



Crocasmia was one of the plants used to create a united visual theme throughout the Full Frontal gardens.



Fern Alder in front of her house in Longley Road, Rochester; she and other locals founded Full Frontal to improve their surroundings.



The kokedama moss ball Fern has hung above her front door.



A discarded, fly-tipped bath has been planted with *Sedum*, *Iris*, *Carex*, *Verbena rigida* and *Lychnis coronaria*.

Street spirit

Limited space has meant a community in Kent has had to think creatively when improving the streets in their neighbourhood

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Participants in the Full Frontal gardens project employ an eclectic range of containers in their limited spaces.



Textural plants have been used to great effect in one of the small, shady front gardens.



Unwanted materials can be recycled by growing something in them, such as the *Sedum* in this old shoe.



Members of the community planted wild flowers in many of the abandoned, unsightly areas around Rochester.

IDEAS FOR SMALL SPACES *Street gardens*

Garden summary

Community project aimed at improving front gardens.

Location: central Rochester, Kent.

Size: eight streets plus the High Street in a 2 mile radius of Longley Road.

Age of gardens: two years since the project's inception.

Visiting: front gardens are private, but can be viewed from public roads, including Longley Road, Clive Road, Castle Avenue, St Margaret's Banks, Listmas Road, Magpie Hall Road, High Street and Rochester Avenue.

✦ www.fullfrontal.org.uk



Strawberry Fields

One Rochester resident in the Full Frontal project has transformed his front garden by adding hanging baskets, growing tomatoes in pots and placing strawberries in trays on top of his wall.

Fern Alder, fed up of seeing her Rochester neighbourhood slowly turning into a fly-tipping hot spot, decided to take action.

A garden designer with horticultural knowledge and a likeable personality, she persuaded her neighbours to start a community project called Full Frontal, now part of the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood scheme. Originating on one street, there are now residents from eight different streets in a two-mile radius.

When Fern started the initiative in 2010, her aim was to 'green up and clean up Medway streets' and since then many residents have embraced it with remarkable enthusiasm. One front garden is nicknamed 'Strawberry Fields' because of the trays of strawberries on the garden wall; another neighbour nearby designed her shady garden around textural plants, and in such a way that it is hard to believe she has no previous horticultural experience.

Obtaining plants

Many of the residents that take part in the Full Frontal project live in terrace houses with small front gardens. They were all given £100 towards plants when they joined (funding came from local authorities and sponsors). To expand plant collections, residents organise swap days and buy from car-boot sales. More often than not plants

are donated, or left in a box on a street with a note saying 'take me'.

From time to time Fern hands out a few bulbs and flowers to create visual cohesion and encourage community spirit. Once it was *Allium sphaerocephalon*; this year she distributed *Crocasmia* 'Lucifer' and devil's bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).

She also encourages her neighbours to try different ways of growing plants. 'This year we have tried low-maintenance hanging baskets containing *Sedum* and *Lewisia*,' Fern says. 'It's not what people normally think of to put in a basket, but they can stay in there during winter.'

Sustainably reusing materials is a key part of Full Frontal. Cleaned tyres are filled with plants such as *Nicotiana mutabilis* and *Lychnis coronaria*. 'A local go-karting venue gives them to us for free,' says Fern. 'They are good as pots because they keep the soil warm. I have overwintered *Dahlia* 'Pooh – Swan Island' in them.'

Cleaning and greening the neighbourhood has indeed made an impact. Areas once infested with nettles, hypodermic needles and old clothes are now filled with wild flowers. The bottom of one road used

to be a popular site for discarded wardrobes, settees and doors. It now contains 20 different buddleias that were a donation from the Natural History Museum.

Fern is clear about her role in Full Frontal: 'It is important that I sit on my hands and I am not too prescriptive about what people do. They need to feel a sense of ownership.' One important ideology she promotes is sustainable planting: 'It was a matter of influencing people. Water butts that were donated by Southern Water are being used, flowers are growing on walls and neighbours share plants.'

Looking around the neighbourhood it is hard to imagine that it was ever as bad as Fern describes. The only sign is the odd remnant of fly-tipping, such as the bath on one road, now filled with *Sedum*, *Iris*, *Dianthus* and *Carex*, and a bin containing a *Ginkgo* next to it.

The initiative shows the positive impacts of horticulture on communities – and the importance of having a driven neighbour such as Fern. ●

More from the RHS For more on RHS It's Your Neighbourhood and other community gardening initiatives, visit: www.rhs.org.uk/getinvolved