



Sharing the best in Gardening

# Grass Roots

The RHS Community Update

Issue 29 • Spring 2017

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

## Growing a Green Plan It

The students designing the gardens of the future



Wildlife gardening in Scotland

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 @RHSBloom  
 rhscommunitygardening

Cover image: Alison Findlay, Community Outreach Advisor and mentor with school students on a tour of University of Bristol Botanic Garden at the launch of the RHS Green Plan It Challenge, Bristol (RHS / Guy Harrop)

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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](https://rhs.org.uk/communities)



RHS / GEORGINA BEE

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

Spring is, of course, well under way and Bloom is off a flying start. The theme for this year is wildlife and biodiversity, tying in with the ongoing RHS Greening Grey Britain campaign.

We are encouraging all groups to do what they can to make their gardens more attractive to Britain's wildlife, which is increasingly losing out on habitat – a massive 22,000 hectares of green space was lost between 2006 and 2012\*.

We'd love you to capture and share your grey to green transformations online with the hashtag #GreeningGreyBritain, or by email, for your chance to win from a selection of thousands of mixed spring and

summer wildlife-friendly bulbs by Farmer Gracey ([rhs.org.uk/communityGGB](https://rhs.org.uk/communityGGB)).

This is my first issue as the new *Grass Roots* editor, and it's been an absolute treat to get to know some of you and your many inspiring stories. Please do get in touch if you have one to share, and we always love to hear from you on social media, on Twitter at @RHSBloom and Facebook at [facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening](https://facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening)



Best wishes and happy gardening,  
Emily Braham

\*University of Leicester report, 2015

## Your views

*I recently started a new community garden on the estate I live on in Sidcup, London. Although I couldn't get the housing association to support it (and so I have self-funded it), the other tenants really love it and I have big plans to transform the area.*

*Children often help with watering and deadheading, and people are talking to each other much more.*

*I started gardening roughly seven years ago as part of Bexley in Bloom, where we won both Gold and Silver awards. This gave me the push I needed to pursue a career in gardening, and I subsequently enrolled on a garden design course at Capel Manor College. I am now even working on a garden for the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show!*

**Jacqueline Griffith**  
Sidcup



JACQUELINE GRIFFITH

Please send your letters and your community garden stories to [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk) or to *Grass Roots*, RHS Community Horticulture, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE. Letters may be edited for publication.

# News



Nigel Dunnett with his 2015 RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show design

## Chelsea garden up for grabs

**One lucky community garden could benefit from a long-lasting and wildlife-friendly makeover thanks to an RHS and BBC's *The One Show* competition.**

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2017 Greening Grey Britain garden, designed by Chelsea Gold medal winner Professor Nigel Dunnett, could be adopted by a group following the show.

The garden will be transferred to the winner's plot (up to 250 sq m), with the help of a leading landscaping firm, where it could have maximum 'greening' benefit for years after the show. We want to know

how this garden – designed to be adaptable to even the smallest spaces – could make a difference to your local environment and community, under your group's guidance.

Judging will be carried out by BBC and RHS gardening experts, led by Professor Dunnett. The winner will be announced on 28 April 2017.

To find out more, visit the RHS website or email [GGBchelsea@rhs.org.uk](mailto:GGBchelsea@rhs.org.uk)



## Get creative for bees in the garden

The Wildlife Trusts and RHS are joining together to call for groups to 'bee creative for wild bees in the garden' this year, as part of our ongoing Wild About Gardens campaign. With honeybees often stealing the show, we wanted to draw attention to the plight of the many solitary bees and bumblebees that also need our help, with many in decline due to diminishing habitat. Events will be taking place throughout the growing seasons this year, culminating in a week of celebration and activity in October for Wild About Gardens Week.

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

## Order your bulbs for wildlife

Towns and villages around the UK were aglow with a purple haze earlier this spring thanks to your hard work last autumn, planting six million crocus bulb alongside Rotary groups. This year we are aiming for 10 million bulbs, for even more pollen-rich displays next year.

Groups should put in their orders before 31 July, at the special price of £95 per 5,000 corms. Download the form at [rotarygbi.org/purple4polio-competition](http://rotarygbi.org/purple4polio-competition)

The photo competition from last year's plantings and displays is still open. Enter pictures of your planting event or crocus display before 30 April for your chance to win £700 worth of gardening vouchers. For further information, email [info@rotarygbi.org](mailto:info@rotarygbi.org)

## Grants to improve your patch

Your next community gardening idea could become a reality through local grants raised through The Health Lottery. The People's Health Trust is looking for small projects, designed and run by local people – think a group of residents on an estate, or a collection of people over neighbouring streets. They are also looking for ideas from 'communities of interest' – groups of people who are keen to address an issue they care about.

Applications are open in different parts of the UK at different times. Visit [peopleshealthtrust.org.uk](http://peopleshealthtrust.org.uk) or call 020 7749 9100 for more information.

## New RHS Community team member

Sam Outing recently joined the team as our Programmes Coordinator. He is



joining us from the RHS fundraising team, and is looking forward to getting to know more of you and helping your Bloom year run smoothly.

# Congratulations Bloom 2017 Finalists!

This year 79 communities have made it through to the UK Finals of RHS Britain in Bloom – the nation’s most prestigious community gardening awards.

Ten of the finalists have never competed at a national level before, including Otley in Yorkshire and Kilconquhar in Scotland. Uttoxeter, Staffordshire and Sark, Guernsey are competing in the finals again after a break of more than 10 years.

The finalists will lead RHS Britain in Bloom judges on a tour of their areas in August, ahead of the award ceremony in Llandudno on 27 October.

VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Donaghmore	Ulster
Filby	Anglia
Pebworth	Heart of England
St Aubin	Jersey
Sark	Guernsey

SMALL TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bothwell	Scotland
Ponteland	Northumbria
Randalstown	Ulster
Uppingham	East Midlands
Wareham	South

LARGE VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Cannington	South West
Coupar Angus	Scotland
Croston	North West
Cullybackey	Ulster
Dalston	Cumbria
Hutton Cranswick	Yorkshire
Market Bosworth	East Midlands
Usk	Wales

TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Barnoldswick	North West
Forres	Scotland
Halstead	Anglia
Otley	Yorkshire
Pembrey and Burry Port	Wales
St Saviour	Jersey
Sherborne	South West
Uttoxeter	Heart of England

SMALL VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bray	Thames and Chilterns
Kilconquhar	Scotland
Stanghow	Northumbria

LARGE TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Altrincham	North West
Ballymena	Ulster
Belper	East Midlands
Chesham	Thames and Chilterns
Farnham	South East
Kendal	Cumbria
Truro	South West





Crocus planting at  
Coupar Angus



London Bridge

TEAM LONDON BRIDGE



Giggles and  
Wiggles nursery,  
Newcastle  
Under Lyme

SMALL CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bury	North West
Canterbury	South East
Colchester	Anglia
Derry City	Ulster
Kirkcaldy	Scotland
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Heart of England
Oadby & Wigston	East Midlands

CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
London Borough of Islington	London
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	London
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	London

LARGE CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Belfast City	Ulster
London Borough of Ealing	London
London Borough of Hillingdon	London

COASTAL UP TO 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Hunstanton	Anglia
Newcastle	Ulster
North Berwick	Scotland
Sidmouth	South West
Silloth on Solway	Cumbria
Whitby	Yorkshire

COASTAL OVER 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Deal	South East
Llandudno	Wales
Newquay	South West
St Helier	Jersey

URBAN COMMUNITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Aldridge	Heart of England
Clifton	South West
Didsbury	North West
Littleover	East Midlands
Starbeck	Yorkshire
Uddingston Pride	Scotland
Walthamstow Village	London

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID)	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Blackburn Town Centre	North West
London Bridge	London
Mansfield BID	East Midlands
Norwich	Anglia
Penrith BID	Cumbria

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Aberdeen	Scotland
Elswick	North West
Harrogate	Yorkshire
Hillsborough	Ulster
Oldham	North West
Portishead	South West
St Peter Port	Guernsey



North Berwick

ROSEMARY OBERLANDER

## 6 Greening Grey Britain

### ▼ Recycling

East Haven Together volunteers with their pioneering growing secret – biosolids dried to 110°C and used as slow release fertiliser.

### Wildlife ►

Particular attention has been paid to attracting pollinators, such as this early bumblebee, seen here feeding on pollen-rich eryngium flowers.



EAST HAVEN TOGETHER



Garden designer Karen Laing created a low-maintenance and wildlife-friendly bed for the centre of the village, which recognises the town's rich history.

STEPH WILKIE

# Walking on the wild side

**For one group on the east coast of Scotland, a momentous anniversary was the catalyst for a renewed community purpose focusing on sustainability. The local environment has benefited, but the group's influence has been felt much further afield too, as Emily Braham finds out.**

Wendy Murray, a trustee of East Haven's Beautiful Scotland group, agrees that gardening is often a natural portal into conservation, but she laughs as she tells me that three years ago she had no particular interest in either.

In 2013, the town was gearing up for its 800th anniversary the following year. Residents wanted to celebrate, but were unsure where to begin. East Haven was, in Wendy's words, "Looking awful. It was quite run down and people kept saying to me that we have to do something."

And so she made it her job (one that remains almost full-time) to gather the aspirations of the town and weave them into a programme of action. "My background is in social work and health, so I guess I have the experience of working with people," she explains.

Rather than selecting just a few of the more popular ideas, the group ambitiously set about addressing them all, entering Beautiful Scotland – the Scottish extension of RHS Britain in Bloom – at the same time.

### Creating a lasting legacy

Helpfully, key themes emerged. Protecting the natural environment, celebrating East Haven's identity as an ancient fishing village, and improving the experience for visitors were common threads.

The group set a cracking pace, and went on to take home a Silver Gilt Bloom award in recognition of their tireless work. A new community garden was commissioned to reconnect the village, which had been physically divided by a railway line since 1838. Landscape designer Karen Laing made use of a disused fishing boat as a central feature, while a series of 'wave beds' and dry-stone walls framed hundreds of native coastal plants and grasses – a low-maintenance garden that reflected the region's long history.

It was clear by now that the natural environment was an important part of East Haven and people wanted to see it protected, but thus far, Wendy says, their efforts had been ad hoc. Aware that wildflower meadows were in decline, they



EAST HAVEN TOGETHER

EAST HAVEN TOGETHER

considered 'seed bombing' the coastline. Wendy now describes this as wake-up call, as they realised that interfering with natural ecosystems could inadvertently cause more harm than good.

### Finding focus

In order to find some direction, the group created its own sustainability strategy. Wendy drew on her own experience in management to partner with relevant programmes such as Tayside Biodiversity Partnership, while linking to Scottish government priorities, such as the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity.

In 2015, the group became a new independent charity, East Haven Together. The three pillars of Bloom – environmental responsibility, community and horticulture – provided the overarching focus.

The region's rich natural environment also made conservation a logical focus. East Haven is the last known natural growing site for priority plant species, greater yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*), while kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) has been planted in denoted Sites of Special Scientific Interest, as the sole food source for the endangered small blue butterfly.

Early signs show their work in habitat creation is paying off. Last year, they recorded the peacock, small tortoiseshell and painted lady butterflies, all of which are in serious decline. They have also

anecdotally seen an increase in hedgehog numbers following the creation of specialist corridors. This year, they plan on planting native sea pea (*Lathyrus japonicus*) along the dunes.

### Beginning with people

While East Haven Together has grown into something much larger than first imagined, for Wendy, it all began with people. "While the high-level strategies are always there to guide us, our day-to-day activities are driven by a grass roots approach from all our volunteers," she says.

Wendy says that though the community-wide transformation has required many hands and a central driving force, communication – especially face to face – has been key. "If you sit and talk to people, build those relationships, they're much more likely to commit."

Of course it helps that the town has only around 100 residents, but at least 30 of them are regularly involved. "I feel very proud of that", says Wendy. "I have been so inspired by the contribution that everyone has made. Originally it was about beautifying the village, but we've all developed – even when they're gardening now, people don't say that this will look beautiful – they tell us this will be great for the bees or we might get the peacocks (butterflies) this year."

◀ **Conservation**  
Volunteers cut grass along East Haven's Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in order to support rare greater yellow rattle and other priority species.

▼ **Education**  
East Haven Together's efforts in conservation culminated in a two-day 'BioBlitz' in 2016, with children taking part in monitoring and creating habitats for wildlife.



EAST HAVEN TOGETHER

## Share your Greening Grey Britain transformations

To help inspire your wildlife-friendly projects this year, we are inviting groups to share the progress of their grey-to-green transformations on social media. Hundreds of summer and spring bulbs are up for grabs. See [rhs.org.uk/communityGGB](https://rhs.org.uk/communityGGB) for more information.

Want to help support bees in your garden? Along with the Wildlife Trusts, we are calling on people to get 'creative for bees in the garden' this year. You can help by surveying bees in your garden before and after your planting efforts, adding the results to citizen science portal Polli:Nation.

[wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk](https://wildaboutgardensweek.org.uk)  
[opalexplornature.org/polli-nation](https://opalexplornature.org/polli-nation)

# RHS Advice



RHS / FIONA MCLEOD

## Shady gardens for wildlife

Join the campaign to turn grey spaces into beautiful green places for people and wildlife. We will share ideas throughout the year to inspire your group's Greening Grey Britain activities.

A garden without any shade would make life more difficult for gardeners and wildlife alike; variation in habitat is key to promoting biodiversity, and shade brings a tranquillity and shelter to our gardens.

Naturally, plants won't grow as fast in lower light levels or where tree roots rob them of moisture and water. It's also true that plants in shade are generally less prolific flowerers.

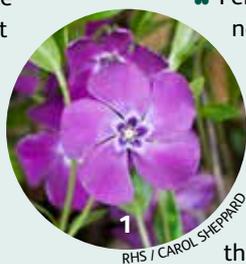
Shade ranges from dappled light shade to profound gloom under evergreen trees or overhanging balconies. In truth, your options in the latter cases are limited, and perhaps such places are best suited to compost bins, sheds, water butts or giving way entirely to wildlife – think a neat stack of logs to provide shelter. Fungi will enjoy such conditions too, and in turn will become food for insects and other creatures.

For an attractive and wildlife-friendly shady garden, bold use of leaf shapes and colours may be the best approach.

## Pick of the shade-loving plants

❁ While all hydrangeas tolerate shade, the ones that have most value for pollinators are *H. paniculata* – with its pyramidal flower spikes that age well, remaining attractive even in winter – and climbing *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*. The latter can be induced to scale tall trees although initial growth rate might be slow.

❁ Deadnettles are good for pollinators; *Lamium maculatum* (2) spreads well and is often called on for sites where little else will grow due to depth of shade and dryness of soil.



RHS / CAROL SHEPPARD

❁ Periwinkles (*Vinca*) are not notably good for wildlife, but in those difficult places – under evergreen trees and shrubs for example – they clothe and protect the soil and their cheerful early flowers (1) will please gardeners.



RHS / HERBARIUM

❁ Mahonia puts out its insect-friendly flowers (3) early, at a time when other flowers are scarce. Its sculptural leaves look good all year, while its berries support birds in summer. *Mahonia x media* 'Winter Sun' is particularly desirable.



RHS / CAROL SHEPPARD

❁ *Fatsia japonica*, Japanese aralia, has large ivy-like flowers relished by insects, and is especially striking in shade with its large, hand-shaped, evergreen leaves.

❁ Hardy geraniums (4) are a mainstay of shade gardening and their flowers prized by insects. *Geranium phaeum* 'Album' for example is reliable in dry shade and is widely sold.



RHS / LIZ BIRTH

❁ Hellebores, like mahonia, flowers when other insect-friendly sources are scarce. RHS Plant Finder lists nearly 700 cultivars but for the helping wildlife, the economical seed-raised strains such as of *Helleborus x hybridus* are a good choice.

# Making a mini fernery

Ferns will generally grow well mixed into any planting where the sun is not direct or the soil very dry, but are especially valued in shady areas, on the north-facing side of walls or beneath trees. While moist soil is best, by careful choice and occasional summer watering in dry regions, ferns can be grown in a wide range of conditions. Adding a bucketful of garden compost per square metre is all that is needed to prepare the growing space. Here are a few to consider in your patch.

❁ *Asplenium scolopendrium* AGM (RHS Award of Garden Merit): Hart's tongue fern; native growing up to 60cm high. Common in woods, banks and the side of ditches, it is a good choice where the ground slopes. Remains green in winter.

❁ *Dryopteris filix-mas* AGM: male fern, native. This large deciduous fern (up to 1.2m) will often spread and is a good choice where larger areas need to be covered, especially as young ferns unfurl attractively as 'croziers'.



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / ANURAKPONG

❁ *Polypodium vulgare*: common polypody is a robust, 30cm-high evergreen native that can withstand difficult conditions. In fact, adventurous gardeners could even try wiring small plants to mossy crannies on trees. Related *Polypodium x mantoniae* 'Cornubiense' (50cm) has an RHS AGM and is a dense, varied fern.

❁ *Polystichum aculeatum* AGM: hard shield fern. Evergreen, native shuttlecock fern up to 60cm high. It is a particularly good option beneath deciduous trees.

❁ *Polystichum setiferum* AGM: soft shield fern. A tall (1.2m) vigorous evergreen native fern often used beneath deciduous trees. *Polystichum setiferum* Plumosomultilobum Group is similar, but is dense and mossy.

# MEET THE POLLINATORS



RHS / ANDREW HALSTEAD

## HAWK MOTHS

These are the largest moths in Europe; the convolvulus hawk moth has a wingspan of up to 12 cm. The caterpillars are also large and often striking. Worldwide, this group contains the most well-known moth pollinators

- ❁ **Name:** *Sphingidae* family. There are 17 species that can be found regularly in the UK, eight of which are immigrants; they visit from Europe in the summer and don't usually overwinter in the UK.
- ❁ **Spot them:** They are characterised by their thick bodies and held-back wings, which give them an 'arrow' appearance when resting. Most fly at night, although bee hawk moths and hummingbird varieties are day-fliers. The caterpillars can be found feeding on leaves, but are often well camouflaged.
- ❁ **Food:** The adults that feed do so from tubular flowers, reaching the nectar with their long proboscises (straw-shaped mouth parts).
- ❁ **Life cycle:** Caterpillars eat until fully grown then pupate before emerging as an adult moth. Most species overwinter in the pupa stage underground or in leaf litter. The adults live for a few months.
- ❁ **Who knew?:** The narrow-bordered bee hawk moth and the broad-bordered bee hawk moth mimic bees, having yellow stripy bodies and transparent wings.
- ❁ **How to help:** You can provide larval food plant and by letting some areas of your garden grow wild. Some species of hawk moth specialise on particular trees, such as the pine hawk moth.

❁ Camellia (5) are spectacular but not of especial merit for wildlife. Nonetheless, like other ericaceous shrubs (*Pieris* and *rhododendron* for example), they are valuable where soil conditions are acidic and can also be grown in pots in the shade.



RHS / CAROL SHEPPARD

❁ Fuchsia are famously awash with bees in summer and, except when in deep shade, will flower freely into early autumn. *Fuchsia* 'Mrs Popple' is an old cultivar, is widely sold and has the single flowers favoured by insects.



RHS / SUE DREN

❁ Sweet box, *Sarcococca confusa*, has richly scented, little white flowers in late winter, followed by berries – both good for wildlife. One the most valuable shrubs for shady gardens.

❁ Gardeners tend to love or loathe ivy. Loathe because it can be a 'spreader' damaging fences and disfiguring masonry. But where it has room to grow, its autumn flowers and winter berries are valuable for insects and birds. Common ivy is the most resilient.

❁ Bulbs are a mainstay of shade, especially under deciduous trees. The bulbs are in leaf when trees are leafless, and then disappear under the ground for the summer. Good choices for wildlife include crocus (6), grape hyacinth and snowdrops.

How to...

# Sow seeds outdoors

Because seedlings are vulnerable to competing vegetation and weather, it is usually worth preparing the soil well. Remove weeds and debris, and add organic matter such as rotted manure or compost at up to two bucketfuls per square metre, along with 50g of general fertiliser per square metre. This is best forked or dug into the soil, before the seedbed is prepared.

Exceptions include 'seed balls' (small balls of clay holding seeds that are scattered whole) and no-dig gardening, where the ground is sown undisturbed. These methods can work but, with less control over the crucial establishment phase, repeat sowing is more likely to be necessary.

Seeds need air, moisture and warmth to germinate. Typically hardy plants, like lettuce and peas, require about 7°C, while tender plants such as courgettes and runner beans need about 12°C for good germination. This occurs from March and mid-May, depending on where you are in the UK. Soil must also be reasonably dry, as wet soil contains little air. Moisture is assured by sowing beneath the soil, but not too deep as seeds have limited resources to send shoots to the surface.



**1** Remove weeds and excessive compaction, usually by digging, before sowing starts. Before sowing, the ground can be pressed by treading if it seems too loose. The ideal to aim for is very loose soil on top but 30mm down, it should be firm.

RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

## RHS Advisors' Corner

*I am based in Wanstead, east London and have just taken on responsibility for two small spaces in my local area, working with Wanstead Community Gardeners.*

*One of the gardens is west-facing, is on the corner of a road, has a large tree and gets a lot of sun (pictured right). The south-facing space gets sun in the morning but is shady in the afternoon.*

*I'm able to maintain the spaces once per week, and ideally would like something which looks attractive throughout the summer and neat and tidy in the winter.*

*Could you recommend what I could plant as we move into spring/summer?*

Dan Slipper,  
Wanstead Community Gardeners



### RHS Chief Horticulturist Guy Barter says:

While the west-facing site will get much sun at certain times of day, the shade of the tree will limit what can be grown, as will the tree roots, which will rob the soil of nutrients and moisture.

In such conditions, real toughies are called for. From the pictures

you sent, it looks like you already have two such bushes; *Berberis thunbergii*, possibly the purple-leaved form with yellow spring flowers and red autumn berries.



RHS / TIM SANDALL



RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

**2** Draw a groove or drill deep enough to cover the seeds, ranging from 10mm deep for small seeds such as onions, to 50mm for large bean seeds. The easiest way to make shallow drills is to press a broom handle or lath into the soil. This firms the soil at the base of the drill which enhances water uptake by germinating seed.



RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

**3** The seed can now be placed in the drill – the finger and thumb method is often easiest for beginners.

In dry weather, water can be dribbled down the drill to make sure the seed has enough to drink, but it is better to have watered the area the previous day.



RHS

**4** Cover the seeds by raking a little soil back over them. Once covered, the soil should be firmed to make sure the seed and soil are in good contact, without too much pressure.

Labelling helps to keep track of sowings, while a covering of fleece will exclude pests, prevent cats from frequenting the seedbed and warms the soil. Some brushwood on top can help deter foxes from digging up the seedbed.

Covering the soil is a good practice, and lesser periwinkle (*Vinca minor* – it has violet flowers in spring, pictured left) and *Liriope muscari*, mauve flowers in summer, are two robust plants that will do this well.

Covering walls with climbers is a cheap and effective way of adding greenery. Ivy is a good climber for stressful situations and will clothe walls and also provide ground cover. Your other site appears also to have a tree in the middle, covered with ivy, which is great cover for wildlife. However, it can indicate poor tree health and if so, you may need to replace it at some stage.



RHS / WENDY WESLEY

Other interesting plant options to consider include *Phlomis russeliana* (which does well at RHS Garden Wisley in Surrey) with grey-green, textured leaves all year and mustard flowers in summer. *Sedum* (Herbstfreude Group) 'Herbstfreude' is a robust sun-lover that tolerates some shade, producing abundant pink flowers (below left) relished by pollinators, in

later summer. Bear's breech (*Acanthus mollis*) is a perennial plant with handsome summer leaves and two-lipped purple and white flowers.



RHS / CAROL SHEPPARD

In a relatively warm and dry area such as London, they also need no water once established.

The wall at the back would support wall shrubs such as *Pyracantha*, which has yellow or orange-red autumn berries (below) after white spring flowers and a bold evergreen habit, and *Jasminum nudiflorum* which has yellow flowers in early spring.

In both cases, you can add bulbs for extra colour and interest.

Does your group have a question for the RHS advice team? Email [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk)



# Growing a Green Plan It

The RHS Green Plan It Challenge is inspiring teenagers to rethink green space and the role of horticulture

In 2014, it was becoming increasingly clear that horticulture had an image problem. The RHS *Horticulture Matters* report released in the same year called it a 'crisis in the industry', with 72 percent of businesses unable to fill vacancies, and a widespread perception among young people that horticulture jobs were for the unskilled.

An action plan ensued, with pledges from government and business to entice more young people to horticulture. For the RHS, the Green Plan It Challenge was a chance to match real-world scenarios with classroom learning. Students could see first-hand what a career in the industry could look like through taking part in a 10-week programme.

Student-led, it allowed 774 young people to explore the world of plants for themselves, as well as the needs of their community and the environment, connecting with National Curriculum subjects such as Science, Design and Technology,

Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship.

The students, aged 12 to 13, were supported by an industry mentor and an RHS Community Outreach Advisor, to work in teams of up to six to develop creative solutions to a horticultural challenge. The final designs were presented and displayed at eight regional competitions in December 2016, inspiring many of the schools to work towards the practical implementation of their visions.

## Outdoor learning in Northumberland

Tracey Young, a teacher St Paul's Middle School in Alnwick, Northumberland, had hoped that Green Plan It would help students tap into their creative sides and learn new skills, but she was surprised at just how much they embraced the challenge.

"For us it was very much about giving children an opportunity that was real," she explains. "It was the first year that

we did anything this big, and it was a bit daunting. But it was amazing because all the kids came through and it showed in their presentation."

The school entered a team of five students, all aged 12 and part of an alternative, hands-on learning programme that aims to boost social and practical skills.

Calling themselves Forest Folk, they worked alongside their mentor, garden designer Christine Liddle, and RHS Community Outreach Advisor Christine Wright, to design an accessible, wildlife-friendly outdoor learning space for the school grounds on its underused, leafy boundary.

They zoned the garden, based on soil type and sun/shade conditions. Learning about the wildlife in the area, the team set about designing suitable plants and habitat, including a hedgehog house and a bug hotel. The design also included learning zones, a tree swing,



RHS / SIRASTUDIO



RHS / EDWARD SHAW

FAR LEFT: Students get a tour of Kirkley College's gardens, Northumberland, at the regional launch of the Green Plan It Challenge

LEFT: A model display designed by one of the school teams, Birmingham

BELOW: Students on a tour of the Beth Chatto Gardens, Colchester.



RHS / JOE HIGHAM

privacy screening and a stage for school performances.

The need for accessibility to the garden was key as one of the pupils, Kuba, uses a walking frame and couldn't get to the site easily, so his experiences were worked into the final design.

As the school is moving towards a two-tier system, with the middle school sadly to close later this year, it's hoped the garden could be adopted by the primary students, serving as a legacy for the middle school. Despite the closure, Head Teacher Maria Wilson said the programme will have long-lasting benefit for the students, with the team already signing up for practical lessons in the summer to build their gardening knowledge.

"It really enriched their lives," she said. "I can't express just how much it helped grow their confidence, and they had so much enthusiasm – in their presentation the teacher had to stop them talking about it because they had so much to say!"

### Growing up: vertical gardens in London

At Swanlea School in Tower Hamlets, students had a different set of problems to deal with. While those in rural Northumberland associated horticulture with tractors and fields, in urban east London, students were unlikely to have a garden.

Aware of the shortage of green space in the area and the potential benefit that more gardens could provide, the pupils set their sights on a community-wide solution. Working with industry mentor landscape designer Lily Bakratsa, design and technology teacher Chris Nairn and RHS Community Outreach Advisor Chris Young, they imagined a series of balcony gardens for a nearby, typical block of flats, which could be copied.

Mr Nairn sought to guide them towards a practical solution to the question they posed as their central theme: "How are we supposed to design a garden when we all live in flats and don't have any?"

He was surprised at just how absorbed the students became in the task, with the team consulting residents to find out what would work for them. The students envisioned food planting in upcycled drainpipes, along with multipurpose furniture and built-in storage to cater for residents' mixed use of their small outside spaces.

"I couldn't have expected the positive effect it had on our students," the teacher said. "It was a real stepping stone to understanding how they could contribute to a socio-economically deprived area, while learning about horticulture."

The team, Swanleaf, are now exploring how to make the design a reality, and are busy planning a showcase display for RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show.

**For all enquiries relating to the Green Plan It Challenge 2017, please email [greenplanit@rhs.org.uk](mailto:greenplanit@rhs.org.uk)**



EMER DAVIDSON



EMER DAVIDSON

## Spring at the playground

**Sharon McMaster started a garden at a primary school in Ballycarrickmaddy, Northern Ireland in 2011. It has since grown into a year-round outdoor programme for all ages, incorporating cooking lessons that make use of fresh home-grown produce. In 2016, Sharon was named RHS Campaign for School Gardening Champion of the Year. She gives us the view from the playground this spring.**

Sunny, swaying daffodils and narcissi signal the arrival of spring. We can finally press on with the busy work of creating a colourful and bountiful fruit, flower and vegetable garden.

The schoolchildren were chomping at the bit to get back out in the garden by February, unable to get their hands dirty since last October. For some of them – students range from four to 10 years old in age – it was their first time.

At this time of year the beds are empty, so it's a great opportunity to give them the freedom to dig and explore, which they love. As the season gets going, the beds will fill up, but I always keep one bare so they can keep exploring the soil. I want them to learn that everything comes from here. Some children are content to look for worms or dig for treasure, others really get into the science of it.

In spring there's lots going on in the beds, and by April it's in full swing. We work with fast-growing crops that they can eat as a reward. It's hard for the youngsters to wait a long time to see a result.

We began with pea shoots on the windowsill in February, so they can pinch

and taste them before they are planted in March, it's a chance to teach them about growing and discover the enjoyment that comes from it.

In April we sow a wonderful mix of bee and butterfly-attracting flower seeds – these contain around 45 cultivars for a burst of colour in borders in the summer and autumn. This is a great opportunity for the children to observe different seeds and to teach them some good sowing techniques. We sow this mix in modules in a polytunnel using a good organic seed compost, and plant out the modules into their final location about five weeks later. The Northern Ireland climate is a cool and damp one, so delaying sowing gives better results.

Our schools are off all July and August, but it's lovely to come back in September to the abundance of blooms before the children set about gathering the seeds they produce to store for the following year. Last year they pressed the flowers as an art project to preserve their delicate flower heads and their fond memories of time spent in the school garden.



RHS / JASON INGRAM

# RHS Affiliated Societies

## Dig for community

From the original land of the commons to the current urban food-growing renaissance, the humble allotment has a long history. Provided to returned soldiers at the end of the First World War, then rolled out en masse with the 'Dig for Victory' campaign in the Second World War, local access to food growing remains a hotly contested issue in many parts of the UK.

In our cities, allotments are, of course, especially prized, with increasing demand for green space. And in a mirror to our urban diversity, allotments too are taking different shapes, with turmeric neighbouring thyme, or Chilean guava next to the more familiar raspberry.

In the north London suburb of Enfield, Wendy Wong has introduced a taste of China to the Oakwood North Allotments with dazzling success, including her prized pak choi. She took several first-place prizes in the Oakwood Horticultural Society show, and her lush leafy greens have encouraged others to turn their hands to more exotic alternative crops.

"I like to grow Chinese vegetables because they are delicious in lots of different cooking styles and dishes," she says.

Wendy says the ideal conditions for her favourite Chinese greens are plenty of sunshine, with seeds germinated in high, raised beds to prevent attack by slugs and snails and fed with good animal fertiliser, such as chicken or horse manure.

## Horticulture federations – how could they help you?

If your allotment is battling a closure or you need advice on running an event, horticulture federations may be able to help.

Local membership could offer your group access to relevant events, judges training, speakers and advice to help you make a bigger impact in your community.

See our website for details of your local federation [rhs.org.uk/federations-and-guilds](https://rhs.org.uk/federations-and-guilds). If you belong to a federation that is not listed here, please send the details to [affiliated@rhs.org.uk](mailto:affiliated@rhs.org.uk)

## Share the plot

*How has your allotment changed over the years? We'd love to hear your story.*

Is your local plot still growing strong after generations, and if so, how has the way you work changed over the years?

Has your plot has been passed down through the family? Perhaps you've introduced an unusual fruit or vegetable that is the pride of the allotment, or maybe you've gone organic.

Share your allotment story and images with [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk) or on social media at [facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening](https://facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening) and [@RHS\\_Bloom](https://twitter.com/RHS_Bloom)

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