incredible Edible Wakefield, IYN
Project	Town Centre Herb Trail

Last summer, Girl Guides from Ossett helped volunteers from Incredible Edible Wakefield to fill planters in Ossett town centre with sage and thyme.

The It's Your Neighbourhood group is now calling on other local organisations and businesses to follow the Guides' example and 'adopt a planter' to help form a herb trail, together with a map and herb quiz, around the whole of Ossett town centre.

In December 2012 the group's work was mentioned at the Doha UN Climate Change Conference, as Lizette Simpson from Ossett Girl Guiding was interviewed for Climate Change TV. "Who says tiny steps can't make a difference!" exclaims Yvonne Smith, Co-ordinator of Incredible Edible Wakefield. "In a few years' time we hope that everyone in Ossett will have access to free, locally-grown herbs, saving money as well as carbon emissions."

www.incredible-edible-wakefield.co.uk/



The Guides with their herb planter

Ossett Girl Guides



Edible Britain

Celebrate this year's launch by planting edible community gardens!

A young Bloom volunteer harvests crops from a street-side edible bed in Woolton, Merseyside

Free seeds for all registered Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) groups, and RHS Affiliated Societies

Group	Donington in Bloom
Project	Aromatic Library Garden

The residents of Donington in Lincolnshire have been enjoying more flavour in their food following the creation of a community herb garden in the grounds of the library.

The plot of land skirting the building had lain empty until Donington in Bloom volunteers approached the library service. "All the rubbish used to blow in there," explains Liz Walker, Chair of Donington in Bloom. "It wasn't being used and so just kept filling up." The group suggested creating a public herb garden and the library jumped at the idea.

With funding from a local trust and donations from B&Q the group planted a range of herbs, including thyme, mint, chives, dill, chervil and rosemary.

Each herb is clearly identified and people are encouraged to pick their own. Inside the library a plan of the garden sits alongside a special selection of books about the culinary and medicinal uses of herbs, helping visitors to identify and make use of the offering outside.

"It's been hugely popular," says Liz. "Everybody is very conscientious and just takes what they need. One resident asked me if he could go back for more as he was preparing his Christmas stuffing!"

www.doningtonidea.org/bloom.htm



Donington's new herb garden is open 24/7

Group	Garstang in Bloom
Project	Edible Jubilee Garden

In Lancashire, Garstang in Bloom teamed up with the local Transition group to create a new edible and wildlife-friendly garden to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Pollinator-friendly shrubs and perennials were planted alongside vegetables and herbs and the residents of Garstang were invited to 'help themselves'.

"It's been really popular," says Norah Hoyles, Chair of Garstang in Bloom. "All this year's crop went. We had cabbages and kale, artichokes, onions, carrots and lettuce. It's inspired people to grow their own - you think 'I've got a space just like that, so maybe I could do something at home.'"



The space before and after Garstang's edible transformation

Images: Lynn Hunter

James Russell

How to...

RHS horticultural advisors share their tips for growing edibles.

Where to grow edibles

Most herbs and vegetables grow best with full sun and light, well-drained, moisture-retentive, fertile soil with plenty of organic matter incorporated. They can be grown in the ground or in containers.

Consider if there is any possibility that your proposed site **might be contaminated**. Your local authority is the best first point of contact for determining whether a site in the public domain has already been tested for contaminants. However, the history of the site should be considered and where industrial or waste disposal uses have been recorded it would be wise to have soil tested by a specialist laboratory, or grow in containers of imported soil or potting media.

To reduce the chance of your edible herbs being exposed to heavy metals and particulates from vehicle exhaust, we recommend that you choose a location away from heavily-used roads.

Sowing your seeds

Enrich your soil with roughly a bucketful of rotted compost per square metre and eliminate all weeds prior to sowing/ planting.

Rake the soil into a fine tilth (a fine, crumbly texture) and create seed drills at the depth specified for each plant (see seed packets for details).

Ensure that you water the ground before you sow your seeds - don't water them afterwards as you'll wash them away. After sowing, wait until the seeds have germinated before you water again. Water thoroughly every 10-14 days in dry spells.

Sowing/planting in rows enables you to control subsequent weeds, especially if the spaces between rows can be easily hoed. Scatter the seed along your drills as thinly and evenly as you can. Place labelled markers at either end of the drill to help identify the seedlings. You could also stretch string between your two markers to show exactly where the drill line is. Gently fill in the drills with soil and press down lightly.

Watch out for slugs and snails in the early stages - seedlings are very vulnerable to slug attack. If you've got space, it may be worth sowing some of the seeds into modules in case you need to in-fill any slug casualties.

Harvesting

Some herbs and salads such as coriander, wild rocket and cress may be ready to harvest



Above: Sowing seeds in drills with labelled markers at each end helps to identify seedlings when they appear. Right: Mint is often planted in pots to prevent it becoming invasive

Edible Britain seed pack:

- Chives (perennial)
- Parsley (biennial)
- Coriander (annual)
- Dill (annual)
- Garlic chives (perennial)
- Sage (perennial/ evergreen)
- Thyme (perennial/ evergreen)
- Fennel (perennial)
- Red frills mustard (annual)
- Nasturtiums – edible flowers and leaves (annual)
- Marigold – edible petals (annual, though sometimes hardy)
- Radishes (annual)
- Carrots (annual)
- Spring onions (annual)
- Spinach (annual)

within a few days of sowing, while others, such as parsley and garlic chives, may take a few weeks. They can be picked easily by pinching out or cutting before flowering. See individual seed packets for when to harvest.



Left: Take root cuttings of mint in spring, potting up segments of the root in fine compost



Propagating

Cuttings of some herbs such as bay, marjoram, mint, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme can be taken from late summer to early autumn. Take root cuttings of mint in spring.

Divide hardy herbs such as sweet marjoram, oregano and mint in spring. Collect the seeds of your annual and biennial herbs such as coriander, dill and parsley and sow again in spring and throughout the growing season at three week intervals until August.

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

- Rich, well-drained soil in full sun, though tolerant of wet conditions and heavy soils.
- Cut down to the ground after flowering to produce fresh leaves.
- Mild garlic-like flavour; leaves, bulbs and flowers are all used.

Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*)

- Well-drained fertile soil in part shade.
- Leaves and roots used fresh, especially in Thai cooking.
- Seeds used dried in curries and pickles.

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)

- Well-drained neutral to slightly acid soil in sun.
- Leaves are cut in spring and summer for using fresh or dried; seeds harvested in summer for use dried, all widely used in cooking, especially Scandinavian cookery.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

- Rich, well-drained neutral to alkaline soil in sun or part shade.
- Pick leaves just before flowering and use fresh; an essential ingredient in French, Italian and Middle Eastern cookery.
- High in vitamins and minerals.



A few of the edibles in your Edible Britain seed pack

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

- Well-drained to dry neutral to alkaline soils in full sun; sage dislikes damp conditions and low light in winter.
- Hard prune in early spring to promote bushy growth.
- Leaves are used to flavour many dishes, especially meat. Fresh or dried leaves are used for tea.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

- Well-drained, even stony poor soils in sun; most thymes prefer neutral to alkaline soil.
- Trim lightly after flowering to maintain bushy habit.
- Fresh or dried leaves and flowers used to flavour many dishes, especially French cookery.

Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)

- Well-drained soil in full sun.
- Marigold petals can be eaten; they are known as 'poor man's saffron' as they can be used to colour rice.

Spinach (*Spinacia*)

- Full sun (light shade in the height of summer) and fertile moist soil.
- Water well as they will flower (bolt) if they get too dry.
- Harvest leaves when big enough.

Carrots (*Daucus carota*)

- Open, sunny site and fertile well-drained soil.
- When the plants have grown you can thin to 5 – 7cm apart.
- The smell that arises from thinning carrots can attract the carrot root fly. To reduce damage from carrot root fly, cover your crop with fleece or mesh.

Potential problems with edibles

- Herbs such as coriander, dill, basil and wild rocket can be quick to bolt and go straight to flower, especially if overcrowded or in poor dry soil. Make regular sowings to have a good supply of these crops.
- On lettuces, downy mildew can be problematic and mint rust can affect marjoram and savory as well as mint.
- Rosemary beetle can be a problem on

lavender, sage and thyme as well as rosemary. Protect young seedlings from birds, slugs and snails.

- Parsley can suffer from aphids and carrot fly – grow under fleece or insect-proof mesh where these pests are troublesome.

For more advice about each of these problems, visit: rhs.org.uk/advice

Free RHS advice for communities

All Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups, as well as RHS Affiliated Societies, can contact the RHS Advisory Service for free gardening advice relating to their group's work.

For the details of how to contact the team please refer to your support pack

or see the 'support for all groups' advice sheet in the online hub.

Advice and about growing edibles, including videos and year-round tips can also be found on the RHS website at: rhs.org.uk/growyourown

For advice on more than 700 gardening topics, visit: rhs.org.uk/advice



Herbs can be used to create attractive and fragrant gardens, which are great for encouraging wildlife

Excite people...

Ideas and tips for engaging people in your new edible garden

Start out with a sign

If you'd like members of the public to volunteer to help look after your edible garden or just to help themselves to the produce, you'll need to make people aware that it's a community garden for everyone to use. So make sure you have adequate signage in place. Why not try some of these ideas:

- Arrange a competition with a local school for pupils to design a sign for the new edible garden. The winning design can be displayed permanently in the garden in a weather-proof format (affordable options are available, such as laminated paper or chalk drawn blackboards)
- Commission a local artist or designer to create signage for the garden including information about the different edibles; the medicinal and culinary uses of herbs.
- Make sure to include your group's website address on the sign so that people can easily find further information about the garden and how they can volunteer with your group.
- Use QR codes on information boards so that Smartphone users can find further details about the edible garden on your website.



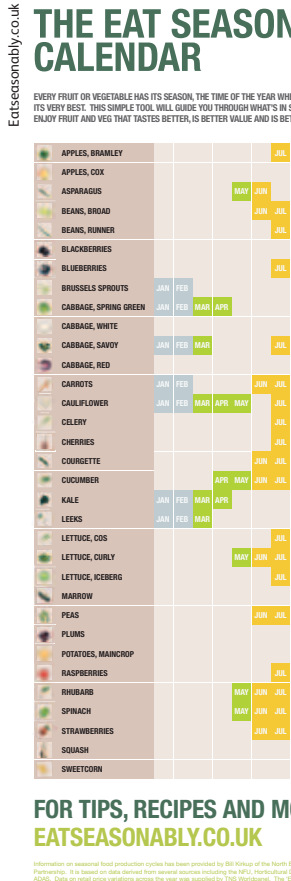
A community garden in East London makes visitors feel welcome.

Champion local food

Why not try out one of these ideas to help raise awareness of the benefits of growing and eating local food.

CO2 Challenge: Ask pupils to record the country of origin of all their shop-bought fruit and vegetables for a week and then help them to calculate how many airmiles have been flown to deliver their weekly groceries. Recognise the efforts of pupils to eat locally and grow their own, at school and at home.

Seasonal Eating Week: Run a seasonal eating challenge. Hand out seasonal-eating charts (which can be downloaded for free from the internet) and challenge local people to eat only seasonal produce for a week (or longer). Create an online blog or try to arrange a regular column in the local paper where people can send in their stories. You could also ask participants to calculate how much money they've saved by eating seasonal food.



All generations enjoy growing fruit and vegetables, which taste better picked straight from the vine!

Did you know..

The first recorded strike took place in Ancient Egypt during the reign of Ramses III when the pyramid workers did not receive their rations of garlic. It is thought the workers used garlic to increase their stamina and to maintain their health.

Tantalise the tastebuds

Use the produce you grow to create community events to raise the profile of growing-your-own locally. Could you try one of these ideas:

- Run a competition amongst local groups/ residents or school children to find a set of winning recipes to publish in your newsletter, on your website or even in a local paper. Use this competition to raise awareness of the garden by challenging entrants to create recipes using one or more of the herbs/ vegetables growing in the garden.

- Hold an annual World Food Day celebration - ask people to create dishes from ingredients growing in the garden to raise money for future planting projects, or to buy more edibles!
- Launch your new edible space with a cooking-inspired event - invite a local chef to come along and prepare some recipes with the vegetables and herbs that will be available later in the year.
- Collect seeds from your annuals and biennials and give these away at events for people to pot up and grow on at home (paper pots can be made cheaply and easily from newspaper).

The wonders of herbs

The President of the Herb Society, Jekka McVicar, has been cultivating herbs at her organic farm for 25 years. In the next year she will be transforming the farm into a herboretum and a school to share her passion with others. Jekka is supporting 'Edible Britain', the 2013 Bloom launch activity.

RHS: How easy it is to grow herbs?


JM: Herbs are a really great way to start gardening and they are very rewarding. They're ideal for small spaces - from just one pot you can grow a cut and come again herb salad; it transforms a sandwich into a feast and it's something the children can easily do. Things like Mizuna, or frilled mustards – they've got good flavour and they're not difficult to grow.

RHS: *Is there anything to watch out for when planting a new herb garden?*

JM: It's well worth going on slug and snail patrol when your seedlings come out. When I first moved to my farm we were inundated with snails. I used to go out at night and pick them off and I got dustbins full - the trouble is, I can't kill anything, so I drove them up the road and dumped them about a quarter of a mile away. My children and husband, in exasperation, marked the biggest snails with Tipp-ex and you know what, they returned within the month. I still struggle to kill them though you do need to try to protect your seedlings in the early stages.

RHS: How did you get into herbs?

JM: Through my stomach! My mother had a herb garden and my grandmother was a great cook and so I could pick and choose mints before I went to school. Today I grow over 300 culinary herbs. I want to lead people to medicinal herbs through culinary ones, because they are so interchangeable. Rosemary is not only good in lamb or tomato sauce, you can also drink rosemary tea, which is excellent for the memory. Its botanical name is *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *officinalis* meaning that it was officially used by the apothecaries, the founders of modern-day medicine. So, as Hippocrates said, “Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food.”



RHS: What are some of the other medicinal uses of herbs?

JM: In ancient times, dill seeds would have been used medicinally – as an antispasmodic and to ease flatulence. Today it's used in gripe water for children. Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is a really important medicinal herb. You can clean your

teeth with the leaves and it's also fantastic as a gargle for sore throats – put three leaves in a cup, add boiled water, strain and let it cool and gargle. Don't worry if you swallow it by mistake because sage tea is really good for your memory too – sage stands for wisdom.


Thyme is also medicinal, it's a natural antiseptic. Boil up some leaves and wash down your surfaces with it. Fennel is a good diuretic and coriander helps you digest heavy foods and stops bloating. Yarrow is used to stop blood flow - the SAS still use it today. Chives and spring onions, in the allium family, are really good for lowering blood pressure, as are all onions. The list is endless!

RHS: Herbs can be strong natural antiseptics then?

JM: Yes, garlic is known as one of the best antiseptics there is. During the First World War they used to crush it onto sphagnum moss and put it on wounds to stop them getting gangrene. That goes back to when the artisans who built the pyramids were given a clove of garlic a day, not just to put in cooking but to rub on any cuts so they didn't go septic.

RHS: *How can we inspire more people to grow herbs?*

JM: The easiest way to inspire people to garden is through food. Throughout history we have always nurtured edible crops, for survival. We've become disconnected from that today. I'd love to see more herb gardens grown in public spaces. Herb gardens can look untidy because herbs by their nature are wild plants – they're the same plants that we've been cultivating for over 2,000 years. The best herb gardens are the ones that are used, because we then look after them and keep them in shape. They're also wonderful for encouraging biodiversity. I'd love every school to have a herb garden. It links geography and history, sociology, biology and biodiversity and at the end of it you can eat it and you have better digestion.



Chives make a tasty and attractive addition to any herb garden.