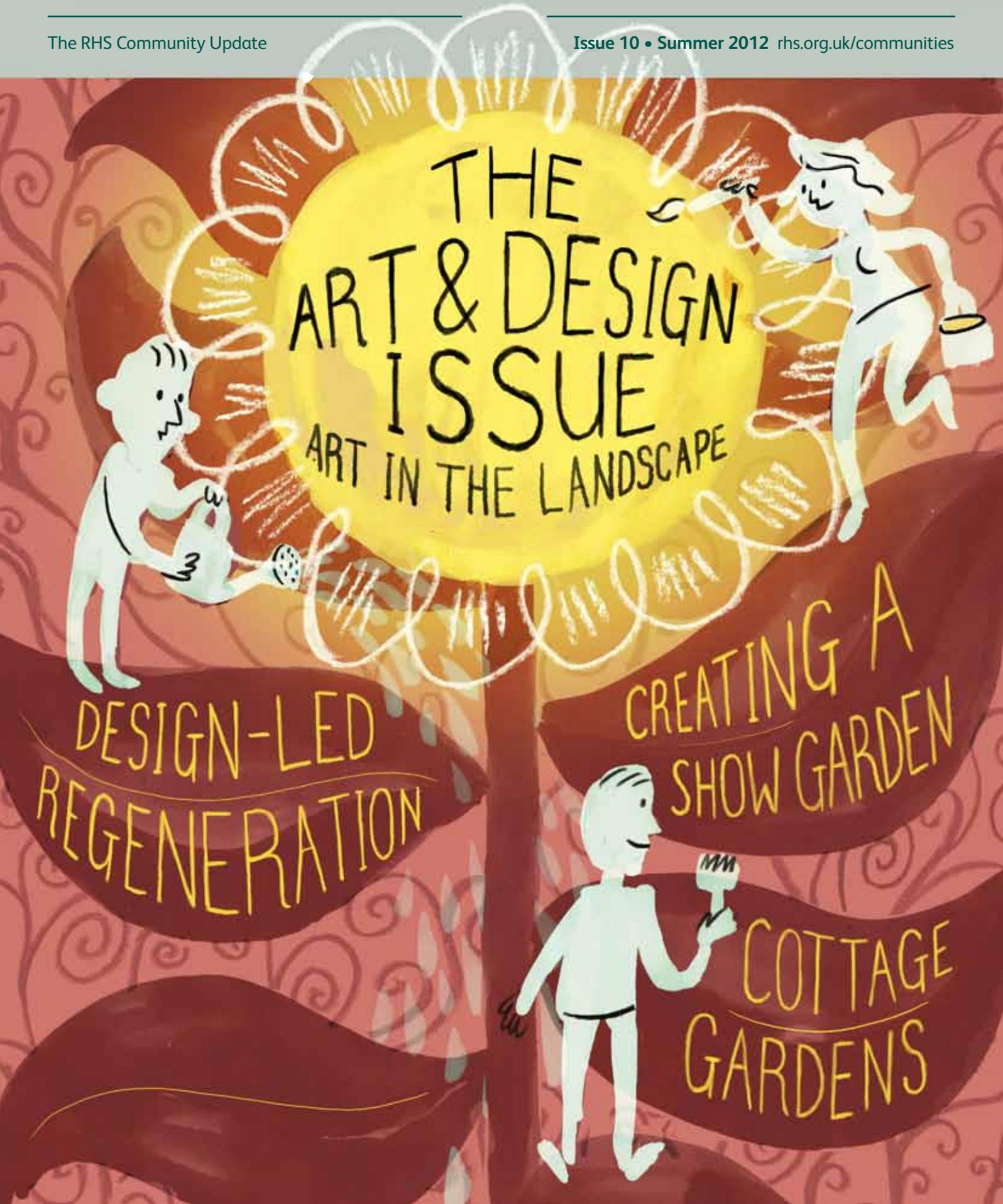


# GROWING COMMUNITIES

The RHS Community Update

Issue 10 • Summer 2012 [rhs.org.uk/communities](http://rhs.org.uk/communities)



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more interconnected communities. For more  
information about RHS Britain in Bloom, RHS It's  
Your Neighbourhood and RHS Affiliated Societies,  
please visit [www.rhs.org.uk/communities](http://www.rhs.org.uk/communities)



## To the summer issue of *Growing Communities*, the magazine for all RHS “in Bloom” and It’s Your Neighbourhood participants and RHS Affiliated Societies.

Art and design: gardening encompasses both. Whether it’s a large-scale landscaping project or a collection of just a few plants, designing gardens and green spaces is a sure-fire way to get the creative juices flowing. Once planted they continue to hold us spellbound, evolving as the seasons progress into living, breathing works of art.

In this issue, we hear from community groups around the UK which are forming exciting partnerships to bring art and design into their local landscape, addressing social needs in the process (p.10 – 13). We also have design tips from the President of the RHS, landscape architect Elizabeth Banks (p.7), and we meet garden designer and community activist

Fern Alder, who is inspiring her neighbours to transform their street (p.9).

As ever, we’re always looking for groups’ stories to publish in the magazine - please send your news and ideas to Sophie Dawson: [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118.

Many thanks,

Sophie Dawson,  
Editor

### YOUR LETTERS

## A resourceful approach in a water shortage

*“Following on from your article about how to deal with the drought (Spring 2012 issue, pg.6), I thought readers might like to hear about my water-conservation idea. During the current hosepipe ban I have been reusing my bathwater to water my garden by hooking up a siphon (once used to clean our fish tank) to a hose which is trailed through the house. If your bathroom is on the ground floor there may not be enough gravity to help the water through the hosepipe. After watering the garden and topping up my water butt, any surplus water is put into plastic bottles which I then use to water the flower bed (adopted by my Brownies and Guides) outside our local school, where we meet.”*

*Linda Camborne-Paynter,  
Stony Stratford in Bloom*



Linda tops up her water butt with bathwater using a fishtank siphon and a piece of hose

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.



Finnore Alliment Association

## Affiliated Societies...

Boost your membership by joining this November's Dig Together Day!

**A**ffiliated Societies are invited to plant trees to celebrate this year's Dig Together Day. The campaign provides a platform for groups to promote their activities locally and reach out to new members. "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood groups are also welcome to take part.

Trees can be applied for through the Woodland Trust's free community tree packs scheme or purchased at a substantial discount via a special Dig Together Day offer.

To source your trees and to upload the details of your Dig Together Day event, please visit:

[www.rhs.org.uk/digtogetherday](http://www.rhs.org.uk/digtogetherday)

## Affiliated Societies raise funds

Over 590 societies have registered for the exclusive new RHS individual membership offer, rolled out in March, with £450 to be paid back to societies that have already recruited new members to join the RHS.

To find out more about the scheme, which sees RHS Affiliated Societies collect a £5 recruitment fee for every new member they sign up to the RHS, please contact Lucy Reid on: 020 7821 3651/

[lucyreid@rhs.org.uk](mailto:lucyreid@rhs.org.uk)

## Pear rust spotters needed

The RHS is working with the Sylva Foundation to run a survey to map the incidences of European pear rust across the country. Over the last ten years the RHS has seen a steady increase in enquiries,

suggesting that the fungus is spreading. Both charities are encouraging gardeners to get involved with the survey.

[www.TreeWatch.com/pearrust](http://www.TreeWatch.com/pearrust)



Rust on pear

## Funding update for community groups

### New online tools

Spacehive and Peoplefund are two new funding platforms for local projects. The websites allow groups and individuals to pitch their projects to the online community, where viewers can pledge their support. If the total funding target is reached, the funds are made available.

<http://spacehive.com> and [www.peoplefund.it/](http://www.peoplefund.it/)

### Support for young volunteers

The Alec Dickson Trust provides grants of up to £500 to under-30s around the UK for volunteering or voluntary community projects which enhance the lives of others.

[www.alecdicksontrust.org.uk/](http://www.alecdicksontrust.org.uk/)

### BAA Communities Trust

The Trust makes grants of up to £50,000 to support projects in the communities closest to BAA's airports – Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heathrow, Southampton and Stansted. The Trust

focuses on projects that protect the environment, create opportunities for young people, break down barriers to employment through skills development and promote active communities. Applications can be made year-round.

[www.baa.com](http://www.baa.com)

### Retailers support communities

Wilkinson's Helping Hands project gives each store a budget to distribute to projects and schemes within the local community. To apply for a donation, visit your local store.

Waitrose is rolling out its Partner Volunteering scheme across all branches this year. The scheme will see 75,000 employee hours being invested in 2012. Customers nominate good causes for support and Waitrose employees decide which of these they want to volunteer for and how their skills will be used.

[www.johnlewispartnership.co.uk](http://www.johnlewispartnership.co.uk)

## Free RHS tool for groups

The 5,000th plant has been added to the RHS's free online service, *RHS Plant Selector*. The tool allows viewers to search for plants suitable for a variety of conditions (including different soil types, exposure to sun or shade) or by colour, size or season of interest of the plant.

[www.rhs.org.uk/plantselector](http://www.rhs.org.uk/plantselector)

## High street rejuvenation

The government has accepted many of the recommendations put forward by Mary Portas in her proposal to rejuvenate the UK's high streets. These include: creating dedicated 'town teams'; making parking more affordable; funding innovation focused on bringing empty shops back to life; launching a National Markets Day; and encouraging greater involvement by local communities in shaping the high street. To read the full report visit:

[www.maryportas.com](http://www.maryportas.com)

# What are the RHS Community Campaigns?

The RHS supports several UK-wide community gardening schemes, all of which help to spread the joy of gardening and boost community spirit. There are more than 5,000 community groups and 15,000 schools currently taking part.

**RHS Britain in Bloom**

Britain in Bloom is a UK-wide campaign to help people in towns, cities and villages to improve their local environment. Groups clean up and green up their areas, often leading to reductions in crime, rejuvenated local economies and more empowered communities.

Participating communities receive an annual visit from the “in Bloom” judges who provide feedback and encouragement. There are two levels to the campaign: the regional heats, which are co-ordinated by 16 different regional/ national organisations, and the UK Finals, which are co-ordinated by the RHS.

[www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](http://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)



RHS/Julien Weisgold

“in Bloom” groups focus on three core areas: horticultural achievement; environmental responsibility and community participation.



Over 15,000 schools are already signed up to the Campaign

Kate Davies

## RHS Campaign for School Gardening

The RHS Campaign for School Gardening aims to encourage and support schools to create and actively use a school garden. The RHS provides participating schools with free support, resources and a series of practical training days for teachers, to equip them with the skills they need to manage and run a school garden.

Community groups can recommend the Campaign for School Gardening to their local schools for free and then support and mentor the school as it develops its garden.

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

To find community groups or RHS Campaign for School Gardening schools in your area, search the online map at: [www.rhs.org.uk/communities](http://www.rhs.org.uk/communities)

## RHS It's Your Neighbourhood

The It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) scheme is for groups of volunteers working to improve a specific site through community gardening. While an “in Bloom” group will work across an entire town or village, an IYN group may be based in a park or community garden, in the grounds of a housing estate or a shared residential alley. The scheme is free to enter and any group can join as long as it is made up of volunteers, involves gardening, and the site is benefitting the local community. IYN is non-competitive and provides groups with useful feedback, advice and encouragement.

IYN groups often work in partnership with their local “in Bloom” group to improve an area, sharing ideas, resources and expertise.

[www.rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood](http://www.rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood)



Hundreds of residents' groups use the IYN scheme to improve their neighbourhoods

James Russell

# Entente Florale

The European competition, Entente Florale, is managed by the Association Européenne pour le Fleurissement et le Paysage to promote a greener and more pleasant environment in European cities, towns and villages.

## RHS Affiliated Societies

The RHS Affiliated Societies programme is a membership scheme for gardening clubs and horticultural societies, providing a range of benefits. There are currently over 2,900 groups registered in the UK and overseas, including local gardening clubs and horticultural societies, specialist plant societies, allotment groups and community gardening initiatives. To qualify for the scheme, groups must have a remit to promote gardening at a local level and hold regular meetings or an annual show.

RHS Affiliated Societies are often able to lend their expertise to local community groups, and many set up their own community initiatives.

[www.rhs.org.uk/affiliatedsocieties](http://www.rhs.org.uk/affiliatedsocieties)



Members of London's Paddock Allotments

RHS/Julian Weagall

*The RHS offers Affiliated Societies, "in Bloom" and IYN groups highly competitive insurance cover, at market-beating rates. To find out more, please visit [www.rhs.org.uk/communities](http://www.rhs.org.uk/communities)*

The RHS does not coordinate Entente Florale, but RHS Britain in Bloom Judges do choose which UK finalists should be invited to enter the European competition each year. Two entrants are selected from the previous year's Britain in Bloom Finals based on their level of achievement.

This year Bristol and Rustington will compete against entrants from across Europe. Lead UK Jury member, Clive Addison, says, "Entente Florale gives those at the top of their game in the UK the opportunity to represent their country at the European level. It builds on 'in Bloom' but includes more focus on landscape and environmental management and planning as well as tourism. Entrants must demonstrate that their activities have improved the quality of life of both residents and visitors. We are very excited to welcome Bristol and Rustington into the competition this year and we will be working hard to do our very best to gain top awards for the UK."

## Bristol competes

The city of Bristol will compete against nine European rivals this summer and hopes that its participation will benefit local tourism. Bristol in Bloom Co-ordinator, Monica Whyte, says, "It's a big investment in showing off our city, but it's one that we hope will reap dividends for Bristol in the future. We're delighted to have the support of Bristol City Council. It is only with their input and financial commitment that we're able to take part."

Monica describes entering the European competition as a "dream come true", adding that she's still in a daze from the city winning last year's Large City category in the Britain in Bloom Finals.

Greenery abounds throughout the city



James Ellis

## Rustington represents UK villages

Rustington in West Sussex will compete in the village category and hopes to impress the European judges with its wide-reaching activities, including beach conservation, churchyard improvements and ongoing work in the local community.

Rustington in Bloom Co-ordinator Mike Harwood says, "We're lucky to have a highly motivated volunteer workforce and a very supportive parish council and this year we'll be pulling out all the stops."



Rustington in Bloom

Floral displays bring seasonal colour to the centre of the village

For more information, please visit: [www.entente-florale.eu](http://www.entente-florale.eu)

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

## RHS ADVICE

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

# Choosing the right plants

As well as regional weather, each garden or green space will have a particular climate depending on its soil type, exposure to weather, aspect (i.e. north facing/ south facing) and drainage. Inspecting nearby gardens and green spaces is the quickest way to identify plants that are likely to thrive - many rhododendrons will indicate an acid soil for example - but understanding the local conditions will help you to make the best choices.

## Wind

Wind exposure often restricts plant growth in Britain more than cold; areas with shelter are more successful than ones that lack shelter. Wind tunnels between hills and buildings can cause speedy, turbulent air flow that dries, cools and stresses plants. Fences, ideally porous ones, and hedges, especially those with a mix of evergreen and deciduous plants, filter and slow the air without creating turbulence and are a good investment.



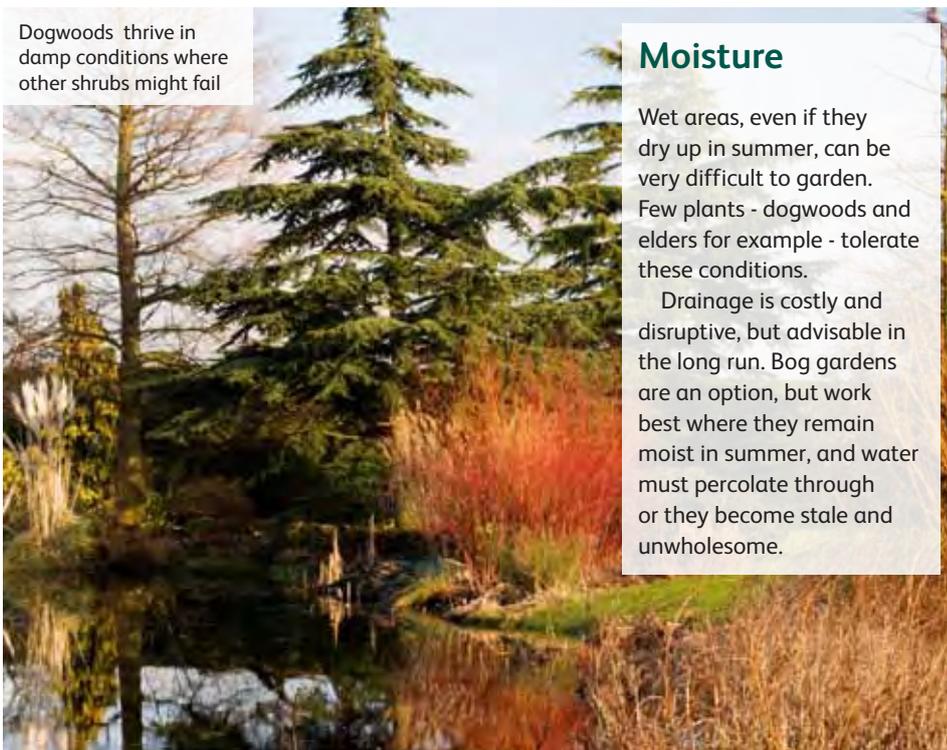
RHS/ Simon Garbutt

A beech hedge provides shelter

## Frost

The downside of shelter on sloping ground is that it can trap cold air as it flows downhill, cold air being denser than warmer air. Points where cold air collects are called frost pockets and plants in frost pockets are very vulnerable to damage. Making gaps in fences or hedges that run across slopes can allow cold air to drain away. Gardens in dips and valley bottoms are at particular risk as there are few options for cold air to drain away.

Dogwoods thrive in damp conditions where other shrubs might fail



RHS/ Jerry Holpur

## Moisture

Wet areas, even if they dry up in summer, can be very difficult to garden. Few plants - dogwoods and elders for example - tolerate these conditions.

Drainage is costly and disruptive, but advisable in the long run. Bog gardens are an option, but work best where they remain moist in summer, and water must percolate through or they become stale and unwholesome.

## Shade

Gardening in shade or 'woodland' calls for forest plants such as *Mahonia* and *Pieris*, which usually thrive as long as there is enough soil moisture. Trees, unlike buildings, walls and fences, suck up moisture. A very limited repertoire of plants can thrive under trees.

## Light

South-facing areas receive more light and warmth than those with less favourable aspects. If the site slopes to the south and contains fences or walls to trap and reflect warmth it will be especially well suited to tender plants that would not thrive elsewhere.

Not all sites can face south, and less sunny aspects often enjoy more stable conditions without extremes of either hot or cold. Ferns, hardy fuchsias, hellebores and Japanese anemones are examples of plants that thrive on the north side of walls and buildings.



RHS/ Tim Sandall

Shade-loving trilliums, bergenias, hellebores and ferns



RHS/Tim Sandall

## Designing a garden or green space

Elizabeth Banks, RHS President and landscape architect, shares her top tips.

Setting out on the adventure to create a garden or landscape is exciting and challenging. To see the realisation of a dream garden is hugely satisfying. I hope that some of these pointers may be useful for you.

- Firstly think how your space is going to be used. Is it going to produce fruit, vegetables, flowers or lawn? Who is going to look after it? Deciding this is essential for success. Where are the funds coming from? It is amazing what ambition can accomplish.
  - What are the surroundings - look at the horizon - a tree, a corner of a building, a church spire make a powerful view which you need to keep open when laying out the plot. Also see what you need to hide, either by masking the view with a tree or creating a distraction such as bright planting so people look at that rather than the ugly view.
  - Consider the conditions - wind, climate wet or dry, shady or open. This will help in choosing the plants and also in locating the comfortable places to sit.
  - Pick up the local style of landscape - flat, rocky, rolling - and blend it into the garden so that it fits in with its surroundings.
  - Consider how people will approach the garden and how they will look at it. Worn grass as people take a short cut across the lawns is called a 'desire line'. When I heard about it at college, I had a vision of Marilyn Monroe at the end of the path enticing people to walk over it! You can persuade people to walk where you want them to by curving the paths or mown lawns and enticing them to move in the way you want them to go.
  - Create an entrance - so that you know that you are entering somewhere different and special. Go under an arch, through a gate, through a fence or even a pair of tallish plants will create the effect.
  - Contain the site by adding a fence or boundary plantings however small, so the eye does not include the wider landscape.
  - Colour in the planting - hot colours draw the eye, soft colours make the plants look further away. Design a border with soft colours at the beginning and develop it into hot colours then retreat into softer colours again. This will make the border look even longer!
- Finally, enjoy yourself and watch the garden grow.

Entice people to move through the space the way you want them to



RHS/Tim Sandall

Use hot colours to draw the eye



RHS/Jerry Harpur

Locate sheltered spots for seating



RHS/Jerry Harpur

## Free RHS advice for communities

All "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood groups, as well as all RHS Affiliated Societies, can contact the RHS Advisory Service for free gardening advice relating to their group's work. Your support pack explains how to make the most of this free benefit. To request a replacement support pack, please email [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk) or call 020 7821 3069.

To search for advice covering more than 700 common gardening topics, visit: [www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)

# Sowing the seeds of community

Over the last few years, Imberhorne School in West Sussex has used its gardening activities to create ties with the local community.

Led by gardening co-ordinators Noreen Daw and Rob Langstone, the pupils of year 8 and 9 have been involved in a number of projects supported by East Grinstead in Bloom and other partners – including sowing a wildflower meadow in the town, planting crocus bulbs with the Rotary Club and, in conjunction with Mid Sussex District Council, contributing to planting a community flower bed. They have also created new garden areas at the school and their efforts have been recognised by



Volunteers roll up the turf to make a turf stack.

awards in the Schools category of South and South East in Bloom, and have contributed to their Benchmark Level 4 status in the RHS Campaign for School Gardening.

In 2011, they planted a small orchard of seven rare fruit trees donated by the Brighton Permaculture Trust in the school grounds. The pupils were keen to develop the area further and seized on the opportunity to take part in the RHS Wild about Wildflowers initiative.

Noreen and her pupils decided this was an ideal opportunity to link the community with the school and invited staff, pupils, parents, East Grinstead in Bloom and others to take part in a weekend working party. A local hire company donated the use of a turving machine and a turnout of more than 20 volunteers including three pupils resulted in several areas being cleared and sown with seeds. The group also created three turf stacks and a wild animal shelter.

Student Henry Grub said, "Owen, Rowan and I were so pleased to be involved with the community and also to use some machinery that we had never used before. I'm so glad that we can have a say in what goes on in our school and help to improve the environment."

## Tips for summer

Long summer holidays are always tricky for schools and they usually welcome offers of help from volunteers. Summer tasks include:

- Watering, to ensure the survival of crops and hopefully result in a bumper harvest in the autumn term
- Picking and freezing summer fruits and other crops which can be used for cooking in school
- Weeding, as keeping on top of this can prevent the task from being too daunting when the school returns.

Further hints and tips for schools and their supporters can be found online at:

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

Is your group working with your local school? We're always looking for examples of innovative partnerships to feature in the magazine. Please send your story to: [deirdrewalton@rhs.org.uk](mailto:deirdrewalton@rhs.org.uk) / 01423 724 683.



Pupils, staff, parents and community members gather together to sow wildflowers.

Fern in the street in Rochester where she is helping residents to green their frontages

Augustus Fernald



# INTERVIEW

**Award-winning garden designer Fern Alder has transformed her suburban street in Rochester into a green corridor, motivating residents through the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) scheme. Now she's been asked to replicate the project across the Medway.**

**Your community group, Full Frontal, helps residents to improve their front gardens. You've signed up all but one house on your street and last year you achieved top marks in the IYN campaign. How did it all begin?**

It actually began one night in June 2010 at about 1am in the morning! I decided on a bit of a whim to put leaflets through everyone's doors suggesting we got together to form a community group. Our street was desolate; all the frontages are concreted over and most were just gathering rubbish; mine was the only one with any plants in it. My neighbour had approached me asking for help with her garden and it suddenly hit me that maybe we could do the whole street. I think the name Full Frontal helped to grab people's attention; I'm not sure 'Longley Road Garden Group' would have had the same impact! Everyone thought I was completely mad at first, but now we've got 24 houses on board and the street has been completely transformed.

**The group has been so successful that the council wants to roll out the concept across**

**all the Medway towns. Do you think Full Frontal will work in other areas?**

Absolutely, in fact we've got six new groups from Rochester entering into It's Your Neighbourhood this year. It works by finding the doers, the champions, and helping them to motivate people. Every street is different, so you need this local approach. We've developed a constitution that other groups can adopt, if they want. I've also been able to help with planting advice. Lots of people don't know where to start with gardening, but they get excited when they understand there's a plant for every place.

**Your own garden recently won Kent Wildlife Trust's 'Best Small Garden in Kent' award. Have you been able to share your passion for wildlife gardening with the group?**

Last year we created a wonderful space at the end of our street. It had been used as a fly-tip, but we cleared it and planted buddleia and nasturtiums inside tyres. The plants were donated for free from the Natural History Museum's butterfly exhibit. By summer it was

brimming with flowers and insects. Everyone on the street loved it and it saved the council £12,000 by preventing fly-tipping there.

**After a career as a potter you studied garden design at Hadlow College in 2007, going on to win several awards, including a gold at Hampton Court. What has been your most exciting design project?**

If I'm honest it's these community projects, working in public spaces that lots of people can enjoy. A few years ago I won a competition to design a temporary garden in a park in Bitche, France. It was a contemplative space, with seating encircled by wooden walls. Sitting inside and listening to people as they came in was wonderful. It was such a buzz seeing them walk through and enjoy a space that had started out on paper.

[www.fullfrontal.org.uk](http://www.fullfrontal.org.uk)  
[www.spacefx.net](http://www.spacefx.net)  
[www.rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood](http://www.rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood)



Volunteers relax at last year's summer fair.

# Regeneration is a garden

Nina Pope

Artists and residents create a community garden from an inner-city waste ground in one of London's poorest boroughs. Author: Alison Gibson.

**I**t was an unlikely route to a harvest festival, walking past grey tower blocks in a run-down part of East London without even a window box in sight.

Against such a background, the colour and cheerfulness of Abbey Gardens was nothing short of stunning for visitors to the community garden's first harvest festival in 2009. It felt like walking into a painting, and the effect was instantly uplifting. Dramatic sunflowers 6ft tall were like welcoming smiles at the centre of 34 long raised beds bursting with flowers and vegetables.

Along a back wall were the intriguing words "What Will The Harvest Be?" in large orange letters.

On that day, the harvest was a bountiful one, enough to treat 200 local residents to a free lunch cooked on site by visiting chef Sam Clark of the restaurant Moro.

Bunches of sweet peas and bags of vegetables were available for donations from an honesty stall, a gesture of trust that is typical of the garden's spirit.

Three years earlier, this garden did not exist. The 80m x 30m rectangular site was overgrown and neglected, inaccessible to the public and regularly abused by fly-tippers and vandals.

Unbeknown to most residents of Newham, the site was one of only two scheduled ancient monuments in their borough. Deep beneath soil long contaminated by nearby industry lay the remains of the gatehouse to a 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian abbey. Monks once ran a productive kitchen garden here. There had been an enjoyment of food, an exchange of cultures as visitors brought spices from other countries.

In 2006, a group of local residents formed Friends of Abbey Gardens (FOAG). "The main motivation was to develop the land into a communal and social space, driven and governed by residents and users," says Andreas Lang, a founding member of the group who also designed the garden's characterful honesty stall and trugs. The group hoped that lots more people would be inspired and get involved, which was essential to the success of the project. The land was leased from the local council.

Artist duo Karen Guthrie and Nina Pope were approached by FOAG and won a commission to create an artwork on the site. They were both self-taught gardeners interested in local food production. Consultation with local residents showed that there was a lot of interest in growing

food, but little experience, knowledge or opportunity.

They devised a two-phase plan, the first part being to create a temporary harvest garden as an experiment so that FOAG could try out their ambition to grow their own food on quite a large scale. The second part of the plan was for a permanent, more carefully landscaped garden.

It was a photograph that inspired the design of the harvest garden, one that caught Karen and Nina's attention when they were researching local history. A group of unemployed men in July 1906, dressed in the clothing of their different occupations,

George gathers green wheat ears for a recipe test





Lydia Thornley

Nina Pope



Left: Garden Club Leader Hamish and Gary the chef display the bounty at the garden's second harvest festival in 2010. Right: Hamish explains fruit tree pruning.

standing in a line on the day that they were arrested for taking over a vacant plot of land to grow food. The men were known as the Plaistow Land Grabbers. "It was an inspiring image and story," says Karen. On a wall in the photograph are the words 'What Will The Harvest Be?', which Karen and Nina took as the name of their project. A blown-up copy of the photograph now covers the front of the cabin at Abbey Gardens. The name of the men's endeavour, Triangle Camp, and the shape of their garden inspired the triangular design of the raised beds at Abbey Gardens.

To overcome the contamination problem, the site was covered with a protective membrane, and new soil was brought in.

In the first year the choice of plants was restricted to those that would grow in one season. "We wanted people to see it go from nothing to a full garden," says Nina. Seeds were donated by Chiltern Seeds in Cumbria.

The choice of bold colours rather reflects the boldness of the project. Unlike the usual allotment system, everything is grown communally. The garden is maintained by volunteers at three drop-in gardening sessions a week led by a paid gardener. There are no rules about how much work a volunteer has to do or how much produce can be taken, and somehow that works well.

The garden is also open to the public every day. This was a risk because the project could have been ruined by vandalism and theft. "We had a strong hunch that if it looked good enough people wouldn't damage it, they would respect it," says Nina.

Abbey Gardens is now a thriving, much-loved garden run by a Friends group that has grown to 60 members, with 20 nationalities between them and a variety of valuable skills. The temporary experiment appears to be here to stay.

The garden is also enjoyed by many more

people, whether it is workmen who eat their lunch there every day, mothers walking with babies, or visitors who attend events.

Lydia Thornley, a founding member of FOAG, says, "I'd been planning to move out of London for some outdoors and community. This project has made me feel rooted – literally – in the neighbourhood."

*The Friends of Abbey Gardens is an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group.*

[www.abbeygardens.org](http://www.abbeygardens.org)  
[www.whatwilltheharvestbe.com](http://www.whatwilltheharvestbe.com)

“ We had a strong hunch that if it looked good enough people wouldn't damage it, they would respect it. ”

*Nina Pope, Artist*

Lydia Thornley



Newham's own protest gardeners, the Plaistow Land Grabbers, are remembered on the group's cabin wall.

Lydia Thornley

## A floral traffic island

A new airport development in Guernsey's St Pierre du Bois presented the local Bloom group with a unique creative opportunity.

**D**ismayed with the bog-standard concrete traffic island proposed for the new access road, Floral St Peter's asked if they could be involved in landscaping the area. With the Public Services Department onside, volunteers then set about designing a more sympathetic alternative.

Floral Guernsey Council member and garden designer Helen Litchfield led the process, submitting plans for a traffic island featuring local granite cobbles and swathes of *Agapanthus* and *Sedum*, to represent the surrounding green valleys and cliffscapes of St Pierre du Bois.

With planning permission granted the group approached the Floral Guernsey Legacy Project, supported by HSBC, securing substantial funding to complete



The team plant up the new traffic island in Guernsey's St Pierre du Bois with help from HSBC staff

Floral St Peter's

the work. In March 2012, five HSBC staff joined Floral St Peter's volunteers to plant up the new island.

Marguerite Talmage, a member of Floral St Peter's says, "We were keen to keep the rural

character of the parish in this very visible feature at the gateway to St Peters, and we are delighted to have been able to achieve this unique public-private initiative in the heart of our parish."

# Art in the landscape

How "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood groups are visually enriching their local environments.

## Art and gardening rescue local land

Left to fall into dereliction, a small patch of land in the suburb of St Ann's in Nottingham had become a hotspot for fly-tipping and drug use. Spurred into action, neighbours got together to tackle the eye-sore.

**L**ocal voluntary art and gardening group, St Ann's Projects, set out to renovate the space with fruit trees, edible plants and wild flowers, and art created by the community.

"We're working with children at a local school," explains group co-founder Martin Sommerville. "The Eco Team are designing posters asking people to walk their dogs responsibly and look after the area. Once we've got a name agreed for the land we'll create a mosaic sign too."

Martin and partner Carly Williams, both community artists by profession, first attracted the attention of their neighbours in 2010 when they began mosaicking their doorstep. "Loads of people stopped to chat," explains Martin.

"After that we began making posters to give away spare plants to local people. We'd talk about the state of the area. There were lots of bits of land around that seemed uncared for. Everyone could see so much potential in them."

Today the group's monthly gatherings attract up to 70 people each time who come along to learn new skills and get involved with the gardening. Many just enjoy the chance to catch up on gossip, admits Martin, who's thrilled with the newfound sense of community. "Neighbours and passers-by of every age are getting

involved, making films, baking, building bird boxes, mosaicking and drawing. There are lots of young people keen to join in too."

He continues, "Spending time together gardening and making art helps people to take a stake in the area, to care more about it in the future. It's a way to build connections."

[www.stannsprojects.wordpress.com](http://www.stannsprojects.wordpress.com)



St Ann's Projects It's Your Neighbourhood group uses colourful posters to get the local community involved



*Onoporden* steals the show at the In Flight Garden. Inset: Nectar Bar in Valley Gardens, with its bug houses and pollinator-friendly planting

Images: Harrogate Borough Council

## Living sculptures draw the crowds in Harrogate

Working with designer Paul Hervey-Brookes, Harrogate Council in partnership with Harrogate in Bloom has created living sculptures using architectural plants in perennial beds designed to attract wildlife.



**N**ectar Bar in the Valley Gardens and an In-flight Garden on nearby Montpellier Hill are intended to increase biodiversity in city-centre locations while also inspiring the public about what they can achieve at home. Plants such as *Onopordon*, *Sanguisorba* and *Eupatorium* attract a variety of pollinators throughout the year, while their attractive seed heads provide strong winter form and food for birds. Insect houses add further year-round interest.

Patrick Kilburn, Head of Parks and Open Spaces at Harrogate Borough Council says, "These biodiverse rich beds have been hugely popular with the public. They've enabled us to reflect messages

about biodiversity and they've also saved the council money, while offering something which has a long period of interest and, from the public and of course the wildlife perspective, is beautiful."

He adds, "Working with Paul has enabled us to meet our objectives for these areas while also creating a living work of art, which will continue to develop year on year."

Harrogate was featured in this year's BBC series Bees Butterflies and Blooms: [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013pw23](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013pw23)



Images: Friends of Abberd Brook

## A better walk to the shops

Working with professional artists and local school children, first-time It's Your Neighbourhood group, Friends of Abberd Brook (FAB) in Calne, Wiltshire, transformed a former grot-spot.

**T**he underpass, which cuts under a busy road to accommodate a riverside path, was previously a magnet for graffiti and anti-social behaviour. "It was very oppressive," says Francis Bosworth, Chair of FAB. "It's a shortcut to the shops for many of us but it was never a nice walk and for youngsters it was a no-go area."

Today its walls are flanked by a bright, new mosaic artwork created using the children's drawings of wildlife you'd find near the brook. "Local people love it," says Francis. "We've put in a plaque naming the young designers and we've had no issues with graffiti since it was installed."

To enhance the area further the group has planted wildflowers in the surrounding earth banks, renewed stepping stones across the brook and installed a new set of steps to increase access. There are also plans in place for a new Abberd Brook nature trail.

[www.fabrook.org.uk](http://www.fabrook.org.uk)



Above: The underpass before work began. Right: the mosaics designed by local school children

# Young designers take on Tatton

Young people from nine estates across Tameside, Greater Manchester, will be entering their second show garden at the RHS Flower Show Tatton Park this summer.

The 50 youngsters, aged 8 - 16, are members of DreamScheme, an initiative being run by Registered Social Landlord New Charter as part of its local It's Your Neighbourhood campaign. DreamScheme helps young people on the estates to engage with the wider community through volunteering activities like gardening, litter-picking and recycling. Participants earn points for the hours they volunteer, which can be redeemed against activities and trips. One excursion, to the Tatton Park Flower Show in 2009, was particularly memorable.

"The children were so overwhelmed by what they saw at Tatton they decided they wanted to create their own show garden," explains Tatton DreamScheme Co-ordinator and New Charter employee Linda Sidebottom. "After a few enquiries it seemed we would be able to enter and with the generous support of New Charter Building Company, contractors and volunteer residents, we were able to make it happen."

The garden, entered in 2010, featured two contrasting halves. One side reflected the things the young people were used to seeing on their estates, like unkempt gardens, dog fouling and graffiti, while the other portrayed their ideal garden space. It received a bronze medal and lots of media interest. "The children were on the radio and in the papers," says Linda. "They became celebs overnight, even in school. It was so empowering for them, they just got so much out of it."

One of the young designers, 11-year-old Lewis Phillips, confesses that before DreamScheme he just used to watch the telly. "We do lots of things now," he says,



Above: The children visit Tameside Nurseries at Denton to plant up the bedding for their Tatton Park show garden. Below: The group's first show garden in 2010

"cooking and planting are my favourite. At Tatton I talked to so many people and they were really interested in what we did on our estate. I even showed a lady how to plant the strawberry runners."

This year the children have chosen the four seasons as their theme. Many of the same individuals are still involved, explains Linda, with the older ones staying on to mentor the younger ones. "This is somewhere they can apply themselves and develop their confidence," she says. "Gardening has been an unexpected draw!"

[www.newcharter.co.uk](http://www.newcharter.co.uk)



## Bloom group goes for Gold!

This summer will see Frinton in Bloom returning to the RHS Flower Show Tatton Park for a third year, exhibiting their flowerbed entry, Bullseye, inspired by the ancient sport of archery. In 2011 they were awarded the RHS Silver-Gilt Grenfell prize for their coastal-themed entry, Taking a Dip.

Explaining their motivations for taking part, Frinton in Bloom's

Chairman David Foster points to the positive publicity the show provides: "We were featured on the BBC last year and the local press reported on it enthusiastically. A bonus of the media coverage has been tourism, as people who wouldn't otherwise come to your community hear about you and decide to visit."

[www.frintoninbloom.org/](http://www.frintoninbloom.org/)

To find out more about entering the RHS National Flower Bed Competition, please email [exhibitorapplications@rhs.org.uk](mailto:exhibitorapplications@rhs.org.uk). The RHS offers financial assistance to all successful applicants.

Above: Wallflowers and foxgloves bloom in the cottage garden at RHS Garden Rosemoor

# A Cottage Garden Revival

One of the UK's largest RHS Affiliated Societies urges gardeners to put plants first.

**W**hen The Cottage Garden Society (CGS) was formed in 1982, the UK was in the grip of a very different gardening trend. "Conifer and heather gardens were all the rage at the time," recalls founding member Clive Lane. "Everywhere, people were paving over their gardens, uprooting traditional cottage garden plantings and replacing them with low-maintenance plants and hard landscaping.

"Nothing could have been more at odds with the ethos of cottage gardening, which focuses on artless informality - borders crammed with a jostle of herbs and flowers, paths lined with aromatic shrubs. A haven from the stresses of modern-day life."

Clive and fellow enthusiasts were so concerned about the future of the traditional gardening style that they joined forces to form the CGS. Today this RHS Affiliated Society has around 5,000 members, worldwide, a sure sign of how far the tide has turned since those difficult days in the 1980s.

Clive attributes this revival in the fortunes of cottage gardening to a growing interest in self-sufficiency, as well as the urge to feel closer to nature. "Having evolved from 'a way of life' - providing food, honey, medicinal cures and seasoning herbs, for the cottager -

the cottage garden today has become more of a design style, something which can be created not just in the country but in towns and cities," he says. "It's a naturalistic garden style, full of old fashioned flowers and shrubs mixed with productive spaces for vegetables and herbs and full of wildlife."

[www.thecottagegardensociety.org.uk](http://www.thecottagegardensociety.org.uk)

## The importance of plants

Plants in urban areas are not just valuable for their looks: they offer a wide range of other benefits including flood prevention, building insulation, air cooling and providing homes for wildlife. To find out why plants and gardens are so crucial for our towns and cities, visit:

[www.rhs.org.uk/urbangreening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/urbangreening)



Chris King

## Tips from the CGS

### Choosing plants

Hollyhocks, lupins, lavender, rosemary, pinks and old fashioned roses are traditionally planted in cottage gardens. These old favourites have been grown in cottage gardens for hundreds of years, along with primroses, columbines and geraniums. Modern cottage gardens, though, may well include plants with hot colours such as red, orange, and bright yellows. It would be sad to limit the choice too severely in the pursuit of 'authenticity'.

### Use contrasting flower shapes to create interest

Spires (foxgloves, verbascums, hollyhocks, delphiniums etc.) are invaluable amongst more rounded clump-forming plants like aster, phlox and geraniums. Small flowers that make a haze of colour are indispensable amongst plants with larger single blooms like the oriental poppies, hemerocallis and all of the daisy family.

### Focal points

An old pump and water butt will add a touch of authenticity to the cottage garden, as will stone troughs and sinks planted up with auriculas, pinks and thymes. A sitting area is an ideal place for grouping scented plants which can be enjoyed whilst relaxing with a glass of wine after a busy day.

### Divide and maintain

The informality of a cottage garden can easily develop into something of a jungle without constant division of stronger growing plants, which can quite quickly become 'thugs' if left to their own devices.



RHS/Tim Sandall

Dividing perennials



RHS/Tim Sandall

Left: Vegetables are planted alongside flowers in many cottage gardens

# 1,200 community groups go Wild about Wildflowers!



Images, clockwise from top left: Barnoldswick in Bloom; Haywards Heath in Bloom; Long Lane Pasture Trust; Cartmel in Bloom; Kirklees Eco-School; Cemaes Bay in Bloom; St Wilfred's Primary School; Rosliston in Bloom; Ballynure in Bloom; Bracknell in Bloom; Dines Green Community Primary School; Friends of Prince Consort Gardens; Ashton Friends of Skitters; Summercourt School; Rayleigh Town Council; Wimbledon Chase Primary School.

In April 2012, more than 1,200 "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood groups, RHS Affiliated Societies and Campaign for School Gardening schools joined the Wild about Wildflowers initiative to launch RHS Britain in Bloom. This resulted in nearly five acres of new wildflower meadows being planted across the UK.

Visit [www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch](http://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch) to read the stories of some of the groups that took part. If you didn't get involved in 2012, save the date for next April when we'll be co-ordinating another mass-planting event to launch the campaign!

**Take part in this summer's Buglife/ RHS survey!**

If you planted wildflowers in spring, please take part in this summer's pollinator survey. Visit: [www.buglife.org.uk/pollinatorsurvey](http://www.buglife.org.uk/pollinatorsurvey) to take part.