



Royal  
Horticultural  
Society

Sharing the best in Gardening

# GRASS ROOTS

The RHS Community Update

Issue 17 • Spring 2014 [rhs.org.uk/communities](http://rhs.org.uk/communities)

## RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM

*The Finalists!*

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CELEBRATES 50  
YEARS OF BLOOM**  
*- Get involved!*

**DR MARK GODDARD  
ON POLLINATORS**

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# WELCOME

To the spring issue of *Grass Roots*, the magazine for all RHS "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood participants and RHS Affiliated Societies.

It's the 50th anniversary of RHS Britain in Bloom and we're 'Growing for Gold'! The biggest-ever Bloom launch event will take place during National Gardening Week (14 - 20 April) with more than 2,000 groups sowing sunflower seeds. These golden flowers, beloved by pollinators, will line the streets of our cities, towns and villages this summer - marking 50 golden years' of Britain's favourite gardening campaign. We'd love you to get involved - see below for how you can join in.

As we celebrate half a century we also look forward, with garden designer and broadcaster Chris Beardshaw considering how the campaign might evolve in the next 50 years (pages 6-7).

With Growing for Gold's focus on pollinator-friendly planting we hear from Leeds University's Dr Mark Goddard about how we can help our insect friends (pages 13-14). And the RHS Science team explains how our gardens can reduce flooding and heat waves in urban areas (pages 10-11).

As ever, 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

Many thanks,

Sophie Dawson, Editor

**50 YEARS**  
RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM



Sharing the best in Gardening

## GROWING FOR GOLD - GET INVOLVED!

Groups will celebrate 50 years of Bloom during this year's National Gardening Week (14 - 20 April) by sowing pollinator-



friendly sunflowers. Over half a million seeds will be planted, creating fields of gold across the UK to herald Bloom's golden anniversary.

If your group missed the chance to apply for free seeds but you'd still like to get involved in celebrating the anniversary, why not organise a community gardening event during National Gardening Week.

Groups can add their events to the website to help attract new volunteers. To add your Bloom anniversary launch event, visit: [nationalgardeningweek.co.uk](http://nationalgardeningweek.co.uk)



## Bloom planting more sustainable

An RHS survey into the impact of RHS Britain in Bloom has shown that volunteers planted almost 3,000,000 bulbs, 185,000 trees and 718,000 shrubs last year alone. The survey highlighted a shift in favour of sustainable planting material over seasonal bedding schemes. Around 53 percent of respondents' planting is now longer-lasting trees, shrubs and perennials - an increase of 7 percent since 2010. For Bloom's City category the figure for 'sustainable' planting is more than 90 percent.

The survey also revealed that groups are responsible for looking after significant

amounts of green space. Around 58 percent have turned abandoned land, previously prone to fly-tipping, into usable community spaces such as allotments, while others have safeguarded land for public use that was earmarked for building and development.

Many of the respondents cited a need to improve their local area and increase their levels of local pride as the reasons for taking part. Others said community ethos, cohesion and the enjoyment of competing and achieving recognition was their primary motivation.

## Sustainable Growing Media funding - apply now

Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups can apply for up to £10,000 to help them garden more sustainably - funding is available to increase the use of sustainable growing media. This is the second and final round of the Defra/ RHS Sustainable Horticulture in Partnership (SHIP) Scheme. Apply by 23rd May.

For more information, the guidelines and application forms, visit: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](http://rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)

## RHS Regional funding

Groups in Scotland will soon be able to apply for RHS funds to support their community gardening projects. Check the RHS website from early summer for further details and an application form.

In Yorkshire, recipients of the RHS grassroots gardening funding programme will be announced soon. The three-year £100,000 programme is now supported by Kärcher to mark the launch of its new watering range. One of the groups will also win a visit from multi-RHS-medal winner and Kärcher watering range ambassador, Diarmuid Gavin.

To find out more about RHS regional funding, visit: [rhs.org.uk/regional](http://rhs.org.uk/regional)

## Bloom 50th photo competition launched

A Facebook photo competition has been launched to celebrate Bloom's 50th anniversary with big prizes for the best pictures.

Enter your photos into one of two categories, 'Community Gardening' or 'Bloom through the ages', for your chance to win. And make sure you cast your votes too - the photo with the most votes in each category will win £300 of vouchers for plants!

The competition ends on 1 June. Enter your pictures and cast your votes on Facebook: [facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening](https://facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening)

## Bloom anniversary podcast

A special podcast has been created to mark RHS Britain in Bloom's golden anniversary. Tune in to find out more about the difference Britain in Bloom makes to communities across the UK. To download the podcast, visit: [rhs.org.uk/podcasts](http://rhs.org.uk/podcasts)

## Bloom gardens at RHS Shows

The anniversary will be marked with RHS Britain in Bloom gardens at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show and RHS Hampton Court Flower Show. For more about the shows, visit: [rhs.org.uk/shows](http://rhs.org.uk/shows)



## Great deals to RHS Partner Gardens

All Bloom, IYN and RHS Affiliated Societies can enjoy special offers at 28 RHS Partner Gardens this year, such as Knoll Gardens in Dorset (pictured). Download the full list of offers from the RHS website: [rhs.org.uk/groups](http://rhs.org.uk/groups)



# Congratulations RHS Britain in Bloom 2014 finalists!

This year 72 communities have been nominated by their Region or Nation in Bloom to take part in the UK Finals - RHS Britain in Bloom. We'll let you know how they do in the autumn issue of the magazine! To find out more about the campaign, visit: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](http://rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)



City of London in Bloom

SMALL VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bray Village	Thames & Chilterns
Great Whittington	Northumbria
Tresco	South West

VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Elswick	North West
Filby	Anglia
Glenarm	Ulster
Kirkoswald	Cumbria
Moorsholm	Northumbria
Norton in Hales	Heart of England
Upper Hopton	Yorkshire

LARGE VILLAGE	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Dufftown	Scotland
Hillsborough	Ulster
Limpsfield	South East
Market Bosworth	East Midlands
Usk	Wales

COASTAL UP TO 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Filey	Yorkshire
Hunstanton	Anglia
Tenby	Wales

Images, clockwise from above: wildflower planting in the City of London; schoolchildren support Sedgfield in Bloom; colourful spring displays in Elswick; young tree planters in Oldham; perennial displays in Truro.

COASTAL OVER 12K	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Sidmouth	South West
St Andrews	Scotland
St Peter Port	Guernsey



Truro in Bloom

SMALL TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Cranbrook	South East
Dunnington	Yorkshire
Pitlochry	Scotland
Sedgefield	Northumbria
Whitehead	Ulster

TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bridgnorth	Heart of England
Dalton with Newton	Cumbria
Halstead	Anglia
Henley on Thames	Thames & Chilterns
Immingham	East Midlands
Linlithgow	Scotland
Shevington & District	North West
Thornbury	South West

LARGE TOWN	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Alton	Southern
Belper	East Midlands
Carrickfergus	Ulster
Colwyn Bay	Wales
Congleton	North West
Durham	Northumbria
Farnham	South East
Malvern	Heart of England
Perth	Scotland
Truro	South West
Wisbech	Anglia



Sedgfield in Bloom



Elswick in Bloom

SMALL CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bath	South West
Bracknell	Thames & Chilterns
Chorley	North West
Crawley	South East
Derry City	Ulster
Harrogate	Yorkshire
Loughborough	East Midlands
Tamworth	Heart of England

CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Aberdeen	Scotland
Norwich	Anglia
Oldham	North West
Westminster	London

LARGE CITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Hillingdon	London
Leeds	Yorkshire
Sunderland	Northumbria

URBAN COMMUNITY	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Bridgers Community Group (Leigh)	North West
Eston (Middlesbrough)	Northumbria
Evington (Leicester)	East Midlands
Kippax (Leeds)	Yorkshire
London Bridge (Southwark)	London
Port Marine & Village Quarter (Portishead)	South West
Town Close Ward (Norwich)	Anglia

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS	
Entry Name	Region / Nation
Ahoghill	Ulster
City of London	London
Glenrothes	Scotland
Shrewsbury	Heart of England
Woolton (Liverpool)	North West



Oldham in Bloom





## What future for communities?

As Britain in Bloom enters its second half century, what does the future hold for the RHS-organised campaign, and how will it continue to evolve? Author: Chris Beardshaw, garden designer and broadcaster.

Britain in Bloom has unquestionably advanced significantly since its embryonic years in the mid-1960s, a time when the broad concept of community gardening demanded bouquets of blowsy bedding erupting from civic buildings and public spaces.

Today, we see modifications of the original ideal that create a more holistic consideration of our external environments – most importantly, the recognition that genuine ‘beautification’ of outside spaces needs more than mere aesthetic seasonal shows. In fact it must encompass issues of broad environmental concern, conservation, education, community involvement and long-term, sustainable projects.

Experience of the new, clear vision of the initiatives instigated since the RHS took over Bloom’s organisation in 2002 has clearly highlighted the transformations possible in the communities and regions that launch themselves into the horticultural fray. Generations work collectively; social, cultural and religious barriers are dissolved; neighbours become acquainted; pride blossoms; spaces are made relevant to new users; and beautification in the most comprehensive sense happens. But, most importantly, action takes place, projects get moving and real results are witnessed as a direct consequence of the toil of local people.

While admirable, the success of this revised model for Bloom means there is a danger that those responsible for the planning, provision and management of

our green spaces could come to rely on the scheme. Indeed, some would like it to make up for their own shortcomings.

Local planning authorities are required to take account of, and improve, health, social and cultural wellbeing, and have obligations to provide facilities to meet community needs. This is a tall order at a time when one in six local authorities admit the quality of their green spaces is declining. So the question is, will Bloom provide the quality places that we all want from our public space?

### Bloom’s current impact

Reliance on the RHS Britain in Bloom initiative to sculpt our external environments is currently fraught with difficulties. Much of the work invariably falls to a select band of (largely) volunteer individuals. To use Bloom as a transformative tool they need to successfully deploy a broad horticultural church, in terms of participation, motivation, implementation and seasonal resilience.

Typically without political interest, affiliation to governing authorities or ‘design egos’, Bloom volunteers’ personal passion, desire for change, pride – and sometimes frustration at inaction by others – means it is they who must ignite the flame of community.

So where lies the Achilles heel? It seems any such process is only as robust as: the willingness of the volunteers who fuel it; the widespread appetite for the cause outside the community among local authorities and politicians; the granting of permissions to use land of real potential;



Community gardening, such as planting projects in Cricklade (pictured above) and allotment development in Loughborough (below), delivers real results as a direct consequence of the toil of local people. Community action brings neighbours together (in Nottingham’s Mundella Park, pictured below left), which creates better social cohesion and safer neighbourhoods.

and the ability to secure a realistic flow of the resources necessary to achieve transformations.

To many in the political and public arena, it seems the need to use green space as a catalyst for community and social improvement has been forgotten. It is seen as frivolity, or an unnecessary drain on resources. However, it is possible to assess the real benefits afforded to Bloom communities. And they are not alone: throughout Britain numerous community-led initiatives also demonstrate measurably positive results.

At a time when reports suggest an estimated 25 percent of UK adults are obese, 20 percent suffer from heart problems or diabetes, and as many as one in six adults are being treated for depression, it is heartening to know that research shows access to nature and quality green spaces improves health, promotes healthier lifestyles and offers therapeutic advantages. In ‘green’ environments the perception of health rises and fewer medical symptoms are reported. Often, healthier lifestyles are associated with access to green space within 1¼ miles of the home, and the more active lifestyles associated bring positive changes to health. The provision of active travel networks (footpaths and cycleways) contribute further to healthy living including, according to the British Medical Foundation, the prevention of chronic diseases.

Education, development of social skills and learning are all proven to be enhanced by good community spaces. Non-prescriptive play (invented by children themselves) encourages creativity, while the mixed ages of user groups promotes improved consideration and empathy, and offers opportunities for behavioural and cultural exchange.

Contact with nature also helps personal development: where schools have access to quality green spaces, concentration levels increase, social skills prosper and behavioural issues are significantly reduced.

### Other community benefits

There is also a positive relationship between plants and community safety. Both property crime and violent crime reduce significantly where neighbourhood spaces are ‘greened’ – some studies showed crime halved. Research also indicates that where green spaces and vegetation is present, there is a 90 percent increase in use of external spaces. Consequently better social cohesion develops, people see the area as more neighbourly, a sense of belonging increases and there is more than an 80 percent increase in social interaction.

It surely comes as no surprise that the overwhelming evidence in these reports indicates that as communities we need and

respond to the provision of quality, well-considered, and well-managed external spaces. These areas include all those between private spaces, be they streets, parks, squares, plazas and countless spaces left with no identity. Perhaps a part of the success of Britain in Bloom and other community initiatives lies in the fact they represent a key step toward enabling action in transforming our (often beleaguered) external public spaces, urban and rural, through a community-led response. It is a ‘bottom up’ process not the more traditional ‘top down’ imposition of designs, which so often fail to connect with the communities and people that use them.

Bloom demonstrates that people are inspired to become ‘champions’ to rebuild their community through collaboration with their neighbours. It also challenges the popular concept that great community spaces must be designed and constructed by professionals. In fact, Britain in Bloom is a celebration of the point that the beauty of a public space originates in the marriage between design and the blend of human activities that take place within it. We should measure the success of such spaces by the quantity and diversity of activities it hosts, not its academic or pristine nature.

It is worth remembering that because our public spaces belong to everybody, ▶



Friends of Mundella Park



RHS/Julien Webber





RHS/ Julian Weigall

“Countless projects show that where community flourishes, economic revitalisation follows.”

Bloom volunteers replant the central flower beds in King’s Heath, Birmingham

When not living up to expectations they are perceived as belonging to no-one. However, our villages, towns and cities are largely defined by the quality of their public spaces and these are the springboard to vibrant and robust communities with strong identities and cultures. Countless projects show that where community flourishes, economic revitalisation follows.

Public spaces should exist as a diverse and interlinked network that binds communities together. A wide provision of green spaces also allows for specialisation of response to match the needs of individuals and communities. Each space becomes not only diverse in its content and nature, but also a reflection of the people who live around and use it.

An ambitious route for RHS Britain in

- Bloom to continue to develop over the coming decades could include:
- The structuring of a resilient and economically stable framework that enables communities, facilitated by consultants, to set the standards for all their local spaces.
  - The holding of local authorities to account for greenspace provision, and to support the removal of responsibility for some community spaces from local authorities where that provision falls short of the community’s needs.
  - Working with designers, developers and landowners from the outset in the shaping of meaningful green space.
  - Insisting that developments allocate

long-term funding provision to maintain and support the outdoor spaces around new schemes.

- Maximising the potential of local people and volunteers, who are best placed to enrich their space.

All of which is, perhaps, a tall order, but anyone who has ever sat and revelled at the diversity of life, the activity and the energy in a thriving community garden, will understand. As Christopher Alexander, Emeritus Professor of Architecture at the University of Berkeley, California wrote, ‘Most of the wonderful places in the world were not made by architects, but by people.’



**Hilary Wheat,**  
Community Volunteer,  
Nottingham in Bloom  
‘After living away from the area for 20 years, I returned to the estate where I was born and grew up. I had lost my mum and my sister and needed to do something – I believe strongly that you should leave a place better than you found it.  
We planted hundreds of bulbs and wildflowers on the verges where before had been only bare grass and mud. People suddenly believed it could look better. When I saw a pair of goldfinches in the flower beds next to the shops, I thought, “we’ve done it”.’

RHS/ Julian Weigall



# My Bloom

What difference has Bloom made to your community?  
Send your views to: [bloom50@rhs.org.uk](mailto:bloom50@rhs.org.uk)



**Brett Moore,**  
Head Gardener, Herm  
Island, Channel Isles  
‘I am one of 64 full-time residents of Herm, but we get thousands of visitors, and Bloom is a big part of their experience

In 2012 we won our category, and, jointly, the Tourism Award, so last year we competed in Champion of Champions. I am in charge of the appearance and upkeep of the whole island: we design and maintain ornamental and amenity features, and work to protect and enhance the island’s natural biodiversity. Volunteers from nearby Guernsey help us out, especially over the winter.’

RHS/ Julian Weigall



Lesley Bailey



**Ingrid Lewis,**  
Town Manager and  
Chairman, Colwyn in  
Bloom, Conwy  
‘I have been involved with Colwyn in Bloom since the year 2000, and I

am hugely proud to say we have won Wales in Bloom for 13 years running. It is deeply rewarding to see people become fiercely protective and caring of their town and to get a buzz out of what they are doing. This year we have the support of a Wales rugby star to kick a golden ball over the crossbars to launch our Colwyn in Bloom and Wales in Bloom campaigns.’



Wigan in Bloom



**Ruth Growney,**  
Co-ordinator, Crawley in  
Bloom (Let’s FACE it!),  
Sussex  
‘The Bloom campaign, which includes our local initiative “Let’s FACE

it!”, has changed the face of Crawley. We had a reputation for being a place of 1960s concrete – the various projects have improved the street scene more than anyone would have imagined.  
I love seeing the difference they have made to the town and its residents. We are developing a series of community toolkits for 2014 to put local people in touch with funding sources and resources provided by the council.’



**Margaret Carter,**  
Coordinator, Shevington in  
Bloom, Wigan  
‘Bloom has given me a passion for improving where I live, a confidence I never knew I had when

I started three years ago, brought out skills I was unaware of and has given me new friends. Creating new well-kept, colourful flower beds, bespoke planters and new heritage projects has brought pride in our community. The group is working harder than ever this year on its entry to Britain in Bloom to celebrate the competition’s 50th birthday and to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War.’



## RHS ADVICE

## Urban Greening

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 [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118

With extreme weather conditions expected to become more frequent in the coming decades, RHS Principal Horticultural Advisor Leigh Hunt explains how plants can help our towns and cities to face what lies ahead.

In the UK, more than 85 percent of the population lives in a town or city and many of us are lucky enough to have a garden. In fact, gardens make up around a quarter of the land in most cities and their importance is only just being fully appreciated. Gardens and green spaces in built-up areas do more than just make us feel good, they offer a range of benefits that protect our health and our property

## Preventing flooding

Vegetation, whether trees, lawns or borders, plays a vital role in soaking up rainwater and so helps to prevent localised 'flash' flooding. About 25 percent of all the land in our towns and cities is gardens, which significantly alleviates pressure on urban drainage during periods of heavy rain. Lower density housing with gardens has 3-fold less storm water run-off than higher density stock.

Yet we're paving over our gardens like never before. Figures analysed by the RAC Foundation found that 3.5 million front gardens have been paved over in the UK in the last 15 years. One garden is not really a problem, but collectively the paving over of gardens is having a real impact. For example in Leeds, over a 33-year period there was a 13 percent increase in paved surfaces, 75 percent of which was due to



Images: Paul Debois

paving of residential front gardens; this was linked to more flooding in the area. The benefits of vegetated front gardens have been recognised by the planning system in England; since October 2008, a planning application has been required for more than 5sq m of impermeable paving.

## Keeping our cities cool and our houses warm

Gardens and green spaces are the equivalent of an air-conditioning system for our cities. Urban environments, full of dark-coloured tarmac and buildings, absorb more heat than planted surfaces, leading to an urban heat-island effect (which typically sees a 2-4°C increase in temperatures compared to the countryside). Plants cool the air primarily by releasing moisture and providing

*The paving over of gardens is causing problems in urban areas: green spaces act as a sponge during periods of heavy rainfall and the removal of gardens has seen an increase in the incidence of localised flash-flooding.*

shade, contributing towards combating dangerous heat waves.

Trees, hedges or shrubs can also help to insulate our houses, acting as 'wind breaks' around buildings to slow the speed of buffeting winds and so save on heating costs. Wall-cladding climbers and green roofs also save energy in summertime by keeping buildings cool and reducing the need for air conditioning. It's been estimated that vegetation can be used in conjunction with building design to provide up to a 30 percent energy saving on air conditioning.



## Urban greening research at the RHS – choosing the right plant for the right place



**Dr Tijana Blanusa, RHS Senior Horticultural Scientist**

'One of the areas that we research within RHS Science is how differences in plant structure and function can be best used to get the most environmental benefit out of our green spaces. We found, for example, that trees with rougher and hairier leaves (such as Holm oak or London plane) captured and retained more pollutant particles than olive or lime tree leaves.'

We are pursuing several lines of investigation using various plant species (suitable for green roofs, green walls and as border garden plants) exploring which plant traits are linked to the provision of the greatest number of potential environmental benefits.'



RHS: Tim Sandell

*Trees in urban areas can help to remove pollutants from the air, especially those with hairier leaves such as the London plane tree (left).*

To find out more about how plants benefit our towns and cities, visit the RHS website: [rhs.org.uk/urbangreening](http://rhs.org.uk/urbangreening)

## Save the garden!

Ironically, as we start to appreciate the vital role that gardens play in our towns and cities, they have never been under greater threat. The growing need to develop new homes has seen further pressure for new developments on gardens (also known as 'garden grabbing'). And front and back gardens continue to be paved over.

With climate scientists predicting that the UK weather will become warmer, wetter and more erratic in the future, we need to use our gardens and green spaces to create liveable neighbourhoods that will continue to be comfortable in 50 years' time. This means keeping our gardens green and keeping paving to a minimum.

## Garden more sustainably

Don't miss your chance to apply for funding (deadline 23 May)

Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups can apply for up to £10,000 to help them garden more sustainably. Funding is available to increase the use of sustainable growing media. This is the second and final round of the Defra/ RHS Sustainable Horticulture in Partnership (SHiP) Scheme.

Last year, nine groups received funding. One was The Urban Gardening Project in Manchester, which applied in partnership with Manchester City Council and Hulme Community Garden Centre. The group was awarded £4,000 for a 2-year project to increase its use of peat-free growing media. Volunteers will use various peat-free mixes to propagate plants for Platt Fields Park's 'Green Bee' trail and

for hanging baskets and flowerbeds in community green spaces.

Colin Bennett, one of the organisers, says, "It's a really good project for us to be involved in. It's helped us to look further ahead as we'll be planting from seed, experimenting with different growing mixes. We can also get more involved in choosing our plants. Usually we'd just go to B&Q and buy plants, so it's enabling us to do much more interesting work."

The group is being advised on plant choices by Hulme Community Garden Centre and will be sharing preliminary feedback at a local festival this summer.

To read about the other projects that received funding and to apply, visit the RHS website: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](http://rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)

## Cleaning the air we breathe

Plants can support improved air quality, particularly where the vegetation belts are dense. Particle pollution (e.g. dust from wear on pavements and vehicles, metals from vehicle exhaust fumes, from burning fuel) are trapped by leaves and stems and absorbed by plants. Eventually these are washed off or shed in plant debris, where they go to ground. The rate at which different plants capture pollutants varies and is the subject of current RHS research (see box above).



Flash flooding in Thatcham, Berkshire, in July 2007



## Mad about gardening

Ysgol Esgob Morgan in Denbighshire, Wales champions gardening and is an accredited RHS Campaign for School Gardening Five-Star Gardening School.

Is your group working with a local school? We're always looking for stories to feature in the magazine. Please send an outline of your story to [alanatapsell@rhs.org.uk](mailto:alanatapsell@rhs.org.uk) or call 01483 212387

Staff introduced gardening into the school as part of their work to achieve the Ysgolion Eco Schools Green Flag Award. What began as a way for the school's Eco Club to grow a small variety of vegetables in an allotment is now engaging with all pupils, nurturing skills and talents that will stay with the children for life.

All children and staff take part in activities relating to the school garden. Lesson plans have been revised to allow for activity to take place in and around the garden, particularly for subjects including art, science, English and the humanities.

One of the biggest successes of the Eco Club has been the sourcing of funding and equipment. To date, the group has obtained over £1,600 from St. Asaph City Council, £550 from Keep Wales Tidy, £250 from GreenThumb and £450 from the School Friends Association amongst other smaller donations of tools and equipment. They have been shortlisted for the Morrison's Let's Grow Young Gardener of the Year Award and came second in the RHS Flower Show Tatton Park Primary Vegetables category in 2013.

Richard Hatwood, Eco Coordinator at Ysgol Esgob Morgan says, "The highlight of our garden is seeing the passion and enjoyment on the children's faces as they take part. Giving them their own space to plan, develop and reflect upon is an invaluable tool both in the school curriculum and also in enriching school life and promoting well-being. The gardens have been particularly successful in engaging boys who have low self-esteem or behavioural difficulties and this has resulted in a marked improvement in behaviour across the school."

Ysgol Esgob Morgan works within the community in a variety of ways. School governors, family and friends are regularly invited to see the hard work pupils have put into the garden and to help improve it further. The children undertake three litter picks annually and work with Keep Wales Tidy to pull Himalayan balsam from the river banks. The Eco Club has also planted a natural butterfly garden along the banks of the River Elwy for the community to enjoy. [esgobmorgan.co.uk/](http://esgobmorgan.co.uk/)

Image: Richard Hatwood

## Planting for Pollinators

Dr Mark Goddard is a Research Assistant on the Urban Pollinators Project investigating insect pollinators in urban habitats in the UK (see [www.urbanpollinators.org](http://www.urbanpollinators.org) for more information). Mark was guest speaker at the RHS Britain in Bloom Finalists' Seminar and is supporting this year's Growing for Gold campaign.

### RHS: Why are pollinators important?

MG: As those of you with a veg patch or allotment will know, plants such as apples, strawberries, currants, tomatoes and beans are dependent on insect pollinators. Researchers at the University of Reading estimate that the pollination 'service' to crops is worth around £500 million per year to the UK economy. It's not just our food crops that rely on pollinators – almost 80 percent of UK wildflowers do too. Evidence is also growing that sharing our gardens and parks with wildlife has a positive effect on human well-being: experiencing the gentle buzz of bumblebees makes us *feel* better.

### RHS: And they're declining?

MG: Yes, the majority of available evidence suggests that pollinators are declining at an alarming rate. There is no single reason why they are struggling, but the intensification of farming practices leading to widespread loss of flower-rich natural habitats is probably the major culprit. Evidence is increasing that some pesticides may be interfering with bees'

ability to find flowers, whilst honeybees and bumblebees also face an array of pests and diseases. Research into how these multiple pressures interact to cause pollinator declines is ongoing.

### RHS: What can we do to help?

MG: The good news is that urban areas, especially gardens and allotments, can support rich pollinator communities. This doesn't just hold for the leafy suburbs – my PhD work in Leeds showed that poorer neighbourhoods may be better for bees than rich ones (perhaps because there is less pressure to keep gardens neat and tidy). Wherever you live, you can make a difference by providing food and nest sites.

Different species of bee nest in different places – some burrow underground or in compost heaps; others prefer tree holes or hollow plant stems. Although artificial bumblebee nest boxes very rarely work, solitary bee 'hotels' are popular with mason bees if situated in a sunny spot. Hoverflies don't have nests at all, but try to provide food

and shelter for their larvae, such as rotting vegetation (or even a few aphids)!

Councils also have an important role in conserving pollinators. Flower meadows are a great alternative to ornamental bedding plants, and more relaxed mowing regimes along road verges and in parks will enable pollinator-friendly wildflowers to flourish.

### RHS: What should we be planting?

MG: There is surprisingly little evidence-based information about exactly which plant species (and cultivars) are most important for pollinators. In general, different flowers are used by different pollinators so it's crucial to provide a variety of flower shapes and sizes. For instance, deep flowers (e.g. foxglove) are only accessible to long-tongued bumblebees, whereas shallow, flat flowers (e.g. those in the daisy family) are better for hoverflies and smaller bees.

Bees need both nectar and pollen to raise their young so try for a balance of nectar-rich (e.g. globe thistles) and pollen-rich species (e.g. poppies). Avoid cultivated species with ▶



◀ double flowers (think hybrid roses or double dahlias) because the extra petals reduce the nectar and pollen resources. Timing is important too – bumblebee queens and some solitary bees emerge early in the year and rely on spring flowers such as crocuses and trees such as willow. Later in the year, autumn flowering plants (e.g. ivy or *Sedum*) are also critical. For

more information, have a look at the RHS Perfect for Pollinators lists ([rhs.org.uk/plants-for-pollinators](http://rhs.org.uk/plants-for-pollinators)). Beyond the flower beds, if you can relax the management in some parts of your lawn this will encourage species such as white clover, buttercups, daisy, dandelion and yarrow which are valuable plants for pollinators.

## Meet the pollinators:



Honeybees

**Honeybee (*Apis mellifera*):** Only one species is found in the UK (and in Europe, America and Australasia). It (probably) doesn't survive in the wild in the UK anymore but is managed by beekeepers. They are unique in that large numbers of bees can survive all winter on honey stores, and are the only bee species to communicate using the 'waggle dance'. Honeybees visit a wide range of plants including borage, bramble and orchard fruits.

**Bumblebees (*Bombus* spp.):** 24 species of bumblebee are found in the UK, including seven which are common garden visitors. Like honeybees, bumblebees are social and live in colonies, but only the bumblebee queen survives the winter. The main difference between bumblebee species that should influence our planting is tongue length – the garden bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*) has the longest tongue, measuring 13mm, and can access nectar in deep flowers such as foxglove, red clover and honeysuckle. Shorter-tongued species, such as the buff-tailed bumblebee (*B. terrestris*) will visit a wide variety of flowers with shorter flower tubes, or sometimes 'rob' nectar by biting holes in longer-tubed flowers!



Bumblebee



Tawny mining bee

**Solitary bees:** By far the most diverse group of bees (and often the most inconspicuous), with 243 species recorded in the British Isles. As the name suggests, solitary bees are not social but each nest is the work of a single female working alone. Most solitary bees fall into one of two groups – the mining bees nest directly in the ground or in crumbling walls, whilst the cavity nesters prefer old plant stems and will also use artificial nests. The most familiar of the mining bees is probably the tawny mining bee (*Andrena fulva*) which makes characteristic small 'volcano' burrows in lawns. Another conspicuous spring-flying solitary bee is the cavity-nesting red mason bee (*Osmia rufa*). Both *Andrena fulva* and *Osmia rufa* are valuable pollinators of fruit trees such as apples, pears and plums.

**Hoverflies:** There are over 250 hoverfly species in the British Isles. Most are yellow and black in an attempt to mimic the stinging bees and wasps. Despite their small size, some hoverflies are migratory (e.g. the marmalade fly *Episyrphus balteatus*) and migrate in large numbers from continental Europe. Most hoverflies have short mouth parts and tend to feed on open, shallow flowers with easily accessible pollen and nectar, such those in the daisy family.



Hoverflies

Other flower-visiting insects include many other types of fly, butterflies and moths, beetles, true-bugs and wasps; however the species listed above are often the most effective pollinators.

Images: Gardening with Disabilities [Norfolk]



Garden club winners celebrate at the annual members' Flower Show. Inset: adapted tools help members to garden more easily

The group, which became a registered charity in 1998, offers support to people who, for whatever reason, are struggling to continue gardening. Members enjoy regular meetings and talks, trips to gardens and access to a tools library, as well as advice from the charity's Garden Advisor, Marianne Charles.

Marianne went to horticultural college in her 40s with a view to changing career; however not long after graduating she developed osteoarthritis and so started looking for solutions to continue gardening herself. Becoming the volunteer advisor at Gardening with Disabilities has enabled her to share her horticultural expertise. She visits members in their gardens to suggest steps they might take to make gardening easier. "We support and encourage gardeners, but don't garden for them," she explains. "We try to give ideas that friends and family can help with."

Member Stephanie Lake is grateful for the club's support. In her early 50s, Stephanie, a keen gardener, suffered a brain haemorrhage which left her paralysed down one side. As she struggled to come to terms with the loss of her mobility she found solace and inspiration in the group. "The membership of our group varies," she says, "and there are members who face many more challenges than I, but who are truly inspirational in what they achieve both in the garden and otherwise."

"Some members are physically challenged and some are fully able, but as a group we seem to be able to help each other, and blend

very well," she continues. "Certainly the friendship and sense of belonging have been of great benefit to me, and the fact that most of our meetings do have a gardening theme means that I can truly still think of myself as a 'keen gardener' just like I used to."

Ray Thomas, who has limited sight, enjoys hearing how other members tackle their problems. Being a member has meant "socializing with a variety of people who have

# Making gardening easier in Norfolk

This year, Gardening with Disabilities [Norfolk] celebrates 20 years of helping people to enjoy gardening.

different disabilities and a large variety of ways to overcome them". He's now more discerning when looking at tools, considering how heavy they are, how bulky and adaptable. He adopts a DIY



approach to making tools more user-friendly, with pipe-insulation foam on handles for better grip, and brightly coloured insulating tape to make them more visible.

Jennifer Purple - in her 40s - has had rheumatoid arthritis since childhood and gardens mostly

from a wheelchair. Jennifer is the group's Secretary, Treasurer and Newsletter Editor and enjoys the companionship and shared interest in gardening. "Our outings and our visits to other members' gardens get me out of the house," she says.

The group's oldest member, retired florist Ivy Payne joined the group 20 years ago and is still working in her garden at the age of 96. "I was lonely and saw a picture of the Gardening with Disabilities group, and I am so glad that I joined," she says.

Gardening with Disabilities [Norfolk] is open to members across West Norfolk and committee members regularly travel across the county to give talks and host advice stands at gardening events. "Our motto is 'Gardening made easier'", says Marianne, "not just for people with disabilities but for anyone who, for whatever reason wants to make gardening easier."

**Gardening with Disabilities [Norfolk] is keen to make contact and share information with similar groups across the UK. Please contact Marianne Charles: [mcfra@fsmail.net](mailto:mcfra@fsmail.net) / 01485 525 540**

## Marianne Charles' tips for making gardening easier

1) Tools - Have the right tool for the job. For example I use Peta hand tools with a special grip handle, the angle of which is ideal for gardening in a raised bed, and I use a Darlac lightweight, long-handled pruner for small, high branches.

2) Access - Good access to planted areas is very important so it helps to have paths next to narrow borders, and paths or stepping stones through wide borders. Grow plants which need attention in raised beds and large pots, so that you can sit while gardening. I also have a raised up cold frame and high benches in my greenhouse.

3) Low Maintenance - Choose drought-tolerant plants with year-round interest, including shrubs which require little

pruning and sturdy perennials which do not need staking. I do not hoe because of my arthritic back, so I use plenty of ground cover plants as weeds will quickly colonise any bare soil. Bark mulch will also do the job.

4) Watering - It is best to keep plants which do need watering in a separate area close to a water source. Watering the whole garden means more weeds! Try to position water butts in different parts of the garden.

5) Lawns - Avoid island beds and too many curves to make mowing easier. A brick mowing edge flush with the lawn will cut down on lawn edging. Lawns benefit from feeding, but not too much as the grass will need cutting more often.



Raised beds provide easier access for those with limited mobility





RHS/Julien Weigell

**The next issue will be  
YOUR issue!**  
*Send us your stories*

**To celebrate the 50th anniversary of RHS Britain in Bloom, we are dedicating the next issue to telling *your* stories.**

We want to include as many of your Bloom stories as possible in the summer issue of *Grass Roots*. Tell us what being involved has meant for you and your community. Have you taken part for years or just started recently; what changes has Bloom or It's Your Neighbourhood helped you to achieve; has the campaign helped anyone you know personally - perhaps to get the skills they needed to develop in a new direction?

We will publish as many stories as possible in the next issue of *Grass Roots*. Don't worry if you don't have time to write up the story in full - send us an outline and we'll contact you to get the details. Pictures are important, so make sure you send photos to illustrate your story too (images should be 300dpi).

**Email an outline of your story and pictures to: [Bloom50@rhs.org.uk](mailto:Bloom50@rhs.org.uk)**

**or post to: *Grass Roots*, RHS Community Horticulture, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE**

**Deadline for submissions for the July issue: 5th May 2014**