

RHS CAMPAIGN FOR
**SCHOOL
GARDENING**



RHS / FIONA SECRET

EDUCATION FOR GROWTH

The RHS School Gardeners of the Year awards and a skills development initiative called Green Plan It aim to encourage young people to embrace horticulture

Author: **Alana Tapsell**, RHS Schools Communications Officer

In 2013, the RHS launched a document called *Horticulture Matters*, which detailed future plans – with Government assistance – to work with schools to embed horticulture into education across Key Stages 1–4 (ages 5–16).

Today, around 6 million children at more than 30,000 schools and youth groups across the country experience the fun of gardening at their place of learning, as part of the RHS Campaign for School Gardening. For the last 10 years, schools, groups, teachers and children have been supported with expert knowledge and practical assistance by the Campaign and RHS local advisors – and have begun what the RHS hopes will be a lifelong love, connection with, and understanding of plants. For many children, gardening at school or with their group is the first time they have experienced growing something for themselves.

Each year, the Campaign runs its RHS School Gardeners of the Year awards to search for the most dedicated and inspirational pupils, groups, teachers and volunteers in schools across the >>

UK. One of the three categories is RHS Young School Gardener of the Year in which students aged 5–16 can be nominated. We focus below on three finalists from the 2016 competition who are each achieving incredible things in their secondary schools.

Efforts from the RHS to bring horticulture into primary schools have been hugely successful, but continuing to inspire children once they have embarked on their secondary education is more of a challenge. The need for horticultural education is heightened at this stage of life by the apparent lack of a transfer of gardening and plant knowledge from one generation to another, and a disconnect with nature. These are issues that affect society in general, but they can be tackled by giving young people better access to green spaces and opportunities to learn outdoors. One way the Society is making horticulture relevant to secondary students is through its Green Plan It Challenge. This initiative, which can be fulfilled either through the National Curriculum or as an extra-curricular activity, helps students consider the importance of plants, think about the role green spaces play in our communities, and learn more about a future career in horticulture. ●

RHS YOUNG SCHOOL GARDENER OF THE YEAR

Each year, the RHS receives nominations for enthusiastic young people who have shown commitment and understanding of their green spaces and horticulture, and have made an important contribution to their school and local community.



CHARLOTTE BROMLEY
DAVENPORT

KEY STAGE 3 WINNER, 2016

Molly Hall (aged 14)

Collingwood College, Camberley, Surrey

Molly's horticultural achievements are numerous. They started when, at the age of just 12, she spotted a dusky pink-flowering

bell heather among the native purple bell heathers and lings on her local heathland. By carefully monitoring this plant for a year, and realising that it was a new cultivar, she took several cuttings and has since propagated more than 1,000 plants of *Erica cinerea* 'Molly Rose'. She aims to sell the plants to raise funds for charity. The Heather Society subsequently asked Molly to write an article on her experiences for its 2015 Yearbook and she remains the youngest author to have done so.

The daughter of plantsman John Hall, Molly had built a reputation for propagating heathers when Elsie Ide (widow of plant hunter Dick Ide) asked The Heather Society to save a heather in her garden – and they knew just who to call. This heather was of sentimental value to Elsie: *Calluna vulgaris* 'Trinklet' was found by Dick on Trink Hill, Cornwall in 1972. Fortunately Molly managed to take some cuttings and produce around 60 plants. Some of these are now in the National Plant Collection at RHS Garden Wisley (see p108), alongside another cultivar also discovered by Dick and Elsie: *Calluna vulgaris* 'Mickle-Dickle'.

Molly also has a creative streak. For a GCSE project, she designed a 'Greening the Grey' garden and submitted it to the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show judging panel. They gave Molly positive feedback and have encouraged her to put forward a design when she reaches the age of 18. >>

GREEN PLAN IT

Anisa Gress, News Editor, *The Garden* explains how this RHS project is challenging secondary school students to think about the importance of gardening and green spaces.

Aimed specifically at Year 8–9 students (aged 12–14 years), the RHS Green Plan It Challenge calls for them to consider the role of green spaces and plants in the world around them. By exploring environmental issues and community needs, the project links to school subjects such as Science, Maths, Art, PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and Design and Technology.

The challenge helps students develop new skills, including teamwork, design and planning, while introducing them to a range of careers in horticulture they may not have previously considered.

Trials in schools

The initiative is run by the RHS Community Outreach and Education team. In 2015, a pilot 10-week RHS Green Plan It Challenge was held at 15 schools in Surrey. Students were asked to design a garden or community space, assisted by industry mentors from RHS Garden Wisley and from seven Squire's Garden Centre outlets.

Based on the success achieved by the 2015 trial, the project was launched nationwide in September 2016, at eight regional hubs, when



RHS/PAUL DEBOIS

Students at the launch of the challenge in 2016.



Green Plan It Challenge mentor Angela Halksworth of Tendercare Nursery, Middlesex with pupils of The Compton School, North London.

'The challenge helps students develop new skills, including teamwork...'

524 students from almost 100 schools met local industry mentors. A total of 115 mentors volunteered to spend time with students to assist with the 10-week challenge that ran throughout the school's autumn term.

Andrea Van Sittart, RHS Head of Outreach Development, explained that schools varied in their approach to the challenge. 'Some schools delivered it via the curriculum in class, while others did it through extracurricular clubs such as science or gardening. The challenge was open to all abilities of students with some schools selecting gifted and talented students to take part in their science clubs, whereas others found the project was a great focus for those needing additional learning support,' she said.



RHS/CHRISTOPHER E YOUNG

Model-making in the classroom.

Support from the industry

The 115 industry mentors involved came from all corners of horticulture, including professional gardeners, designers, journalists, botanists and growers. They each dedicated 21–30 hours over the 10-week programme. 'Having these volunteers to support students throughout this challenge was a great opportunity for young people to benefit from their skills and be inspired by their passion for the industry. It also helped the mentors enhance their own professional development,' said Andrea.

During the challenge, students (usually in teams of six) were asked to consider their project and illustrate their designs by making a model, video or drawing plans. At the end of the challenge the team presented their plans at a Celebration Day in December. Volunteers assessed the entries, and an overall winner from each of the eight regional hubs was announced. Winners received a trophy and £100 of National Garden Gift Vouchers.

✦ Plans are in place to run Green Plan It Challenge again in 2017. If you are thinking of becoming a mentor or would like your school to enter the challenge, select the '11–19 years' then 'Green Plan It' tabs at: www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening

2016 GREEN PLAN IT CASE STUDY

Swanlea School

Winner: Best Overall Project, London

At the start, students from Swanlea School, Whitechapel, London, struggled with the concept of designing a garden. Their experiences of living in flats left them with little personal understanding of having their own green space.

Working with their mentor, landscape architect Lily Bakratsa, the students carried out a survey of local residents before creating a design for a garden made from recycled materials, which any local resident could re-create on their own balcony.

Students said they learnt a great deal about plants and the different climates they need to grow and survive, and others said they would consider taking horticultural study further. Teacher Chris Nairn described the experience as 'a fantastic opportunity to introduce students from an urban environment to horticulture'.



RHS/CHRISTOPHER E YOUNG

Lily Bakratsa mentored the team of students at Swanlea School in East London (above). Many had little experience of green space.



CHARLOTTE BROMLEY
DAVENPORT

KEY STAGE 4 WINNER, 2016

Matthew Cossins (aged 15)

Ryedale School, Nawton, North Yorkshire

Matthew is the definition of a passionate gardener, having made a positive difference to his school's community garden. He was instrumental in the design and creation of the garden and along with his team, ensures it is always looking immaculate. For his passion and determination, Matthew was appointed 'Head Gardener' at school, giving him the responsibility of making decisions about what to plant where, and of helping younger pupils to improve their skills.

Matthew said that sharing his horticultural knowledge is something that drives him to garden at school, and that he enjoys both observing plants and helping the skills of his fellow pupils grow and develop. His interest in gardening first began when he was aged just four, helping his father with small jobs around the garden, and over time he was given more and more tasks to do. While at primary school Matthew used these burgeoning skills in gardening to help plant up raised beds and carry out experiments in the wildlife garden.

For the last 10 years, Matthew and his family have been entering several horticultural shows in Yorkshire. They started off showing fruit but have now moved on to dahlias, from which Matthew is particularly proficient in taking cuttings. He spent time volunteering at Scampston Hall, North Yorkshire, during the summer holidays and also worked there as part of his work experience. Once he has left school, Matthew is aiming to get a horticultural apprenticeship, go to college, and work towards becoming a head gardener full-time.



CHARLOTTE BROMLEY
DAVENPORT

KEY STAGE 4 FINALIST, 2016

Thomas McBride (aged 16)

King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

A budding botanist, Thomas's love of gardening started at an early age. As an active member of the gardening club at his primary school, Thomas was disappointed that his new secondary school did not have a garden, let alone a gardening club. He discovered an unused, grassy area of land in the school grounds and, along with a fellow pupil, asked to use this area to create a garden in memory of a teacher who had died.

The pair immediately set to work planning the plants and costs for the project, culminating in a presentation of their bid at a Parent's Association meeting. Overwhelmed by the detail of the plan and the care taken over it, the association granted the pair the funding they needed so that they could start as soon as possible. Thomas worked in the garden every other Monday afternoon, but also gave up many of his breaktimes to help it succeed. The garden now boasts a range of flowering plants and edible crops, the produce of which has been sold to help make the garden's funding more sustainable.

Thomas's favourite plants are scented pelargoniums, including *Pelargonium citronellum* and *Pelargonium 'Clorinda'*. He has successfully grown many of these from cuttings and is now trying his hand at cross-breeding experiments. If not in the garden, Thomas is found in the science laboratory tending to his extensive *Pelargonium* and herb collections. He is keen to study botany at university.



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RHS School Gardeners of the Year 2017

Supported by Gabriel Ash

Each year, the Campaign for School Gardening runs a competition to find the most passionate, inspiring school gardeners. There are three categories: **RHS Young School Gardener of the Year** (students aged 5-16); **RHS School Gardening Champion of the Year** (for teachers or youth leaders); and **RHS School Gardening Team of the Year**.

Across the three categories, 16 finalists will be selected and asked to make a short video demonstrating their passion for gardening and their work in the school and community. An overall winner for each category will then be selected.

Prizes include a Gabriel Ash greenhouse worth £3,425 and several Gabriel Ash cold frames worth up to £860, as well as gardening gift vouchers, seeds and tools.

❖ To nominate a student, team or adult, click on 'School Gardeners of the Year' at: schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/competitions (deadline for entries 28 April 2017).

