

# Grass Roots

The RHS Community Update

Issue 32 • Winter 2017/2018

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



From  
planter  
to plate

Food growing special

Year-round  
growing guide

Create an orchard

Build your plastic  
bottle greenhouse



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 @RHSBloom  
 rhscommunitygardening

Cover image: a visitor on the Apple Trail at Wisley (RHS/Helen Yates)

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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)



# Welcome...

...to the winter issue of *Grass Roots*, the magazine for community gardening groups, including Britain in Bloom, It’s Your Neighborhood and RHS Affiliated Societies.

Hopefully you’ve all enjoyed a very well-deserved rest after the cracking pace of the growing season, judging tours and celebration events around the country. Somehow, though, I doubt the cold weather has kept you indoors for long!

We’re looking forward to embarking on another year of gardening with you, and will no doubt be moved and inspired by your renewed efforts to get your communities growing in 2018.

We are also excited to launch another year of Greening Grey Britain funding, offering dozens of you up to £500 towards

plants and material costs, along with direct support to transform the spaces where you live. We’re looking for gardening projects that help tackle issues around climate change, wellbeing, biodiversity and food security. So to get your creative juices flowing, or at least offer a little food for thought, we’re kicking off the first *Grass Roots* of the year with a focus on edibles. Best wishes and happy gardening,



*Emily*  
Emily Braham, Editor

## Your views – Wildlife gardening embraced by school

*I wanted to tell you about an inspirational school that puts gardening and wildlife at the centre of activities. For the past 10 years, Anne Cronin and Caroline Dobson, both teachers at Colleton Primary School, Twyford, have run a weekly gardening club at lunchtime, though wildlife learning permeates through the whole school curriculum. The children grow fruit and vegetables and helped sow a wildflower meadow, a traditional hedge border and a mini orchard with cherry, apple and plum trees. The school has created a new sensory garden with the children. It includes a pond so they can learn about wildlife, and a woodland play-area where they are planning to grow native anemones, bluebells and wild garlic.*

*The children learn first-hand about the importance of bees through the school’s hives, from which they harvest honey. The school also has free-range chickens, which the children are responsible for looking after! Lessons make the most of these resources, with children using*



*fresh produce from the school’s plot in their cooking curriculum.*  
*The school deservedly won the Mark Mattock Schools Challenge Award for 2017 in Thames and Chiltern in Bloom.*  
**Judith Deveson, Thames and Chiltern in Bloom coordinator.**

**Send in a letter by 30 February 2018 about your group’s experience of growing veg, and how it’s enriched your community, for your chance to win a copy of Carol Klein’s *Grow Your Own Veg Journal*.**

Please send your letters 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.

Print correction: We apologise for the following errors in *Grass Roots*, Autumn 2017: St Leodegarius Church, Nottingham (East Midlands) and Mytholmroyd Station Partnership, Hebden Bridge (Yorkshire) also received It’s Your Neighbourhood National Certificates of Distinction.

The Open University, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire (Thames & Chilterns in Bloom) won a National Certificate of Distinction for Parks.

# News



The Duchess of Cambridge at Robin Hood Primary School.

## A right royal visit

The Duchess of Cambridge visited green-fingered pupils at Robin Hood Primary & Nursery School in Kingston Vale in November to celebrate 10 years of the RHS Campaign for School Gardening.

Her Royal Highness got to work with some of the school’s 5–11 year old pupils, planting spring-flowering bulbs and whittling sticks for the school’s bug hotel, ‘Buggingham Palace’. She chatted to the keen, young gardeners about their love for garden-based learning and shared her own passion for gardening.

The Duchess also spoke with the school’s Outdoor Learning Leader, Sally Spires, and spokespeople from the RHS about the benefits of outdoor education. A recent

survey conducted by the RHS Campaign for School Gardening of its members, found that 98 per cent feel that improving the mental health of their pupils is a top priority, and four in five have used gardening to boost young people’s health and wellbeing.

The campaign works with schools like Robin Hood to help them develop outdoor learning programmes that can achieve these benefits. Pete Boulton, Headteacher at Robin Hood, said: “Gardening and outdoor learning have become an essential part of the curriculum. The development of a creative and engaging outdoor learning environment has enhanced our classroom-based learning, and our staff and children have benefitted from the invaluable skills of collaboration and teamwork. It’s helped develop their confidence and resilience in a sociable and stimulating environment.”

Launched in 2007, the RHS Campaign for School Gardening aims to give all children access to gardening and the outdoors, and now has more than 34,500 schools and youth groups signed up. The campaign team has regularly witnessed the direct positive impact of gardening on young people’s development, including improved literacy, numeracy and motor skills, as well as boosted confidence and improved communication.



RHS/LUKE MACGREGOR

## RHS urges caution on plant disease

The charity is warning of a new threat to popular UK garden plants, including cherry, lavender and rosemary. *Xylella fastidiosa* – a bacterium that restricts water movement in plants – has already caused devastation on the continent. Future-proof your gardens by visiting [rhs.org.uk/science/plant-health-in-gardens/protect-your-garden](https://rhs.org.uk/science/plant-health-in-gardens/protect-your-garden) for advice.

## Free advice for RHS groups

Don’t forget that all Bloom, It’s Your Neighbourhood and Affiliated Society groups are entitled to free expert advice from the RHS. Just email [gardeningadvice@rhs.org.uk](mailto:gardeningadvice@rhs.org.uk) or phone **01483 479700** 10am to 1pm Monday to Friday, making clear your group’s details.

## Trees could reduce asthma risk

Large numbers of trees in urban areas could reduce the risk and severity of asthma attacks, particularly in polluted areas, according to a study by the University of Exeter’s medical school. The study, published in *Environment International*, could influence public health policy, suggesting tree planting could help reduce the damaging effects of air pollution. [exeter.ac.uk/news/university/title\\_622600\\_en.html](https://exeter.ac.uk/news/university/title_622600_en.html)

## Tree-planting grants

The Tree Council is offering grants for school- and community-based tree planting, with particular interest in projects that work with people under the age of 16. Projects of between £100 and £700 could be funded, with successful applicants receiving up to 75 per cent towards their planting costs.



RHS/TIM SANDALL





# Green a grey space

**Transform a community space in 2018 and inspire the next generation to grow – new funding available!**

Is there a grey space in your area that you'd love to transform into a beautiful green oasis that could benefit the community and the environment? Do you have an existing and inclusive gardening idea that could bridge the gap between older and younger generations?

This year we're continuing to connect our experienced Bloomers and community gardeners with young green thumbs as part of Greening Grey Britain. The RHS is offering a number of groups some expert hands-on support, plus up to £500 worth of plants and materials to help communities bring their green visions to life. Imagine dull, tarmacked corners reborn as vibrant, colourful pockets, drab alleyways made lush and green, or a patch of unloved wasteland transformed into a productive garden.

Grow for good with one of these themes: health and wellbeing, wildlife, food or climate change. Check out a few ideas to the right.



RHS / JULIE HOWDEN

## Health and wellbeing

**Create opportunities for people at risk of isolation to connect with each other and with nature – there's a chance you'll help grow a lasting passion. Grow plants to stimulate the senses such as sweet peas for scent, *Verbena bonariensis* for their tactile square stems, and grasses for a soothing sound as they sway in the wind.**

## Plants for a purpose

**Here are a few hard-working plants that offer specific benefits to your garden. With the next issue we'll be sending you some brilliant mixed cosmos seeds to help bring a splash of colour and attract pollinators to your transformed space.**



RHS / MARK WINWOOD

### Borage (*Borago officinalis*)

This easy-to-grow herb pulls in the pollinators and delights us with its delicate cucumber-like scent, so suits a productive, wildlife- and climate-aware garden. Borage often naturalises and self-seeds, reappearing year after year.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

### Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*)

These fuzzy, reliable pot-fillers feel great under big and little fingers, so suit sensory gardens. They can also be used on green roofs and can help trap pollutants for a climate-sensitive garden.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

### Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*)

With their bright and unmistakable heads, sunflowers add cheer to any space, so could be especially rewarding in a garden that offers a mini retreat for visitors. Pollinators will be pleased too!



RHS / TIM SANDALL

### Love in a mist (*Nigella damascena*)

An upright, bushy annual with feathery foliage. Delicate pale blue summer flowers are followed by decorative, inflated seed capsules. This is another great option for pollinators.

## Food

Swap the content of some of your floral street planters for edible produce and get passers-by involved with the offer of fresh food or herbs (see page 6). Soup shares and pop-up stalls with produce-swapping are a great way to draw in the crowds.



RHS / GAVIN HARDY

## Wildlife

Sow a wildflower meadow on verges or in the borders of your garden, or if there's room, make a bigger splash with a greater diversity of planting to welcome bees, butterflies and other wildlife. You could create a wildlife pond, choose plants that offer food and habitat for range of species and add bird and bat boxes.



RHS / PAUL DEBOIS



BARNOLDSWICK IN BLOOM / DAVID WHIPP

## Climate change

Create a green roof or green wall to help reduce water runoff and the urban heat island effect (a simpler green wall can be achieved with climbers and trellis). This could also trap pollutants and insulate your building. Use swales in areas prone to flooding; replace paving with gravel, grass or groundcovers; or adopt other water-saving measures.

## How to apply

Look for a forgotten corner in your local area that's ripe for transformation and start assembling your team!

Applications should show how young people will be involved and who else will be taking part.

One project we funded in 2017 saw Hammersmith Academy pupils (pictured top right) interview people at risk of social isolation at a neighbouring support centre, before designing and planting a space to suit them.

Projects should aim to benefit the community and environment in terms of health and wellbeing, wildlife, food growing or climate change. If you have your own bright idea outside of these themes, do let us know!

All Britain in Bloom, It's Your Neighbourhood, RHS Affiliated Societies and RHS Campaign for School Gardening groups are eligible to apply.

**See [rhs.org.uk/communities](https://rhs.org.uk/communities) for details and to apply before 14 February. If you're already transforming spaces, share your before and after images on social media #greeninggreybritain.**





**Right**  
Chorley's edible street  
planters with helpful  
signs for passers-by.

**Below**  
Cheetham Hill residents  
planting for their 'tea  
garden'.



# Sharing is caring

**RHS Community Outreach Advisor Anne Gunning makes the case for edible public spaces, gleaned some top tips from those growing for others.**

I first came across the idea of public food-growing in Todmorden, West Yorkshire in 2008. Back then it was so forward-thinking that it featured on the news. The town's Incredible Edible project, which also supports Todmorden in Bloom, has since blossomed to a network of 120 groups around the UK and has inspired 700 similar efforts around the world.

But for the hardworking gardeners of Todmorden, tasty local crops aren't the only fruit of their labour. They also pride themselves on having helped transform the wider community, with research showing crime rates in the area are down and growing and eating local produce are up. There are even eco tours in the town, with their famous greens taking centre stage.

Inspired by the innovative gardeners of Todmorden, more and more gardening groups and enterprising individuals around the UK are decorating our public spaces with edibles. Concerns about affordable food (last year food banks gave out 1.2 million food parcels to families in need),

healthy eating, food miles and pesticides are just some of the motivations.

As well as these key benefits, growing food in urban spaces is a great way to bring people together. Those from different backgrounds can share a range of cultural cuisines and practices, while children can be enticed by the promise of tiny berries or tomatoes, new scents, and the thrill of a tended seed becoming a meal.

It was a joy to work with Cheetham Hill's Church of England Community Academy School in Manchester and local residents on their herb garden (pictured above left). Many of the volunteers didn't know each other initially, but through sharing knowledge and learning together they formed strong friendships and found a common purpose. One of the local residents shared her home-grown tea recipe made with sage, lemon verbena and mint, which she used as healthy a pick-me-up.

Another It's Your Neighbourhood group, Heald Place Primary School, also in Manchester, connected parents that had

recently arrived in the UK, helping them share English language skills while tending to their crops outside the school.

Meanwhile, practised community growers and former national finalists at Chorley In Bloom, inspired by the gardeners of nearby Todmorden, sought to demonstrate the appeal of fresh, home-grown produce against the backdrop of ever-more available fast food. Fruit, vegetables and herbs replaced daffodils and bedding plants in their pavement displays, annotated with labels such as 'pick me', or 'leave me a few weeks', encouraging passers-by to help themselves and learn new recipes. The group has since set up a whole new edible garden on disused land behind a retail outlet, with funding from Tesco's Bags of Help, creating a mini sanctuary for people to enjoy a quiet moment while picking fresh produce or maybe doing a little weeding.

Growing food in public spaces can have a wide range of benefits even to those who simply walk by the plot, and see something unexpected!

## Public edibles: top tips

**Food production in an urban setting has its challenges, but the bounty rewards those that make the effort.**

- ✿ Raised beds reduce the risk of contamination from litter and dogs, and they're more visible to drivers.
- ✿ Consider your watering options and enlist helpers. Walthamstow in Bloom recruits seven volunteers over the summer months, each taking one day of the week.
- ✿ Having access to a greenhouse/polytunnel or a vegetable nursery bed will help prevent unwanted gaps – young plants can be raised here to replace crops that are harvested. Chorley in Bloom runs seed-growing sessions in exchange for access to a polytunnel at a local school.
- ✿ Nobody taking the produce? If food is ready to harvest and there are no takers, hold a pop-up-stall and distribute it, donate it to the local food bank or share a community meal.
- ✿ Make the message clear. Chorley in Bloom uses signs to invite people to harvest, show which crops are ready to eat and suggest how much to take. A few recipe ideas could also be provided.
- ✿ Some worry that crops will be stolen, but this rarely happens. Suggest how much pickers should take, or consider plants that don't look edible, such as white currants, Jerusalem artichokes, potatoes, sweet potatoes (south only) or thistly globe artichokes.
- ✿ Cut-and-come-again veg such as chard, kale and salad leaves are an easy and attractive foray into edibles. Onions, radish, leeks and strawberries are also reliable staples.



RHS / JULIAN WEIGALL



RHS / TIM SANDALL

- ✿ Herbs are a great addition to any garden, as regular picking means bushy growth and you only need a little for flavour. Fennel, rosemary and chives are easy to grow, great for wildlife, and the scent will reward passers-by.
- ✿ In a mass of vegetation, a scarecrow makes a lovely focal point. It will bring a smile to your face, and may help keep the pigeons off your brassicas!
- ✿ Work-saving tips: Enlist labour, such as through community payback, to build your raised beds. Use reclaimed food barrels to hold water. Opt for pest and disease-resistant crops. Control weeds with mulch. Water on a timer. Plant/sow early. Use wider spacing to reduce watering needs.

**Thank you to Chorley and Walthamstow Village Bloom groups and Bloom judge Geraldine King for help with these tips. See the following pages for more advice on getting your veggie beds in tip-top shape.**



# RHS Advice

Want to get the most out of your fruit and veg patch? Below are some suggestions to improve yields, choose the perfect planting spot, and protect against pests and disease.



RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

**Left**  
Vertical growers such as French beans add interest and save on space, while non-edibles add variety and can help manage pests.

**Above**  
Beetroot is an easy-to-grow staple with pretty leaves and important nutrients.

## Tip and tricks for community edibles

- 1

**Plant and forget:** low-maintenance varieties that don't need constant attention are ideal for schools over the holidays. Plant Jerusalem artichokes, beetroot, onion sets, sweet potatoes (south only), marrows, blight-resistant bush tomatoes, coriander, dill, cape gooseberries, rhubarb, rosemary, hyssop and sage. Ideally use a mulch to help prevent weeds too.
- 2

**Small-space growing:** for wigwams, trellis and smaller plots, achocha, cucumbers (hardy types) climbing French and runner beans, climbing courgettes, peas, small pumpkins and squash are ideal. Also, tomatoes and strawberries can be grown in hanging baskets, and veg such as beetroot, potatoes and carrots can be grown in containers.
- 3

**Balconies and patios:** plant cranberries and blueberries (acidic rooting medium, might need nets), dwarf raspberries, apricots, mulberry, salad leaves, microgreens such as mustard and cress, tomatoes, aubergines and peppers, including chilli.
- 4

**For health:** plant vitamin and anti-oxidant rich crops, such as blackcurrants, blueberries, raspberries, purple raspberries, strawberries, purple pea, purple potatoes, beetroot, carrots, kale and mustard greens.
- 5

**Grow more:** achieve higher yields and healthy plants by adding organic matter to your soil on a regular basis.
- 6

**Down-time:** include cover crops or green manures in your growing calendar such as red clover and garlic, which are great for bees, add habitat and help to improve the quality of the soil.
- 7

**Combat pests:** grow carrots and parsnips under insect-proof mesh. Protect cabbage roots with a card collar around the base of the stem. Apply grease bands to fruit tree trunks from autumn to spring. You can also hoe areas of bare soil in spring during dry spells to help control slugs and kill weeds. Crop rotation should also help to prevent the build-up of pests and disease.

## Food growing through the seasons

RHS Chief Horticulturist Guy Barter presents a basic growing calendar to help you plan a range of tasty fruit and veg year-round.

	Sow	Plant	Prune	Harvest
Jan		Soft fruit, tree fruit, rhubarb, Jerusalem artichokes	Soft fruit, apples, pears	Winter veg (sprouts, carrots, parsnips, etc)
Feb	Sow brassicas and onions outside, hardy veg indoors	Soft fruit, tree fruit, rhubarb, Jerusalem artichokes	Soft fruit, apples, pears autumn raspberries	Winter veg (sprouts, carrots, parsnips), rhubarb
Mar	Most hardy veg	Strawberries, hardy veg transplants		Sprouting broccoli, cauliflowers, cabbages, salads, rhubarb
Apr	Most tender veg indoors, successional sowing of hardy veg	Hardy veg transplants	Cherries, plums	Sprouting broccoli, cauliflowers, cabbages, salads, rhubarb
May	Tender veg outdoors, successional sowing of hardy veg	Tender veg transplants	Cherries, plums	Gooseberries, cauliflowers, cabbages, salads, broad beans
Jun	Successional sowing of hardy veg	Tender veg transplants	Cherries, plums	Soft fruits, cauliflowers, cabbages, peas and broad beans, potatoes, salads, carrots, beetroot
Jul	Successional sowing of hardy veg, Florence fennel, autumn salads	Tender veg transplants	Cherries, plums	Soft fruits, cherries and plums, cauliflowers, cabbages, peas, French and runner beans, broad beans, potatoes, salads, carrots, beetroot, sweetcorn, tomatoes
Aug	Salad onions, spring cabbages for over wintering		Apples, pears	Cherries, plums, apples, pears, late soft fruit, almost all veg
Sep	Overwintered lettuce, spinach, onion sets		Summer raspberries, hybrid berries	Plums, apples, pears, autumn raspberries, almost all veg
Oct	Garlic, shallots, broad beans	Soft fruit, tree fruit, strawberries	Summer raspberries, hybrid berries	Apples, pears, almost all veg
Nov		Soft fruit, tree fruit, rhubarb	Soft fruit, apples, pears	Winter veg (sprouts, carrots, parsnips, etc)
Dec		Soft fruit, tree fruit, rhubarb, strawberries	Soft fruit, apples, pears	Winter veg (sprouts, carrots, parsnips, etc)

## Add some variety

- ✿ Research has shown that a green layer of dwarf white clover and trefoil beneath cabbage family plants can stop pests finding the crop. There is less evidence that scented plants such as lavender or *Tagetes* make much difference to pest levels, but as long as they don't compete with the crop they may be worth a try.

✿ Sow radish thinly along rows. They come up in around 10 days, so remind you where your rows are. Sow extra veg seeds at the end of rows to fill gaps later.
- ✿ If you worry that your plot lacks colour, consider edible flowers to add impact, such as *Calendula*, nasturtium and borage. Chorley In Bloom has found that nasturtium is a good natural trap for black fly, and helps to keep them away from broad beans.  
[rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=764](https://rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=764)

✿ Climbing varieties such as runner beans, French beans and climbing peas add height for visual interest, which is perfect in a plot without any nearby trees.



RHS / TIM SANDALL





THE ORCHARD PROJECT

# An apple a day...

Orchards can be a rewarding addition to public spaces, yielding generous bounties for residents and wildlife. The Orchard Project's Claire Morris offers a basic guide to getting started.

**Left**  
Celebrating Apple Day  
at Sheldon Country  
Park, Birmingham.

## Find a site

A collection of five or more fruit trees is considered an orchard, so it could be a thin strip of land, an edging to an existing garden, or if you're lucky, a large, open space ripe for cultivation. Speak to the landowner to secure permission to plant – they may even lend a hand!

## Get out and about

You can't have a community orchard without involving the community, so the first job is to get local people on board. Orchards are a great way encourage a sense of community ownership, but you need willing volunteers to maintain it long term. Be enthusiastic, outline the benefits, listen to people's stories of scrumping as kids, and address genuine concerns. Ask which varieties people would like, and make sure they know there will be free food!

## Plan your orchard

You will need to think carefully about where you are going to plant your trees, and how many you can fit into the space you have. Consider sunlight and site conditions when choosing your species; an urban setting might allow for more tender varieties, while shaded areas may suit cooking types.

## The big planting day

Marking a planting day is a great way to bring people together. Everyone will feel part of the process and share in the pride when the trees finally fruit. Winter is the best time to plant, while the trees are dormant (normally November to March), but not if there is snow on the ground or if the ground is frozen. It may be chilly, but the digging will warm everyone up. Failing that, provide plenty of tea and biscuits!

## Digging the pits

Dig square-shaped pits to provide angles for the roots to get stuck into. The pit should be at least 2x2 spade-widths wide, although it will need to be much larger, even double this, on heavily compacted soils. The pit should be dug to at least one spade's depth and it is important to break up the underlying soil with a fork, especially if there is a layer of clay.



RHS / MARK WAUGH

## Heritage blossoms in Elswick

Elswick in Bloom, RHS Britain in Bloom 2017 Champion of Champions, planted its apple-shaped 40-tree orchard five years ago with funding from Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Environmental Trust. The village was once famous for its orchards, but with none remaining, the group sought to revive the area's lost history, tracking down heritage cultivars for an authentic recreation of an original orchard on a disused field.

"The orchard ticks many boxes and has done marvellous things for the community", says Paul Hayhurst, Chairman of Elswick Parish Council and Elswick in Bloom co-ordinator. "People look at the blossom in spring and help themselves to apples at harvest time. We hold an apple day, and in winter we have a talk on pruning. This year, we were even out pruning the trees during Storm Doris!"

A display panel in the orchard explains the tree types and how their fruit can be used. There are beehives in the orchard, which along with an adjacent wildflower meadow, aid pollination.

**Above**  
Volunteers harvest  
apples in Elswick's  
community orchard.

## Planting

The pit should be large enough to accommodate the root ball without the roots having to be squeezed in or bent up the sides. Have one person hold the tree in position while another backfills, ensuring that no air spaces are left around the roots where water can get trapped and freeze, which can cause damage to the roots. It is important that the graft union (the bulge where the rootstock has been grafted onto the scion) remains 8–10cm above the ground level. The tree holder can gently shake the tree every few minutes to ensure soil falls into any spaces. The rest of the soil can then be added until the pit has been filled and tamped down to the level of the surrounding soil.

## Mulching

Add a generous layer of mulch to form a circle around the tree, roughly 1m in diameter and 8–10cm deep. A hollow should be made around the base of the trunk so that the mulch is not touching the bark, as this can lead to rotting.

## Guarding

The Orchard Project has achieved a survival rate of over 98 per cent for its newly planted fruit trees, partly owing to placing net guards around trees, which protects against vandalism and accidental damage. Heavy gauge wire mesh guards and two sturdy posts are used. The guards are then reduced as the trees grow to allow room for branches to spread.

## Celebrate

Once you've found your committed volunteers and planted your orchard, make sure to celebrate! The largest orchard celebration occurs on Apple Day (Oct 21), launched by Common Ground in 1990. A celebration could include pressing apples into juice, an apple quiz based on unusual apple varieties, and of course some fruity nibbles and juices.

**To find out more about how to create a community orchard in your area, visit The Orchard Project website: [theorchardproject.org.uk](http://theorchardproject.org.uk)**





**Left**  
Volunteers at  
Walthamstow Village  
community veg plot.

**Below**  
Community gardeners  
save seed at the  
Penrith Salvation Army  
community garden.



RHS / JULIAN WELGALL

PENRITH BID

# Waste not want not

**Community food growing is a great way to ensure more people have access to fresh produce, and the more we share, the less we waste. We hear from two innovative Bloom groups.**

Walthamstow Village in Bloom, joint winner of the RHS Bloom Growing Communities award in 2017, has created and cares for a vegetable plot in front of a high-dependency drug project that sees up to 50 clients a day. Many of the people who attend are vulnerable and don't have permanent housing. Coordinator Helen Lerner explains how it works:

"Some like to help with the plot when they attend their sessions. There is often choice language and rowdiness, but our organisers don't mind! The clients say it keeps them busy and they enjoy the socialising. Many are also pleased that we see their worth by making an area that is nice for them to spend time in, and trusting and encouraging them to help themselves."

The team donate excess produce to the local Eat or Heat project, which aims to ensure no one chooses between heating and eating. Passers-by can help themselves too, and there's been no vandalism so far (...fingers crossed, says Helen!)

The plot is seen by Helen as a means to give people an insight into growing their

own with confidence and reducing food-miles. "Many have said they've gone on to get an allotment or to grow edibles in their own gardens", she says. "We are going to introduce 'satellite' plots in children's playgrounds, and one of our local authority estates has its own similar project, complete with an outside oven and communal cooking facilities, all run by volunteers."

Further north, Penrith Business Improvement District has been working with Penrith Action for Community Transition, residents and community gardening groups to help provide for those worse off. The team set up raised food-growing planters in front of the Salvation Army building with produce to be distributed in weekly veg boxes. Surplus from harvests is left in boxes on the wall for people to collect, or used by the soup kitchen. There is still some stigma about taking food for free, so it is often collected after dark or distributed directly to avoid public attention. Information boards describe the vegetables and give nutritional advice for different varieties in an effort to

educate the community about the benefits of fresh local produce and healthy eating.

The group is also building links with local allotments to extend the programme and bolster food bank supplies.

## Start donating produce

Growers of fruit and veg often find themselves with a glut of summer crops that they can't use up fast enough, stocking cupboards and freezers for months. Donating your surplus to a community project will ensure everything gets used, and will cultivate your feel-good factor at the same time! If you can't locate a local food bank or homeless service to donate crops, food waste charity FareShare ([fareshare.org.uk](http://fareshare.org.uk)) may be able to help, or try the Olio app, which connects unwanted goods directly with those that can use them ([olioex.com](http://olioex.com)).



KAREN HEYNIKE / WALTON CHARITY

**Clockwise from left**  
Walton-on-Thames  
allotment manager;  
the site's 'Bug Towers';  
and new wildlife pond.



WALTON CHARITY

Most allotments have a tight community spirit, with plot holders more than willing to help each other out with watering and harvesting if their neighbours are away. But it can often be difficult to bring new members in, especially those who are outside of the community gardening fold.

In Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, an idea to cultivate a neglected corner of an existing allotment blossomed into a thriving community resource. Walton Charity, in partnership with PA Housing, runs weekly supported sessions at Walton Community Allotment, targeting those facing barriers associated with physical or mental health conditions, learning disabilities or social isolation. But crucially, says allotment manager Karen Heynike, absolutely anyone can join.

For the majority of volunteers, their first session is also their first contact with gardening, but with a large site, 10 newly amalgamated allotments and a large conservation area, there is always something for people to work on. "We let anyone just give it a go", Karen says. "We leave it open so that there is no minimum time commitment, as this can become a barrier for people and keep them in the cycle of isolation."

"We have one volunteer who had to leave his full-time job due to panic attacks. He was living alone and the weekly sessions were his only contact with the outside world, and his only exercise. At first he would turn up with his headphones in and his head down, and he wouldn't look up. But now, a year on, his physical health has improved and he's really motivated to eat healthily. He's also made contact with people outside of the allotment because he has something to talk about."

Karen describes how the project, which is in its second year, has gone from strength to strength. It now boasts a wildlife area including a bug hotel (which featured at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show), a pond, a hedgerow, a wildflower meadow and hedgehog houses.

For groups that want to broaden their volunteering base in a similar way, Karen says the first thing to remember is that all volunteers will have individual needs, as well variable skills. "One of our volunteers finds clearing an area of weeds immensely satisfying, whereas others prefer to have solitary jobs such as mowing or seed collecting", she explains. She also suggests that keeping the wider community up to date with their work, such as through social media, helps volunteers feel part of the story, whether or not they are up to joining a session.



WALTON CHARITY

# Growing for everyone

**We hear how one RHS-affiliated allotment is thriving under the care of a team of non-gardeners who've found their feet, and green fingers, through an open invitation.**



# Build a bottle greenhouse

Reduce the tide of plastic waste and make a long-lasting resource for your school or community. A bottle greenhouse is a sustainable, inexpensive way for young and old to help lay the foundations for more growing, with the bottles acting as a perfect insulator to keep your seedlings cosy.

## Getting started

- 1 Choose some flat ground around your school or community on which to build your greenhouse
- 2 Ask people and groups to start collecting clear, 2-litre plastic bottles
- 3 Find out if someone has a wooden glasshouse frame (without glass) that they no longer need. This will provide a strong structure. Alternatively, can someone help you create a wooden frame?
- 4 Measure the structure and calculate the number and the size of the materials you will need
- 5 Ensure the site is clear and weed-free and that your bottle greenhouse will be stable and safe in its position
- 6 Once you have your frame in place, fit a polycarbonate roof before attaching the plastic bottles.

## Equipment needed

- ✿ Wood or metal frame – the standard greenhouse frame is 183x183cm, with a ridge height of 213.5cm and eaves of 152.5cm. But a greenhouse of 122x122cm with a ridge height of 183cm and eaves of 152.5cm should suffice for smaller gardens
- ✿ Lots of clean, 2-litre plastic bottles with labels removed – you will need between 250 and 500 bottles, or more for larger greenhouses. Clear bottles are best
- ✿ Bamboo canes and cable ties – for smaller greenhouses, you will need around 48 2m-tall canes. Taut wire or thin rope could be used as an alternative to canes
- ✿ Tools including a drill, screws, screw drivers, secateurs, and scissors or knives
- ✿ Tape, if there are sharp edges
- ✿ Polycarbonate material for the roof.

**Left**  
St. Francis Special School, Lincoln.

**Below**  
Stepney City Farm, London.



## Build your greenhouse!

- 1 Once the basic structure is complete and the roofing material is attached, screw bamboo canes vertically to the wooden base, one bottle-width apart
- 2 Cut the base out of each bottle to allow for stacking and attach the top and bottom bottles of each column with a cable tie. Bottles should be cut to around 30.5cm high, with the top 10–15cm inserted into the bottle above/below (5–8 bottles to stack per cane)
- 3 Continue to do this until the entire side of the bottle greenhouse is filled in
- 4 Ensure the canes and bottles are graduated at the front and back, so the stacks increase in size to fill the eaves. Remember to leave space for a door
- 5 Fill in the sides, front and back and then line the walls inside with clear plastic or bubble wrap for extra insulation.

See [schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk](http://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk) for step-by-step images for building your bottle greenhouse and more workshop resources.

# My green fingered community

RHS Young Ambassador George Hassall is passionate about sharing his love of gardening and the natural world. He tells us how he gets stuck in with his local community.

I was four when my Mum and some of her friends started a community gardening and cooking project. Operation Farm has a community allotment, an orchard and a 'veg 'n' seed swap' scheme, and it also runs cookery workshops and community food events. It now boasts more than 50 adult volunteers and 40 'Young Operation Farmers', like me.

Now that I'm older, I've started running my own gardening workshops at community events. Take this year for example:

- ✿ I ran my own seed-planting stall at a local park, where I showed hundreds of kids how to plant peas, courgettes and radishes. It was so busy that at one point, I had to ask them to form a queue! It's really great teaching other kids and passing on my knowledge because we're on the same level – I hope they think, 'Well if he can do it, I could too!'
- ✿ I helped to mulch around the fruit trees at the local community orchard. We harvested the fruit for the first time this year and ended up with 27 kilograms (60lbs) of fruit!
- ✿ I helped to run a series of outdoor gardening and cooking workshops for kids, where we cooked and ate what we grew. I was in charge of cooking it all up on the fire (just call me the Fire King!).
- ✿ We entered an edible container in the Perfect for Pollinators community garden competition at the first ever RHS Chatsworth Flower Show.
- ✿ We cooked and served more than 500 portions of veggie and herb soup at the Operation Farm Harvest Festival, as part of the RHS Campaign for School Gardening's Big Soup Share.

I've really enjoyed cooking home-grown vegetables this year. I love chopping them up, stirring big pans full of food and watching it boiling and bubbling. Serving the home-made food gives you a nice feeling because you know that you cooked it and grew it yourself. It's a great reward after all the hard work you've put in.

Cooking links to one of my favourite subjects too – chemistry. I love seeing proper chemical reactions as solids turn to liquid and liquids turn into gas.

Community gardening and cooking groups are especially great for us kids because they help to build confidence, and mean we learn new skills. But for me, the best thing about Operation Farm is the friendships and the interesting people you meet.

Get your local school gardening at [schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk](http://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk)





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<b>RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show</b>	2 – 8 July
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