

# Life-Changing Gardening

*In East London*

**Greener Streets:  
Better Lives**  
*- Get involved!*

**2015 Bloom Finalists**  
**Planting for Shade**





# Welcome

RHS / Jason Ingram

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

It's a truly wonderful time of the year, with buds popping open and zingy green growth emerging, and of course there's a great deal to be done in the garden!

Here at the RHS we're looking forward to another jam-packed year, kicking off with the launch of Greener Streets: Better Lives this month. Registered Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups should now have received their seeds, and other groups can get involved and sign up for free seeds at: [rhs.org.uk/GreenerStreetsBetterLives](http://rhs.org.uk/GreenerStreetsBetterLives)

In this issue we've included more ideas about how you might transform the grey spaces in your community with plants. We hope as many people as possible will be

able to do something small. We've also got suggestions from the RHS Advisory team for planting in shady corners and we talk to urban greener extraordinaire, Nigel Dunnett from the University of Sheffield (page 14).

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*

Sophie Dawson, Editor

### Your Letters **Plant donation scheme**

*Preston Environmental Forum (PEF) is a community based charity supporting environmental activity in Preston. We've developed an effective plant donation scheme which I thought might be of interest to other groups.*

*We encourage residents to donate their surplus plants to help community projects around Preston. Last spring PEF received a large donation of perennials, as local residents split the plants in their own gardens, and we used these to create a show-stopping display at the*



Images: PEF

*Corn Exchange bed in the city centre at minimal cost. This year PEF is collecting again and the plants will be used in Avenham Community Gardens*

*This scheme helps us to brighten up areas with a variety of colour and texture. PEF is very grateful for the donations and maintenance work of local volunteers in helping us improve these areas.*

*Chair, PEF*



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.

## Greener Streets: Better Lives Launch

This year's greening campaign\* will launch in April with the transformation of a Bloom community space with support from RHS Chelsea Gold Medal-winning garden designers Adam Frost and Chris Beardshaw.

RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group Cody Docks in East London will receive a grey to green makeover, turning the formerly abandoned Victorian dock into an oasis of green along the River Lea.

With the involvement of groups across the UK we're hoping to revitalise thousands of neglected and rundown spaces over the next three years. We hope you will get involved by changing a grey space into

a thriving, living green place. All groups taking part will receive free nasturtium seeds to help them get started. If you've not yet applied for your free packet of seeds you can do so online at: [rhs.org.uk/GreenerStreetsBetterLives](http://rhs.org.uk/GreenerStreetsBetterLives)

Registered Bloom & It's Your Neighbourhood groups should by now have received their free seeds. If you have not received seeds and you think you should have done, please contact your region/nation in Bloom to check you are registered.

\* Please note the campaign name has changed from Green Streets: Better Lives to **Greener Streets: Better Lives**.



Chorley in Bloom

Urban greening provides significant benefits for people and wildlife

## New RHS brand

This spring a new brand will be launched for Britain in Bloom. The RHS will add guidelines and useful templates for using the new brand to the online hub for registered groups: [rhs.org.uk/bloomiyn](http://rhs.org.uk/bloomiyn). We will contact all groups as soon as the new brand logos and templates are available online to download.



## Greening communities at Hampton

A community space in Bristol has been selected for a 'grey to green' transformation that will be featured at this year's RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show.

Kensington House was selected from 13 projects submitted by Bloom groups from across the country. The gardens of the St Mungo's hostel will be transformed by the RHS in partnership with Nigel Dunnett, Professor of Planting Design and Vegetation Technology, and Director of the Green Roof Centre, University of Sheffield. The garden will form part of an exhibit to show the benefits of urban greening, before being re-built in situ on the real Kensington Road after the show.



Designer Nigel Dunnett measures up the space for transformation

## Wild About Gardens Week, 26 October - 1 November

This year's Wild About Gardens Week will focus on gardening for hedgehogs. There will be lots of ways you can get involved, by organising an event, attending a talk or workshop or just taking a small action in your own garden. We will share more information in the next issue. [wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)

## Share your passion

The RHS is passionate about gardening and horticulture and we want to share the best in gardening with everyone.

Could you volunteer to help share that passion at RHS Shows and Partner Shows? We will proactively engage with visitors to explain the benefits of RHS membership and how, with their help we can keep our gardens beautiful, our shows inspiring and ensure our work in education, science and communities continues.

If you're outgoing, with great communication skills we'd love to hear from you; a full training programme will be provided.

For more information and to apply, please contact Elysa Rule [elysarule@rhs.org.uk](mailto:elysarule@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3120

## OPPORTUNITIES

### New Lottery Fund

Power to Change is a new Big Lottery Fund programme, providing £150m for existing and new community businesses in England. For more information on the Power to Change and to register your interest as a Community Business Champion, visit [thepowertochange.org.uk](http://thepowertochange.org.uk) and follow @peoplesbiz on twitter.

### Free trees for communities

The Woodland Trust sends out free trees every March and November to groups across the UK. Packs come in various mixes of 30, 105 or 420 saplings approximately 20-40cm tall. Applications for packs to plant in November 2015 can be submitted online now until 3 September, while stocks last. For more information and help with how to apply visit: [woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees)

2/ Welcome

3/4 News

4/5 Britain in Bloom Finalists

6/7 Greener Streets: Better Lives

8/9 Life-Changing Gardening

10/11 RHS Science & Advice

Planting for Shade

12/ RHS Campaign for School Gardening

13/ My Bloom

14/ Interview

Nigel Dunnett, University of Sheffield

15/ RHS Affiliated Societies

Cover image: Selby Estate gardeners. Credit: Julian Weigall/ RHS

Back cover: Inchkeith Court gardeners, Edinburgh. Credit: Julian Weigall/ RHS

This magazine is printed on paper using 75 percent recycled fibre and 25 percent virgin fibre sourced from certified sustainable forests. Please pass it on or recycle it.

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The Royal Horticultural Society is the UK's leading gardening charity, dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting gardening.

Our community campaigns support more than 5,000 groups in creating greener and more interconnected communities. For more information about RHS Britain in Bloom, RHS It's Your Neighbourhood and RHS Affiliated Societies, please visit [rhs.org.uk/communities](http://rhs.org.uk/communities)

## Great deals at RHS Partner Gardens

From Cornwall to Yorkshire and Antrim to Essex, some of the UK's best gardens are offering free guided tours, extra special prices, free guidebooks or discounts in their cafes for pre-booked RHS community groups. Check the list below for a garden near you, then visit [rhs.org.uk/groups](http://rhs.org.uk/groups) and click on the link at the bottom of the page for offer details and booking.

### Midlands

Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire  
 Doddington Hall & Gardens, Lincolnshire  
 The Dorothy Clive Garden, Shropshire  
 Coughton Court, Warwickshire  
 Trentham Estate, Staffordshire

### East Anglia

Marks Hall Gardens & Arboretum, Essex  
 Fairhaven Woodland & Water Garden, Norfolk  
 East Bergholt Place, Suffolk

### North

Normanby Hall Country Park, Lincolnshire  
 Scampston Walled Garden, Yorkshire

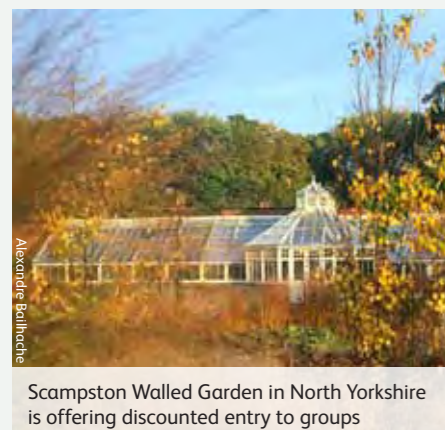
### South East

Borde Hill Garden, West Sussex  
 Godinton House & Gardens, Kent  
 Sheffield Park and Garden, East Sussex  
 Spinners Garden, Hampshire  
 Sussex Prairie Garden, West Sussex  
 West Dean Gardens, West Sussex

### South West

East Lambrook Manor Gardens, Somerset  
 Knoll Gardens, Dorset  
 Trewithen Gardens, Cornwall

**New for 2015:** Ballyrobert Cottage Garden, Northern Ireland



Scampston Walled Garden in North Yorkshire is offering discounted entry to groups



SMALL VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Scarva	Ulster
Tresco	South West
Wolfscastle	Wales

VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Claverley	Heart of England
Fordham	Anglia
Glenarm	Ulster
Kirkoswald	Cumbria
Muthill	Scotland
Spofforth	Yorkshire
Washington Village	Northumbria



LARGE VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Caistor	East Midlands
Coupar Angus	Scotland
Croston	North West
Scholes	Yorkshire

COASTAL UP TO 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Dartmouth	South West
Lytham	North West
North Berwick	Scotland
St Brelade	Jersey
St Pierre du Bois	Guernsey
Whitby	Yorkshire

COASTAL OVER 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Cleethorpes	East Midlands
Great Yarmouth	Anglia
Llandudno	Wales

SMALL TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Ahoghill	Ulster
Corbridge	Northumbria
Cranbrook	South East
Kingsbridge	South West
Uppingham	East Midlands
Whalley	North West
Wimborne	Southern

# Congratulations Britain in Bloom 2015 Finalists!

This year 71 communities have made it through to the UK Finals of Britain in Bloom with the RHS - the nation's most prestigious community gardening awards.

TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Barnoldswick	North West
Cupar	Scotland
Dalton with Newton	Cumbria
Falmouth	South West
Henley on Thames	Thames & Chilterns
Pembrey & Burry Port	Wales
Tewkesbury	Heart of England

SMALL CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bury	North West
Colchester	Anglia
Derry City	Anglia
Grimsby	East Midlands
Kirkcaldy	Scotland
Weston Super Mare	South West

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Experience Guildford	South East
London Bridge	London
Melton Mowbray	East Midlands
Reading	Thames & Chilterns

LARGE TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Antrim	Ulster
Biddulph	Heart of England
Durham	Northumbria
Knaresborough	Yorkshire
St Helier	Northumbria
Ware	Anglia

CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Dundee	Scotland
Norwich	Anglia
Oxford	Thames & Chilterns

LARGE CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Birmingham	Heart of England
Hillingdon	London
Leeds	Yorkshire



URBAN COMMUNITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Aldridge	Heart of England
Didsbury	North West
HEF Bristol (Greater Fishponds)	South West
Mancroft, The Lanes (Norwich)	Anglia
Uddingston	Scotland
Woodlesford	Yorkshire

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bath	South West
Filby	Anglia
Market Bosworth	East Midlands
Norton in Hales	Heart of England
Truro	South West
Usk	Wales



Clockwise: Kingsbridge town square bed; cubs help out with the Dartmouth in Bloom hanging baskets; Dartmouth harbour in high summer; volunteers join in at Hillingdon's scythe festival.

## Bloomers get kids growing their own

Young children in the Hertfordshire town of Ware know their cucumbers from their courgettes thanks to an exciting new scheme being run by the town's Bloom volunteers.

In 2014, Ware's Incredible Edible Challenge, organised by Bloom volunteer Sylvia Hovell, saw 11 groups of young children ages 4 – 11 years old growing vegetables in raised-bed planters. The groups, which included school gardening clubs, nursery groups, cub and beaver groups, were each provided with free soil, seeds and a converted pallet planter, as well as growing advice, tips and ideas.

Allotment plot-owners Sylvia and her husband John then visited groups throughout the summer to offer encouragement and in July, each group was judged and received a certificate and prize. Local Van Hage Garden Centre provided goodie bags for all the groups taking part, which were given out at the Ware Allotment Awards evening.

The feedback from the children was positive: eleven-year-olds Zocha and Ella from Sacred Heart School felt proud of the vegetables they'd grown for their pallet while William Lang, age 8, from Great Amwell Cubs enjoyed meeting the



Pupils at Sacred Heart tend their veg

judges. "It was nice telling them about our plants," he said. "Also I learnt a lot about the environment. I grew a beetroot and it surprised me 'cause it was so small!"

Lisa Smith,

Stepping Stones Nursery Teacher who coordinated one of the growing groups, said, "Young children learn best through play using their senses to experience the world. Growing things provides such a wealth of opportunity to talk about growth, care, change as well as health and wellbeing, empowering children to make choices about food and offering them new food tastes. The generosity of the Ware in Bloom team in providing seeds, soil and a box made this possible."

Sylvia organised the entire initiative with donated time and products: pallets were transformed into planters with the help of young offenders from the Hertfordshire Youth Justice Service; soil was provided by ScottsMiracle-Gro and seeds were purchased in sales or donated by volunteers. The Ware Allotment Society helped with the judging, in addition to providing funding to produce certificates and buy garden centre vouchers for the groups taking part.

Her advice for others: just go for it. "I'm not scared to ask for things and everyone's been so generous," she said. "The children have had the chance to grow their own vegetables and experience the taste of something picked straight from the plant, many of them for the first time. It's made it all so worthwhile."

This year the challenge continues and Sylvia already has two new groups signed up to take part.

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



# Greener Streets: Better Lives

Inspirational edible greening projects from Bloom groups around the UK

## Composting and growing project in Nottingham street

Residents in New Basford, Nottingham are putting the green back into their street with the help of a local wormery enthusiast.

Anna de la Vega lives locally and runs a small business called The Urban Worm. After studying Urban Food Security as part of her masters degree Anna became inspired to begin a community composting and food-growing scheme.

She kick-started Edible Avenue in 2011 with her neighbour Scarlett Lee, inviting neighbours to a planting day in her garden.

"We didn't know our neighbours so thought it'd be a great way to meet," she says. "Most people didn't come as we were hit by a freak snowstorm that day, but I got lots of notes through my door to say they'd like to be involved."

With support from Nottingham in Bloom and a local garden centre, Anna was able to source hanging baskets, soil and seeds in order to provide every house on the street with a welcome hanging basket. With the front gardens of the terraced houses paved, she encouraged residents to grow in containers. Regular get-togethers were



organised to share information and advice and to raise funds for communal features, such as the two herb planters positioned along the street.

Today the street is dotted with window boxes, planters and hanging baskets full of fruit, vegetables and herbs. Other community initiatives have been set up on the back of the gardening: Anna bulk buys organic food at affordable prices for her neighbours, which she divvies up in her front room, and local children are invited to gather eggs from the chickens in her garden.

As part of her growing business Anna has developed a wheelie bin wormery, which is easy to move and fits well alongside other bins. There are now six of these along her street, where residents

are able to compost their kitchen waste. Anna sells the resulting worm casings and fertiliser at local farmers markets. She has additional wormeries at the nearby St Anns Allotments, where she works in partnership with Ecoworks, the small charity which runs the site. Following the scaling back of council food waste collections due to budget cuts, Anna is hoping to gather food waste from across the region, donating a percentage of her profits to Ecoworks.

In 2014 Edible Avenue was visited by the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood

## Residents rejuvenate park's problem area

Formerly an area for drug users, rough sleepers and gangs, an unused quarter of Stockwell's Larkhall Park has over the last eighteen months been transformed into a community garden by a keen group of gardeners and volunteers. The garden has been developed by the charity Thrive together with a local residents group The Larks, and is now a new and exciting community hub, with weekly gardening and food sharing activities.

The group's advice to others starting out is to do lots of research before applying for funding and to build relationships with other community groups, shops, council, businesses and Friends of groups. Julie Floyd from Thrive says, "Visit other similar projects and find out what their obstacles and highlights are. Find a sister organisation to mentor you in the initial stages."

She also recommends letting a project grow organically, rather than starting out with too many people. "Try to get a nucleus of people to lead the project initially and it grow organically rather than have too many people at the beginning and they fade away as maybe there are not enough tasks to go around."

"Start small, don't be disheartened if things don't always work out, involve yourself in community and fundraising events, use the site for food sharing activities and tell everyone what you are trying to achieve!"

[facebook.com/larks.garden](https://facebook.com/larks.garden)



Images: Julie Floyd



Larkhall gardening group in their new space. Above and left: before and after the transformation



Neighbours get together twice a year to socialise, share ideas and raise funds

assessors and awarded a Level 3, Developing. The assessors were impressed by Anna's enthusiasm: "Anna's enthusiasm to promote Edible Avenue is infectious and creative," they said. "Sharing eggs and their collection with the children; bulk buying organic produce, making it available for all; food waste is then collected which reduces litter and keeps the street tidy. This community is lifted by the horticultural endeavours of Anna and her neighbours."

[theurbanworm.co.uk](http://theurbanworm.co.uk)



## Life-Changing Gardening

How a community gardening initiative in Whitechapel in East London has changed residents' lives. Author: Sophie Dawson

The ladies and I meet in Rosemary's flat for tea and scones, something she admits would never have happened before the gardening club started. "I didn't know any neighbours," she says. "I didn't know anyone and I didn't go out because I didn't know anyone. I felt really isolated."

Rosemary, Anwara and Halema live on the Selby Estate in Whitechapel. Originally from Kenya, Rosemary has been on the estate for 15 years. Working from home and not knowing anyone locally, she'd been suffering with depression and had problems with her health.

Living just around the corner, Anwara and Halema have known each other since they moved to the UK from Bangladesh 19 years ago. But they too felt isolated, struggling to get to know neighbours due to shyness about speaking English.

The three women's friendship began two years ago through their involvement in a local gardening project coordinated by the nearby Spitalfields City Farm. With lottery and housing association funding, strips of grass in front of Selby's flats were transformed into vegetable growing areas, with residents able to take responsibility for managing those nearest their flats.

Katherine Jackson from Spitalfields City Farm coordinates the project, running regular gardening sessions on the estate. She also supports those looking after plots near their flats, including Halema, Rosemary and Anwara, providing seeds and tools, encouragement and advice. "Gardening here has linked people together," she says. "Across all ages and cultures,



and it's especially because it's front gardens. Being visible out front has helped neighbours to meet and friendships to form."

For Rosemary, gardening in front of her flat has changed her attitude toward the local community. "I felt segregated before," she explains. "I didn't know anyone so I stayed inside all the time." After living side by side for 10 years, Rosemary and her Bengali neighbour Fatema have now become friends, sharing the produce they grow in front of their flats and swapping recipes. They also get involved in the weekly Inspire a Circle Women's Group, which meets in the nearby community centre. "I feel now I belong to the community and I don't want to miss out when things are happening," she says. "I even went one step further and joined the tenants association. I love the women here now, we share things and we are friends."

Halema had gardened as a child on her grandfather's farm in Bangladesh and missed the sense of space when she moved to London. "When I came here to this tiny flat with no garden I felt like I was suffocating so I was happy to start when Katherine arrived,"



she says. But with little confidence in her English, her shyness had almost stopped her getting involved. When the corner plot in front of her flat was suggested as a growing space she didn't want to garden there as she felt it was too visible. But with encouragement she started and now she chats to everyone who passes by, including the postman and the parking attendants. "Older Bengali neighbours I didn't know before come and give me advice and the children help with digging and taking things away," she says. Halema's own son enjoys helping her in the garden and she's noticed how much better he sleeps now he's spending more time outside. "My children are getting involved and now they eat salad every day and my son sleeps better after he's been in the garden."

For Anwara it was her eldest son who encouraged her to get involved to help her improve her English. "It's good for your communication," she says. "The first time I felt very shy. I didn't talk to any of my neighbours before. Now I feel very confident. Nobody encouraged me before, but now my family are proud of me."

"We had a lack of confidence because of the language barrier, but we have no choice, we have to talk English to Katherine," says Halema with a smile. Halema has now joined the tenants association and is getting more involved in the estate, while Anwara has decided to start English classes, which she hopes will help her to get a job once her children leave home.

The language barrier has sometimes made it difficult for Katherine to give residents lots of information, but in retrospect she feels it's worked out well. "I realised the best thing was to encourage people to try things and then they learn and do it for themselves," she says.

Rosemary admits she'd never gardened before and hadn't had much interest, but now it has completely transformed her life. "Katherine kept knocking on my door and I thought, oh my God this lady is so persistent so I decided to go so she'd leave me alone. And then after I went, it was me chasing Katherine!" she says.

Healthwise, it's now the way she releases stress. "My daughter tells me when I'm stressed, 'Mum, go into the garden!'. I tell myself I'm only going to plant one thing, if I'm not feeling well, and then I go out and I see something else and something else and you're there for two hours and I feel so satisfied."

The gardening has given Rosemary, Anwara and Halema a new lease of life through the friendships they've formed. They've also noticed improvements in their health since they started growing and eating more vegetables. Rosemary suffered from bad eczema, which disappeared when she changed her diet. She confesses she'd



never much liked to cook but now she makes lots of vegetable smoothies and has started experimenting with new foods.

"If I have a headache I go in the garden - for me it has become like medicine," she says. "It's changed my life in so many ways. I never used to notice nature before, but now it's changed my perspective. Sometimes you don't see things until someone comes along and opens your eyes. They say - can you try this? - and then by doing it you get something back and discover something for yourself."

At Rosemary's flat laughter flows freely as the friends' talk moves on to other things: Zumba versus Pilates, the health benefits of drinking mint tea, and the successful residents' Christmas party, which, last year, Halema helped to organise. From just a few small seeds, the Selby Estate's ladies are now busy growing their community.

The Selby Estate Gardening Club is primarily funded by Southern Housing Group. In 2013, the group won an award from the City Bridge Trust Growing Localities scheme. Spitalfields City Farm is a London in Bloom award winner.

[spitalfieldscityfarm.org](http://spitalfieldscityfarm.org)



Images clockwise: Rosemary in her garden; late spring bulbs cheer the estate; Anwara's potatoes; Halema prepares her garden for spring planting; gardening friends.

## RHS Advice

## Planting for Shade

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

RHS Chief Horticultural Advisor Guy Barter shares his top tips.

## Shade from buildings

Plants need light and water to grow. Buildings can cut down on light, but having no roots they do not deplete soil moisture. Although annuals are tempting when taking over shady ground to get quick results, they don't grow well in shade and in full shade performance may be disappointing. However careful choice can partially overcome this: of the hardy annuals, sown in situ, poached egg flower (*Limnanthes douglasii*) and baby blue eyes (*Nemophila insignis*) are worth trying; also the scrambling canary nasturtium, *Tropaeolum peregrinum*. Further possibilities; pansies, violas, bellis (the double-flowered daisy), and the biennial Canterbury bell.

Although vegetables ideally need full sun, some are more accommodating; beetroot 'Bolthardy', calabrese, chard, kale, kohlrabi (needs to be started off in bright conditions and then transplanted) and lettuce, especially the 'cut and come again' cultivars. Raising plants in cell-trays or modules will get them off to an early start with an established root system. Radish, spinach and herbs - chives, mint and parsley - are all shade-tolerant and can be sown or planted direct.



Raspberries produce a reasonable crop in shade



Luddenden in Bloom in Yorkshire bring colour to a shady corner with trailing nasturtiums

Fruit that originate from woodland edges such as raspberries and blackcurrants can produce a reasonable crop in this environment. Apples, pears and plums prefer a more open position, as do the nectarines and peaches, but Morello cherry and 'Williams' pears are moderately shade tolerant. Avoid fruiting vegetables such as aubergines, chilies, tomatoes, courgettes and peppers.

Shady corners near the buildings are particularly difficult to plant and often ignored. Leafy climbers such as *Parthenocissus* or climbing hydrangea will make short work of even the most intrusive wall. These are not suitable for growing in pots and should be planted 45cm (18ins) away from the wall where the soil will be moist.

When planting near walls mix in plenty of manure or compost. Robust plant choices include; *Garrya elliptica*, *Berberis*

*x stenophylla* 'Corallina Compacta', *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae* and *Geranium x riversleaianum* 'Russell Prichard'. Damper borders suit hostas, *Epimedium* and the creeping *Cornus Canadensis*. *Alchemilla mollis* and *Ajuga reptans* will spread, disguising unsightly paving.

Add interest and depth to a dull, shady corner by combining mixed pots packed with shade lovers such as camellias, pieris, variegated ivies and periwinkle.

Make a feature of the area by placing a wooden barrel (which can be adapted to collect water from a downpipe) in the corner, or a stone trough planted up with ferns.

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

## Dry shade

The dry, shaded soil beneath deciduous trees, shrubs and hedges that is so disappointing in summer comes into its own in spring. At other times it offers a cool, shady retreat in summer and sheltered area in winter. By choosing plants that

grow and flower while the leaves are off the trees and then retreat below ground to sit out dry, dull summer conditions, fabulous spring gardens can be created. Bulbs worth considering include; *Anemone* (apennina; blanda), *Colchicum autumnale* (potentially harmful), *Cyclamen* (coum; hederifolium - autumn), *Endymion*, English bluebell (non-

If possible, try to increase the light levels by careful pruning of the trees. Growing conditions within shade of trees can be challenging, as tree roots remove nutrients and water, so the incorporation of well-rotted organic matter, such as garden compost or manure, will encourage healthy growth.

*Dryopteris felix-mas* is a deciduous fern that will grow in dry shade. *Luzula sylvatica* (woodrush) gives an evergreen, grassy effect, with white flowers in spring and summer, and could be interplanted with *Digitalis* (foxglove). *Epimediums* have pretty, heart-shaped leaves and delicate flowers. *Lamium* (dead nettle) looks pretty next to paths and planted between paving slabs. If all else fails, ivy will usually cover the ground, even under conifers.



Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis Sandersii* Group) and winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*) will carpet the dry shady soil under deciduous trees

scripta), *Eranthis hyemalis*, snowdrop *Galanthus* (elwesii; nivalis), *Leucojum*, *Lilium*.

Further bulbs to consider where conditions are sunless, but more open, include: dwarf *Narcissus* (pseudo-narcissus; cyclamineus), *Scilla sibirica*, *Puschkinia scilloides*, *Chionodoxa luciliae* and windflower, *Anemone nemorosa*.

Other spring flowers include; pulmonarias, hellebores and epimediums. The shrubs winter box (*Sarcococca*) and daphnes survive in these conditions where their fragrant flowers can be enjoyed on sunny afternoons.

Shade from conifers and other evergreens is not nearly as suitable for planting, but robust periwinkles (*Vinca*) and ivies can survive even in these sites.



Mulch plants to encourage healthy growth



Epimedium x youngianum 'Niveum'

## Jobs for April

All areas of the garden are growing strongly, so plant and sow now to cash in on these optimum conditions.

- April showers encourage flowers, but it can also be a dry and cold month, so be ready to water new additions to the garden and use fleece to protect tender plants.
- After a testing winter for lawns, rake out any moss or thatch if necessary and seed bare patches. Germination

should be quick now the soil is warming up.

- Aim to keep weeds under control early in the season to prevent them taking hold. Hoeing annual weeds before they seed, on a dry sunny day can be very effective.
- Replace winter losses now. Lavender, cistus, shrubby salvias and ceanothus come from warmer regions and appreciate the whole summer to establish before colder weather arrives.



Images left to right: raking moss from the lawn, hoeing weeds and replacing less hardy plants are all jobs to consider in April

# Reconnecting with the natural world

How one Scottish school helped its pupils to reconnect with the natural world through building a garden. Author: Alana Tapsell

On 1st May 2014, Linwood High School in Renfrewshire, Scotland opened The Craig Hepburn Memorial Garden and Outdoor Learning Centre; a garden to commemorate the life of the former pupil who was tragically murdered in 2012 and to provide a place for learning and discovery.

Linwood is a small town three miles from Glasgow Airport and surrounded by beautiful countryside but it is also on the Scottish index of multiple deprivation. The school could see its pupils were experiencing a disconnect with nature and the natural world and as a result, had no interest in it. After three years of planning, the 170 x 80ft garden was born from the school's efforts to tip the balance and build horticulture into everyday academic life.

Art teacher and school garden leader, Lesley Hinde, said, "We think creating a garden is the most positive thing you can do as an individual or, as we did, a community. All of our pupils were involved in the creation of this garden, as well as half a dozen staff, many local businesses, Mr. and Mrs. Hepburn and RHS Development Officer for Scotland, Angela Smith.

"We were trying to build character into all that we did. Whether it was optimism, curiosity, gratitude, zest, grit or self-control, literally we had it in bucket loads."

The garden is designed in such a way that three classes can use the space for learning at the same time, and that's not including pupils using it for practical gardening. The vibrant site boasts an outdoor classroom which holds 33 pupils, eight central raised beds with built-in seating for 50 pupils and a large presentation



A large area of the school grounds has been transformed into a stimulating, natural learning zone (right)

All images: Linwood High School



area. There is also a memorial plum tree planted by Craig's parents, along with a memorial bench, several bug hotels, bird and hedgehog boxes, bird feeders and two ponds.

In addition to practical gardening skills, the space is used to teach a number of curriculum subjects. Drawing classes are run for Art lessons, perspective drawing in Design and Technology, Science pupils have been making fertiliser and Maths is taught in the outdoor classroom. Two year groups are also being taught horticulture as part of a Personal Achievement Award, accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

So how has the garden helped the pupils? "That question is very difficult as there is so much the garden has done for our pupils", said Lesley. "They have become better critical thinkers and have more transferable skills, whether it is teamwork, communicating ideas or problem solving. They are more knowledgeable about plants, flowers, trees, birds, animals and biodiversity and they understand how to grow their own produce in an organic garden. They have more of a connection with their environment and can make a more informed choice about their diet and what they eat."

As well as using the garden within the school, the pupils are involved in several community projects and 2015 will be their second year of helping the Linwood Community Development Trust with this year's Linwood in Bloom. The school is also building more raised beds around the playground for families in the community to grow their own produce and has many plans to increase enterprise opportunities and the events it runs.

[linwoodhigh.renfrewshire.sch.uk/](http://linwoodhigh.renfrewshire.sch.uk/)

Pupils learn about seed sowing with RHS Community Outreach Officer Angela Smith



Patti Pinto in one of last year's back to back gardens, designed by local schoolchildren as part of Congleton in Bloom's campaign

## My Bloom: Patti Pinto, Congleton in Bloom

### Why do you volunteer with Bloom?

I became involved several years ago to help make our town more inviting for visitors and to enhance civic pride amongst residents. I work with the council and groups of volunteers on public gardens and green spaces and enjoy working with people of all ages, especially children in their school gardens.

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

Winning two RHS Gold medals was pretty fantastic - one from the UK Finals, which was a first for Congleton, and one from North West in Bloom. We're quite a new team in Congleton so it was such a wonderful reward for all the hard work.

We also put the old council polytunnel back into good use by inviting 11 local primary schools to design small gardens, which we built back to back along the tunnel. The children really enjoyed the design and planting and the polytunnel was open throughout the summer so that people - and wildlife! - could visit their gardens.

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

We're going to run another polytunnel project with local schools, and this year we're inviting youth groups and pre-schoolers to get involved too. The theme is *Space and the Planets* and we'll create a series of gardens and also run craft activities and competitions.

It's all part of our plans to regenerate the space into a community growing area - the Grow Zone. We want to offer growing spaces to local residents without gardens and also create composting facilities for the community and the local parks staff to use.

### Finding a voice in the garden



Dean Gordon and Angela Smith

Dean Gordon is in the fourth year of the school and he found his voice in the garden. He is a usually a very quiet pupil but horticulture has enabled Dean to flourish both in school and out. He has taken part in many trips, recently working with a garden group at a seed swap event in Renfrew.

Dean then secured work experience with McLarens Nursery in Uplamoor which has helped him gain considerable horticultural knowledge.

Dean said, "On my work experience I went to McLarens Garden Nurseries. It was a great experience as I have a keen interest in gardening. Because it is near to the end of the season I was helping maintain some plants by weeding and watering. It has given me a further insight into horticulture. It was an AWESOME experience. I went on this placement as I enjoyed building and working in my school's garden."

For more advice on gardening in schools, visit: [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)

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)

# Green Solutions



Nigel Dunnett is Professor of Planting Design and Vegetation Technology, and Director of The Green Roof Centre, University of Sheffield. His work focuses on ecological planting design solutions, including rain gardens, green roofs and pictorial meadows. He is also a designer and consultant, with projects including the London Olympic Park (now the Queen Elizabeth Park). This year he is designing a garden at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show which will show the many benefits of transforming grey places with plants.

**RHS: Your job sounds intriguing, what does Vegetation Technology involve?**  
Vegetation Technology is really the use of modern techniques and knowledge to allow us to grow plants in places that would not normally be considered suitable or appropriate. And it is about using plants and vegetation to give us environmental and human benefits. Green roofs and living walls are good examples.

**RHS: What role do plants play in our towns and cities?**

They are essential! We tend to think of plants as decorative, but of course they do so much more than that – it's only the start. It's difficult to know where to stop: providing clean air and water; food; cooling; shading and making better microclimates; promoting nature and biodiversity; helping to reduce flooding. And of course, making places beautiful – this then has a whole wider range of benefits in terms of human health and well-being.

**RHS: So plants are quiet superheros.**  
They may be quiet, but I like them best when they make an impact! A lot of my work is about making dramatic and colourful plantings for cities – urban meadows and other types of plantings. I do try and achieve a 'wow factor' where possible – I want people to be excited by plants. As well as all the environmental benefits, the thing that inspires me most about plants is the feeling of huge joy and uplift when amongst beautiful planted landscapes.

**RHS: Do you have a particular example in mind?**

The space that really inspired me to work in this whole area was the roof garden on Chicago City Hall, USA. This space, on the city government building, is surrounded by the skyscrapers of the modern city, and yet it is a beautiful piece of nature. It is planted purely with native plants of the region – creating dramatic prairie

landscapes, with groups of trees for shade. This has transformed a useless grey asphalt roof into a place rich in biodiversity, a cooling landscape, and a garden that soaks up the rainfall in a storm. But above all, it struck me as a supremely beautiful place, and convinced me that we can have beauty and ecology at the same time.

**RHS: What can people do in their gardens at home?**

An important thing to remember is that gardening with ecology in mind doesn't have to be about letting everything go wild! For example, people love flower-filled gardens, and so do pollinating insects – but keep the flowers simple and not too highly bred. There is absolutely no need to be tied to very purist rules of

using only native plants. And combine garden art with biodiversity, by making artful habitat piles and bee hotels that look good in themselves. We mustn't forget the importance of trees, and making the most of all the potential layers in a garden – trees, shrubs, perennials – to maximise all the opportunities for wildlife, and this in turn will deliver the widest range of other environmental benefits.

**RHS: What's the idea behind the Hampton Court garden?**

The Hampton Court garden will provide a showcase for a whole range of very practical ideas for how gardens and small urban spaces can be used very positively. We are focusing on a community space to highlight the great potential of gardens to bring people together, and in particular we want to show how it is possible to go from 'Grey to Green', in what might seem the most unpromising of places. We want to show a lot of innovative approaches, and to use the garden to explain and demonstrate how the benefits of plants in cities can be achieved. But we also want to do this in an artful way, to show that scientific principles combined with a creative approach can produce the very best type of garden!

[nigeldunnett.info/](http://nigeldunnett.info/)



Nigel used naturalistic planting to create 'wow' factor at the Olympic Park in London. Above: Measuring up the grey community space in Bristol being transformed as part of this year's RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show.

## Allotment Associations Enjoy a free RHS advisory visit

Could your allotment association be one of the lucky few to receive a free visit from the RHS Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee this year? The RHS committee includes experts on all aspects of growing edible crops and they are making themselves available to share their years of experience and wealth of knowledge.

The visits could take the form of an onsite tour, meeting plot holders and discussing issues, and/or a formal 'Gardeners Question Time' style session, perhaps as part of an evening event. At this stage it is envisaged that the advice will cover aspects of crops and their husbandry.

As this is a new initiative, we will be offering a limited number of visits in the late spring or early summer, so if you would like to have the opportunity



to welcome the RHS to your allotment association, please contact: Barry Newman: [barry.newman@live.co.uk](mailto:barry.newman@live.co.uk) / 01403 711598

Please provide the name of your allotment association, the name of a contact to arrange dates and times, together with an indication of the likely attendance to assist us in visit planning.

Currently there are no plans to charge for these visits.

To read more about the seven RHS plant committees visit: [rhs.org.uk/plantcommittees](http://rhs.org.uk/plantcommittees)

## Top kitchen garden tips



RHS Fruit, Vegetable and Herb committee member Barry Newman shares his top kitchen garden tips.

- In my experience the easiest and most productive way of growing vegetables is in raised beds.
- If at all possible keep grass paths and grass borders away from your vegetable beds. Use wood chip or shredded bark for all paths and surrounds; this is a major deterrent to slugs and snails.
- Always try to rotate your crops to avoid build ups of pest and diseases in the soil and to avoid potential nutrient deficiencies.
- When incorporating manure or other organic material, try to get it on to your plot before the turn of the year. My method is to clear the ground, put a thick layer of the material on the surface and then cover it with weed fabric and weight it down around the edge. Let the worms, warmth and moisture do the work before unwrapping it in Feb/Mar and working it into the surface.
- If space allows try to keep an open trench on your plot. It makes a great receptacle for waste vegetation, grass cuttings and other organic matter which can form the foundation for your peas or beans the following year.
- Keep a plan of your plot showing the current year's planting scheme, so that you can refer to it when working out your seed order for the following year. I find this helps to jog the memory when the crops are cleared in the autumn.
- Each year try something different. A new variety, a new technique or a vegetable you have never grown before. Never stop experimenting and learning.
- Keep a diary; register the weather, planting times and varieties used. Note your successes and failures; this is particularly useful for beginners to gain experience and ensure you grow what you like eating when you want to eat it.



# Greener Streets: Better Lives

Turn something grey to green!

For ideas and resources, visit: [rhs.org.uk/  
GreenerStreetsBetterLives](https://rhs.org.uk/GreenerStreetsBetterLives)

