



RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint Home Gardens

The RHS is the UK's gardening charity,
helping people and plants to grow



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CITATION Sachs, A., Shearing, V., Chalmin-Pui, L., Lewis, B. and Griffiths, A. (2026).
The Wellbeing Garden Blueprint for Home Gardens. Royal Horticultural Society, London, UK.



The RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint

The RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint inspires your journey to a garden that's good for you.

Guided by **seven design principles** that shape your journey and **three core elements** as your vision, it helps you create welcoming green spaces that support your emotional health and forge connection with nature in everyday life – a new chapter in your lifelong adventure in gardening where you and your garden thrive together.

A garden of belonging

A lasting sense of place, ownership, and connection for all who use it.

A garden of emotional wellbeing

A hopeful, restorative environment where people can rest and experience a healthy range of emotions.

A garden of ecological resilience

A diverse, robust planting environment that supports long-term health for people and nature.

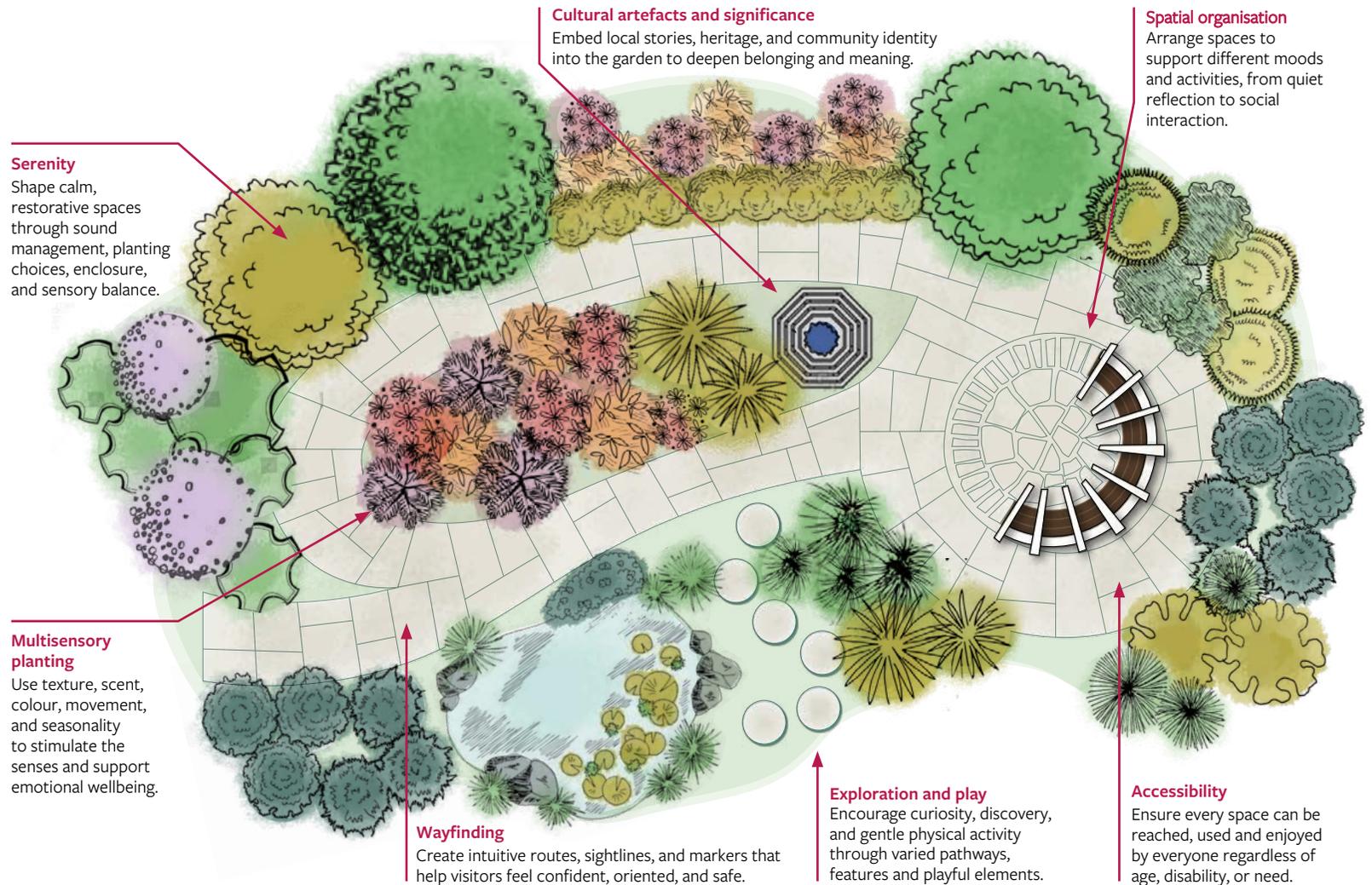


FIGURE 1 The RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint: seven principles and three core elements guiding you toward a garden that nurtures belonging, wellbeing, and ecological resilience.



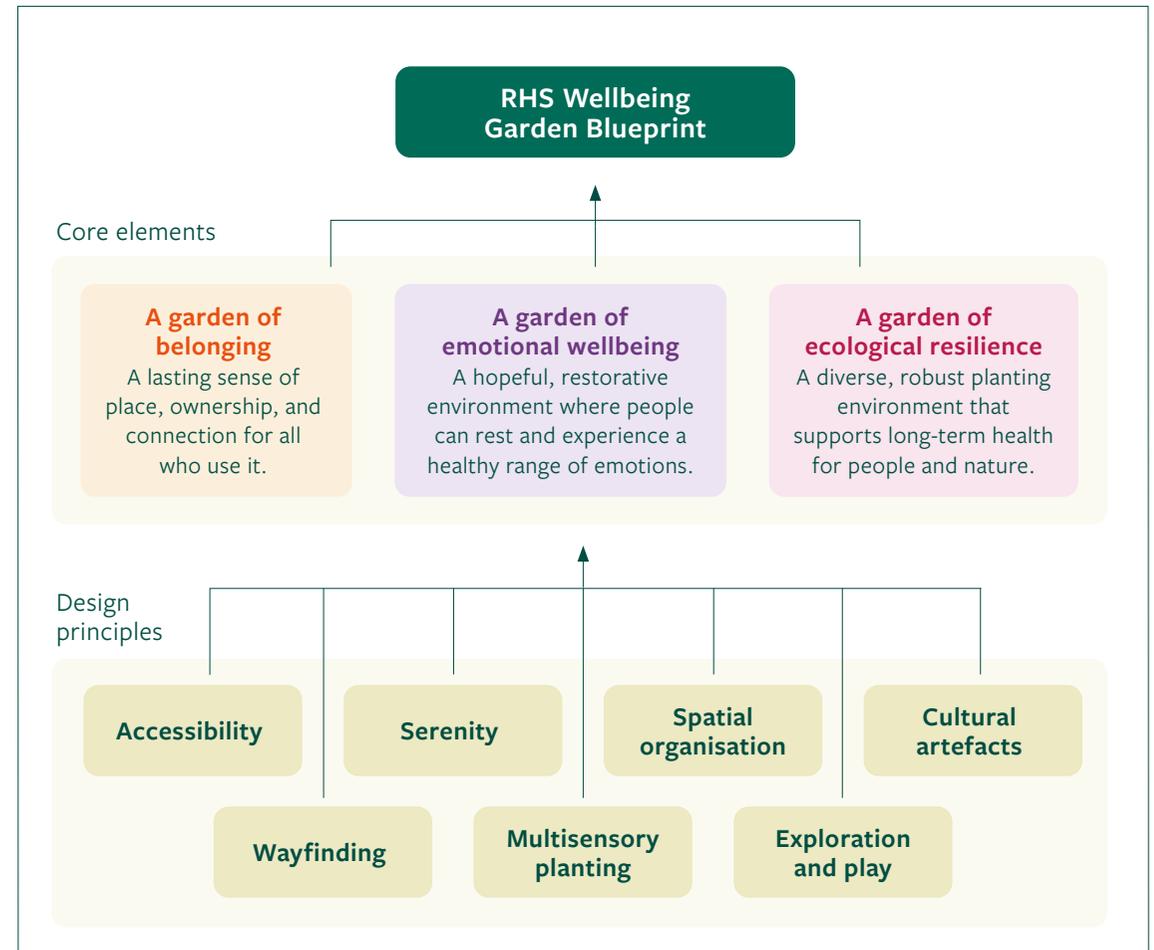
Introduction

A garden isn't just a place to grow plants; it's a place to support your wellbeing. Whether it's a garden, a balcony with a few pots, or a handful of houseplants, these spaces can offer peace, joy, and connection.

With around **41 million people-60%** gardening in the UK, and **88% of households** having access to a private or shared garden, these spaces are among the most accessible ways to support wellbeing.

The RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint draws on twelve years of research and practical experience to show how gardens and gardening can help us feel better, promoting good health, preventing ill-health, and supporting recovery when we need it most.

The evidence is clear: spending time gardening benefits our physical health, mental wellbeing, and sense of connection with others and the



natural world. To discover why gardens have such a powerful impact, explore the science that explains how and why they support better health and wellbeing.

The Blueprint distils the science into **three core elements** what a wellbeing garden achieves and **seven design principles** to help you get there, whether you're starting from scratch or enhancing an existing space.

FIGURE 2 The RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint: seven principles and three core elements guiding you toward a garden that nurtures belonging, wellbeing, and ecological resilience.

Shaping your wellbeing garden vision

Your wellbeing garden isn't just in the plants you choose or the paths you create, it emerges in the moments of peace, wonder, and connection you experience with nature in everyday life.

This activity invites you to notice what draws you to green spaces whether a sense of belonging, emotional comfort, or the joy of connecting with nature, so you can choose the design principles that best support your wellbeing.

Begin with curiosity

You don't need a garden to begin, any moment in nature, in a park, a quiet corner, even a simple window box can help reveal what matters most to you. Let these gentle practices guide your exploration:

- **Pause and notice**

Let your eyes wander until three beautiful things find you. What is it about them that speaks to you?

- **Take a sensory walk**

Move slowly, without destination. Which colours, textures, or scents draw you closer?

- **Listen deeply**

Find stillness. What sounds bring you back to yourself?

- **Welcome wildlife**

Watch the birds, the bees, the small wanderers. Perhaps their presence instils something in you.

- **Keep a nature journal**

Capture what you see, feel, and treasure. Over time, your own garden story will unfold.

Your reflections will reveal themes – whether you seek tranquility, delight in colour and texture, or enjoy moments with wildlife. Use this table to connect what you noticed during your nature moments to the design principles that will bring those experiences into your garden.

Read on to explore the three core elements and seven design principles in full or go straight to the science behind how they support your wellbeing.



DESIGN PRINCIPLE	BELONGING	EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE
1 Accessibility If you wanted to move freely and feel welcome in the space	●	●	
2 Wayfinding If you enjoyed discovering new areas and viewpoints	●	●	
3 Serenity If natural sounds brought you peace		●	●
4 Multisensory planting If colours, scents, and textures drew you in	●	●	●
5 Spatial organisation If different spaces suited different moods	●	●	
6 Exploration and play If wildlife encounters felt joyful	●	●	●
7 Cultural artefacts If the space felt personally meaningful	●	●	

Three core elements

What a wellbeing garden achieves – the vision

Drawing on the latest scientific evidence, gardens naturally support health, but their impact is strengthened through intentional design, thoughtful planting, and personal reflection. Drawing on scientific evidence, the RHS Wellbeing Garden Blueprint outlines **three core elements** that define the vision for any wellbeing garden, supported by **seven design principles** that offer practical steps to achieve it.

These elements apply to every garden, regardless of size, context, or location, and all three should be considered throughout both design and creation to maximise wellbeing benefits.

A garden of belonging

A lasting sense of place, ownership, and connection for all who use it.

A garden of emotional wellbeing

A hopeful, restorative environment where people can rest and experience a healthy range of emotions.

A garden of ecological resilience

A diverse, robust planting environment that supports long-term health for people and nature.



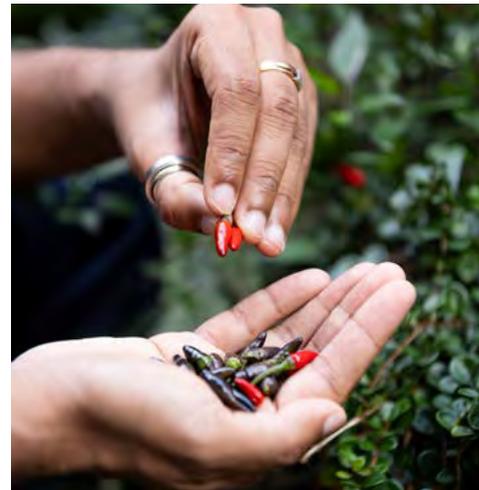


A garden of belonging

A lasting sense of place, ownership, and connection for all who use it.

A garden optimised for wellbeing fosters a strong sense of place, belonging, and ownership. Private residential gardens can be tailored to reflect individual creativity, preferences, and specific needs – such as favourite plants, play areas, mobility considerations, or space limitations – encouraging frequent, enjoyable engagement with the garden.

A sense of place goes beyond design to include emotional and cultural meaning. Through familiar visual cues, sensory experiences, and personal elements like heirloom plants, seasonal displays, or spaces for family traditions, the garden becomes a meaningful extension of the home and a site of memory, connection, and identity.



Designing for adaptability allows the garden to evolve over time. Flexible features such as moveable planters or modular elements help ensure the space remains relevant and engaging, becoming a living legacy that continues to offer joy, connection, and purpose throughout a lifetime of gardening.

FAR LEFT A window garden captures a personal space of belonging and everyday joy.

LEFT This heirloom plant captures the deep connection between plants, food, and the places we call home.

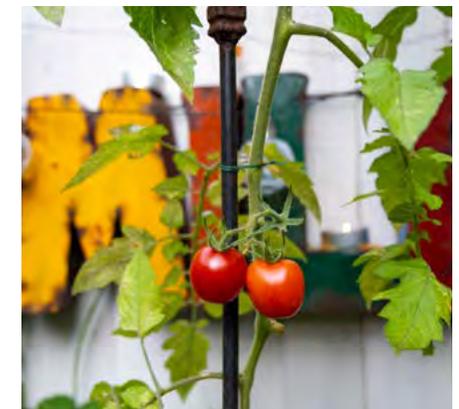
A garden of emotional wellbeing

A hopeful, restorative environment where people can rest and experience a healthy range of emotions.

A garden optimised for wellbeing supports mental, physical, and social health by embracing the full range of human emotions. Rather than seeking constant happiness or calm, it encourages flourishing through acceptance, reflection, and growth.

Gardens can aid emotional regulation by offering spaces to grieve, celebrate, restore energy, or find calm. Seasonal plant interest, distinct garden 'rooms' for different moods, and sensory elements such as water features or birdsong help create perspective, reduce stress, and soften intrusive noise.

A wellbeing-focused garden also evolves across the life course, adapting to changing needs, physical and cognitive capacity, and emotional priorities, from childhood through older age, and across a range of disabilities and health conditions.



TOP A quiet moment in the garden becomes a hopeful place to rest and move gently through life's shifting emotions.

RIGHT Whether indoors or out, water becomes a natural focal point, adding movement and sound.



ABOVE: The RHS Resilient Garden, Tom Massey's design, supported by ACO, blends resilient harmony with thoughtful design, offering a calming, inspiring space.

A garden of ecological resilience

A diverse, robust planting environment that supports long-term health for people and nature.

A garden optimised for wellbeing sits within a wider environmental context, recognising that human health is closely linked to climate and biodiversity resilience. Thoughtful planting – choosing the right plants for local climate, soil, sun, and ecological conditions – supports both environmental and personal wellbeing.

Designing with current and future climate conditions in mind, and using diverse planting, improves resilience to pests and extreme weather while providing sensory richness that benefits people and wildlife alike. Plants that support pollinators create opportunities for connection



with nature, observation, and restoration, with RHS Award of Garden Merit plants offering a reliable starting point.

Sustainable practices such as composting, rainwater harvesting, peat-free compost, pesticide avoidance, and planting for wildlife reduce environmental impact while enhancing gardeners' sense of purpose, connection, and wellbeing.⁵⁵

ABOVE: At RHS Hyde Hall, the Dry Garden showcases resilient planting that thrives in challenging conditions, creating a space where people and wildlife can connect, restore, and flourish.



Seven design principles

Having defined the three core elements that shape the vision of a wellbeing garden, we now turn to the pathway for achieving them. Although gardens are known to enhance wellbeing, clear evidence-based design guidance has been limited.

To address this, the RHS and the University of Surrey conducted a global review of research*, supported by our own work in RHS and NHS wellbeing gardens. We identified the design features with the strongest evidence for supporting wellbeing. These aren't just good design practices – they're evidence-based pathways to achieving the three core elements of a wellbeing garden,^{56,57} regardless of size or budget.

The pathway to achieving the vision

1 Accessibility

Ensure every space can be reached, used and enjoyed by everyone – regardless of age, disability, or need.

2 Wayfinding

Create intuitive routes, sightlines, and markers that help visitors feel confident, oriented, and safe.

3 Serenity

Shape calm, restorative spaces through sound management, planting choices, enclosure, and sensory balance.

4 Multisensory planting

Use texture, scent, colour, movement, and seasonality to stimulate the senses and support emotional wellbeing.

5 Spatial organisation

Arrange spaces to support different moods and activities, from quiet reflection to social interaction.

6 Exploration and play

Encourage curiosity, discovery, and gentle physical activity through varied pathways, features, and playful elements.

7 Cultural artefacts and significance

Embed local stories, heritage, and community identity into the garden to deepen belonging and meaning.

*Harries, B., Chalmin-Pui, L. S., Gatersleben, B., Griffiths, A., & Ratcliffe, E. (2023). 'Designing a wellbeing garden's systematic review of design recommendations. *Design for health*, 7(2), 180-201.





1 Accessibility

Gardens should be easy to find and access from indoors and around buildings, with clear, level pathways wide enough for two people and suitable for wheeled access. Designing for accessibility from the outset ensures the garden can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age, disability, or need.⁸⁴ Varied, comfortable seating in both sun and shade gives users choice in how they use the space.

An inclusive garden supports a range of activities and feels welcoming backgrounds,⁸³ across cultures and generations. Careful attention to lighting, planting, safe surfaces, and

furniture can help build confidence for those less familiar with gardens or gardening. A space becomes restorative when it supports what people want or need to do.

Features such as smooth, non-glare surfaces, gentle gradients, raised beds, accessible seating, and clear routes between areas improve comfort and usability, helping create a garden that is functional, safe, and enjoyable for everyone to find and access.⁸⁵

An environment becomes restorative if it is compatible with what an individual wants or needs to do.



2 Wayfinding

The pathways should link to all areas of the garden and provide a sense of direction and encourage exploration. Paving and layout should aid understanding and orientation of the different elements within the garden.

If the garden has pathways, these should be easy to navigate, curved to create different viewpoints, and invoke a sense of curiosity and surprise. Meandering pathways that link the whole garden together also remove the pressure of choice at an intersection, which is especially helpful for people with dementia.^{7,68} Avoid creating dead ends, as they can be confusing or frustrating for people with varied mobility requirements, visual impairments, or cognitive support considerations.

Nooks, alcoves, pergolas, and layered plantings can create intimate spaces along the path.



3 Serenity

Peaceful garden spaces can be created through natural sounds such as flowing water, rustling grasses, and birdsong, supported by pollinator friendly and berry-producing plants. Quiet, green areas encourage reflection, relaxation, and escape from daily stresses, which many people actively seek in gardens.

The most relaxing patterns are those that are easiest for us to process visually and cognitively. Studies have shown that these are patterns with exact repetition (fractals) of mid-level complexity or Fibonacci type sequences.⁵⁸ Patterns on seedheads, tree branching, ferns, sunflowers and pinecones would have these optimal fractals. Research shows that people

tend to react more positively to lush, green plants with rounded and denser foliage as opposed to narrow pointed leaves in a sparse canopy.⁵⁹

Serenity is strengthened by gentle natural sounds, trickling water, grasses moving in the breeze. Natural soundscapes are more calming than traffic noise, which can reduce the restorative effect of birdsong⁶⁰ while simply perceiving biodiversity is calming.⁶¹ Watching garden birds, such as robins, dunnocks, greenfinches and blackbirds, can be especially restorative.⁶² Planting to attract birds, or adding feeders, increases birdsong and supports this sense of calm.

ABOVE Soft, flowing grasses capture the calming patterns and sounds of nature, offer a moment of serenity, calm and reflection.

OPPOSITE Thoughtfully curved paths and clear junctions create a sense of flow and orientation, helping garden visitors move with confidence and curiosity.



4 Multisensory planting

Planting for diversity ensures year-round interest,⁶³ resilience, and habitat for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, while stimulating the senses and reflecting natural cycles. Designs should avoid invasive, toxic, allergenic, or high-risk pest species.

With these principles in place, a wide plant palette is available, including thousands of RHS Award of Garden Merit plants. Using plants with varied colours,^{64,65} textures, scents, shapes, and wildlife value creates rich multi-sensory experiences that can have an immediate positive effect on mood.

Scent plays a powerful role in wellbeing due to its direct link to emotion and memory.⁶⁶

Smell shapes emotional regulation, cognition, social interaction, stress, and symptoms of depression, so it is a key pathway through which nature supports wellbeing.^{67,68} Research shows that fragrances such as rosemary, lavender, rose, bergamot, grapefruit, cedar, and cypress can help reduce stress⁶⁹ and support emotional regulation.

Maintaining sensory and vegetative diversity across the seasons is essential. Including evergreens, winter-flowering plants, berries, textured bark, and colourful stems ensures continued colour, structure, fragrance, and ecological value throughout the year.

5 Spatial organisation

Gardens can support wellbeing by offering spaces that feel calming or energising, open or secluded, adapting to changing emotions, life stages, and needs. Dividing the garden into areas using plants, structures, or changes in perspective helps support a healthy range of experiences.

Regardless of size, gardens can include distinct spaces for different purposes. Trees, shrubs, climbers, grasses, and hedging help define areas that balance openness with privacy and safety, including quiet corners for observation and reflection.

Wellbeing gardens should also provide spaces for social connection, with areas for gatherings of different sizes and a mix of sun and shade. Features such as outdoor tables, shelter, and shared notice boards^{12,24} can encourage interaction, learning, and community building.





6 Exploration and play

A garden should have elements that inspire easy exploration. It can create a sense of play, joy and new discoveries about each other and the natural world. Stimulating all five senses as a means of discovery can be achieved through planting variety.

Include a diverse range of scented flowers or textured foliage and intentionally explore and experiment. Especially in a public garden setting, visitors may not realise that they are permitted to touch or sniff the plants. Some signage such as plant labels can foster deeper engagement and interaction.

Ensure that the planting choices don't include toxic or allergenic plants if visitors will be encouraged to touch them and prioritise plants that are hardy enough to be regularly engaged with. Such interactivity and exploration will generate playfulness for both children and adults, which is likely to be uplifting and restful for the mind.



TOP A playground of scent, texture, and movement where adults and children explore freely and discover nature.

ABOVE Sensory plants invite visitors to explore through touch, scent, and curiosity.

7 Cultural artefacts and significance

A garden that embeds wellbeing in its design is itself embedded in its local culture and history. Including cultural artefacts and plants to match the individual or community who enjoys the garden can facilitate fascination, belonging, and a sense of safety or familiarity.

Celebrating local cultures can be subtle or immediately visible: inclusion of plants that are symbolic of the local community, with many plants themselves capable of evoking strong and usually positive memories.

These might be gifts passed on to the next generation from loved ones, memorial trees, or plant displays reflecting the symbolism of the local community, your family, and your friends.





Scientific evidence base

Private gardens, even when not designed for wellbeing, are powerful assets for health.

Scientific evidence shows strong links between gardens and improved psychological wellbeing, reduced risk of mental illness, better stress regulation, stronger community connections, and higher self-esteem. Time in gardens can enhance our microbiomes,⁸⁶ potentially lowering the risk of immune-related diseases. Few activities match the breadth of benefits offered by gardens and gardening – particularly their measurable impact on active lifestyles and mental wellbeing.

Gardening or simply being in a garden helps us stay active, connect with others, and immerse ourselves in nature's colours, scents, wildlife, and beauty. Quiet contemplation restores the mind, while gardens also provide food and remedies for minor ailments. The evidence is clear: gardens and regular gardening deliver measurable physical, mental, and social health benefits.

Key evidence for gardens and gardening and health

- Recent longitudinal UK Biobank studies^{2,3,4,5} show that living near more gardens and green space lowers the risk of death from all causes, heart disease, and chronic respiratory illness, and may reduce obesity-related cancer risk.⁶ Higher outdoor activity combined with greater residential greenspace is further linked to a lower risk of dementia and improved brain health markers.⁷
- Howarth et al. in 2020, in a meta-analysis of 77 studies, found that gardening can improve physiological markers linked to long-term health conditions, such as blood glucose, cortisol, and heart rate variability. They also reported positive effects on mental health and wellbeing, including reductions in depression and anxiety, with 36% of studies focused on mental health outcomes.⁸
- Soga et al., in 2017, in a meta-analysis of 22 studies, found that gardening significantly improves both physical and mental health. Benefits include reductions in BMI, depression, anxiety, and stress, alongside increases in physical activity, cognitive function, and overall quality of life with mental wellbeing showing the strongest gains.⁹
- Van den Berg et al., in 2015, in a systematic review of 40 studies, found strong evidence linking greater green space to reduced all-cause mortality. They also reported moderate evidence for an association with perceived general health.¹⁰
- Reyes-Riveros et al., in 2021 conducted a systematic review of 153 studies on green spaces and human health and wellbeing. They found that greater green space through number, vegetation cover, and size, improves all assessed health aspects, with the strongest benefits for mental health.¹¹
- Chalmin-Pui et al., in 2021 found a significant positive association between more frequent gardening and physical activity levels of UK gardeners,¹² while de Bell et al in 2020 found that access to a private garden in the UK was associated with a higher likelihood of meeting physical activity guidelines.¹³



- Contact with soil and vegetation is associated with a higher diversity of microorganisms on the skin and in the gut, which improves immune system function.⁵³
- During the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns, gardening was linked to better health.²⁸⁻⁴⁹
- Exposure to phytoncides, natural aromatics released by plants, are linked with human hormone regulation and anti-cancer properties.⁸⁷

ABOVE Small planting moments bring calm and gently lift wellbeing.
LEFT At RHS Garden Wisley, moments in the allotments support wellbeing in powerful ways, lowering stress, lifting mood, and helping people feel more connected.

The evidence supports

- **Core element:** A garden of emotional wellbeing
- **Design principles:** Accessibility, Serenity, Multisensory planting

Gardeners perceived wellbeing

A 2025 survey by the Royal Horticultural Society and YouGov provides clear evidence for the health benefits of gardening. When asked about the impact of caring for plants, gardeners overwhelmingly reported positive effects across all three dimensions of health⁸⁷ – with 77% saying gardening benefited their mental health, 76% their physical health, and 44% their social health. Crucially, those who are actively looking after plants tend to have higher self-reported wellbeing scores than those who do not, suggesting that regularly tending to plants has a meaningful impact on how good people feel about their lives.

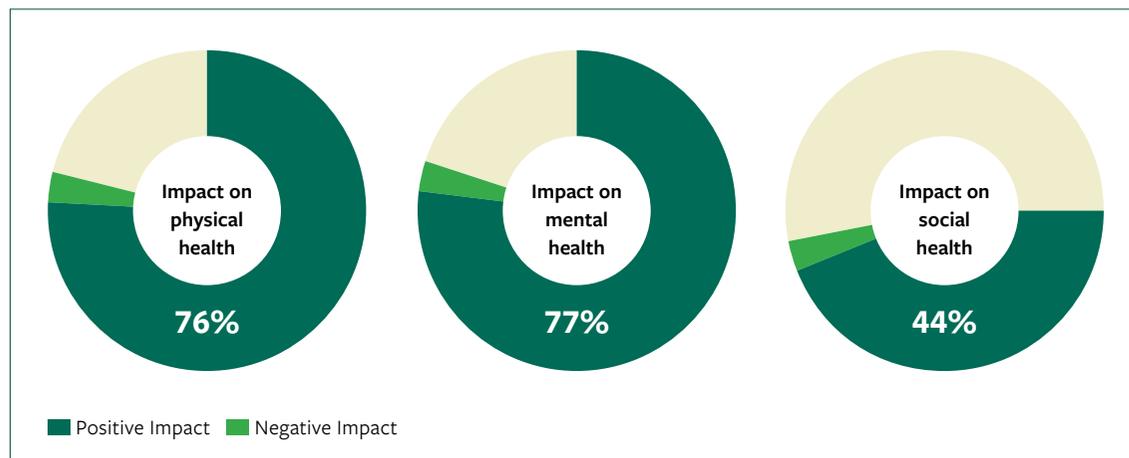


FIGURE 3 Proportion of gardeners reporting a positive impact on their physical, mental, and social health, based on a 2025 RHS and YouGov survey.⁸⁷

The evidence supports

- **Core element:** A garden of belonging, a garden of emotional wellbeing, a garden of ecological resilience
- **Design principles:** Accessibility, Wayfinding, Serenity, Multisensory planting, Spatial organisation, Exploration and play



On a personal level gardening can be associated with

- Reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety^{9,15}
- Frequent positive emotions, similar to biking, walking and eating out^{16,17}
- Feelings of joy^{16,12}
- Higher life satisfaction and meaningful fulfilment^{12,18,19,20}
- Sense of community^{21,22}
- Self-esteem²³
- Personal identity²¹
- Better connection with neighbours^{12,24}
- Creativity²⁵
- Forming positive habits around diet²⁶ and physical exercise²⁷

Spending time in a garden

For those who do not garden themselves, it is also clear that **simply spending time in a garden also has health and wellbeing benefits.** For example:

- The presence of residential gardens has contributed to lower cardiovascular and respiratory disease mortality rates²¹, as well as lower risk of cancer.⁶
- Greener front gardens are associated with healthier physiological stress regulation in residents (as seen through their daily patterns of cortisol hormone concentration).⁵¹
- Adding plants to bare front gardens reduced residents' stress as much as eight NHS mindfulness sessions.⁵¹
- Gardens and green space around the home is linked to less antidepressant medication.⁵⁰
- There is a consistent association between higher levels of green space during childhood and a lower risk of developing a psychiatric disorder later in life. This protective effect of green space is apparent throughout all of childhood.⁵²
- The scoping review by Wendelboe-Nelson et al., in 2019 found that 70% of 273 studies reported a positive association between green space exposure and mental health or wellbeing.¹⁴

Broadly, gardens and gardening grow plants and healthy minds, bodies and spirits

Gardens and gardening play a vital role in supporting health and wellbeing at both individual and community levels. Whether through active gardening or simply spending time in a garden, the benefits are wide-ranging – from improved mental health and reduced stress to stronger social connections and a greater sense of purpose. These positive effects aren't limited to large public green spaces; they can be experienced in private gardens, community plots, and even with a few plants in small front gardens or indoors.

Broadly, gardens and gardening grow plants and healthy minds, bodies and spirits through three key pathways:

- 1 **Reducing harm**
- 2 **Restoring capacities**
- 3 **Building capacities**

The evidence supports

- **Core element:** A garden of emotional wellbeing
- **Design principles:** Accessibility, Serenity, Multisensory planting



Growing healthy minds, bodies and spirits

Pathways from garden exposure or gardening to improved long-term health.



FIGURE 4 Pathways from garden exposure to improved longer term health from Griffiths, A., Chalmin-Pui, L. and Cameron, R. (2023). Cultivating urban habitats, a human species recovery action plan needs more than food and medicinal plant diversity to survive, *Acta Horticulturae*, 1374, 155-164, <https://doi.org/10.17660/ActaHortic.2023.1374.20>

Noticing nature: enhancing wellbeing beyond design

Designing and developing a garden for wellbeing is only the beginning. How we engage with and notice nature within your gardening space can significantly amplify its wellbeing benefits. Research shows that actively paying attention to natural features – such as plants, wildlife, colours, scents, and sounds – enhances psychological restoration, reduces stress, and increases positive emotions.^{73,74,75} Simply gardening or sitting in a garden without focused attention may offer some benefits, but structured noticing practices in your garden can also enhance wellbeing outcomes.⁷³

Why noticing nature matters

Attention Restoration Theory suggests that natural environments help recover mental fatigue by gently holding attention.⁷⁷ However, recent evidence also indicates that intentional noticing of sensory and emotional responses to nature can also deepen the restorative effect.^{73, 78} In experimental studies, participants prompted to notice natural features reported higher wellbeing and restoration compared to those who focused on built elements or received no prompts.⁷³ Similarly, interventions encouraging daily nature-noticing – such as pausing and observing beauty, listening to birdsong, or feeling textures – have been linked to sustained improvements in mood and nature connectedness.^{74, 79}



Practical activities to try out in your garden

Consider incorporating simple, mindful activities to strengthen your connection with nature and boost wellbeing in your garden:

- **Pause and observe**

Spend 10-20 minutes noticing three things you find beautiful in your garden and reflect on why they appeal to you.⁷⁴

- **Sensory walk**

Slowly walk through the garden focusing on colours, textures, and scents. Touch leaves, smell flowers, and notice contrasts in shape and form.⁸⁰

- **Soundscape listening**

Sit quietly and identify natural sounds – birdsong, rustling leaves, water features – and notice how they make you feel.⁶²

- **Wildlife watching**

Observe pollinators or birds for a few minutes. Watching wildlife can evoke fascination and joy, supporting emotional regulation.^{81,82}

- **Nature journaling**

Record observations and feelings after spending time in the garden. Reflective writing can reinforce positive emotions and mindfulness.⁸³

- **Three good things in nature**

Each day, note three positive aspects of nature you noticed in your garden. This simple practice has been shown to improve mood and wellbeing.⁷⁹

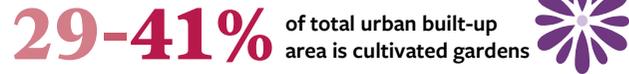
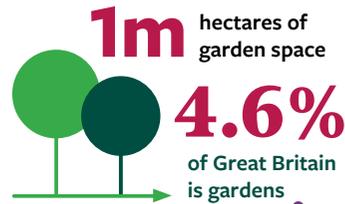
These activities are low-cost, accessible, and adaptable to any garden size. They encourage sensory engagement and emotional reflection, both of which are key pathways to nature connection and wellbeing.^{73, 80} These activities can be adapted for different needs, disabilities, and sensory preferences.

Gardens are an asset

Gardens are not a “nice-to-have” they are a proven, preventative public health asset.

Gardens and gardening are low-cost, high impact ways to improve mental and physical health, support healthy ageing, and reduce inequalities. Evidence shows benefits for wellbeing, the economy, and community resilience, making investment in green spaces and therapeutic gardening a strong public health strategy.

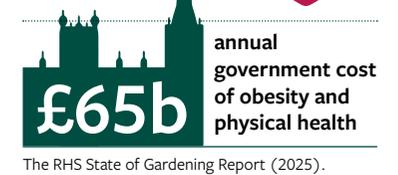
UK GARDENING LANDSCAPE



ECONOMIC IMPACT – ENVIRONMENTAL HORTICULTURE



HEALTH COSTS



MAJOR RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Mental health

Gardens and gardening act as a **scalable mental health intervention.**



Soga et al. 2017; Howarth et al. 2020.

Physical health

Gardens are a low-cost intervention that reduces major non-communicable disease risk and reduces inactivity.

Gardening = moderate exercise, burning: ~200 calories in 30 minutes → comparable to brisk walking, cycling, or yoga



Harvard Medical School, 2024

Social health

Gardens and gardening reduces isolation and strengthens communities.



Sempik et al., 2014; Panțiru et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2025; Kuo et al., 2025

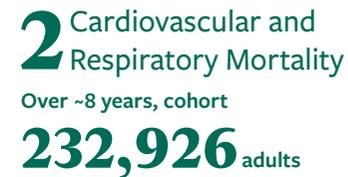
LONGITUDINAL UK BIOBANK EVIDENCE

The UK Biobank is the world’s most comprehensive, large-scale prospective biomedical dataset, containing biological, lifestyle, and health records from 500,000 UK participants over time. This dataset shows that gardening can lower risks of dementia, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, mental illness, and metabolic disorders.



Greener environments had lower dementia, depression and anxiety incidence.

Liu et al., 2024



More private garden space had lower all-cause, cardiovascular and respiratory mortality.

Roscoe et al., 2022



Those in greener neighbourhoods had lower total and lung cancer incidence.

Liu et al., 2025

Case studies

A wellbeing garden can be created in any setting, at any scale, and on any budget to achieve the **three core elements** of a wellbeing garden by applying any of the **seven design principles** of the Wellbeing Garden Blueprint. The case studies illustrate how this Blueprint works in practice.

Core elements

A garden of belonging

A lasting sense of place, ownership, and connection for all who use it.

A garden of emotional wellbeing

A hopeful, restorative environment where people can rest and experience a healthy range of emotions.

A garden of ecological resilience

A diverse, robust planting environment that supports long-term health for people and nature.

1 Growing friendship and wellbeing through a home garden

Julie and Richard Hill

📍 Devon £ £500 📏 200m²



DESIGN PRINCIPLES APPLIED

Accessibility

Widened steps and extended pavers for easy movement

Multisensory Planting

Scented jasmine and roses, water sounds, varied textures

Spatial Organisation

Secluded seating areas and distinct garden zones

Serenity

Fountain sounds and sheltered environments

Cultural Artefacts

Memorial camellia and handcrafted willow obelisk

2 Gardening through cancer treatment in a home wellbeing garden

Alison France and Andrew Farrell

📍 West Yorkshire £ £33,000 📏 1,200m²



DESIGN PRINCIPLES APPLIED

Accessibility

Levelled terrain designed for wheelchair access

Multisensory Planting

Scented roses and peonies, white dusk-glowing flowers

Spatial Organisation

Sheltered and sunny seating options throughout

Serenity

Fountain, shaded willow retreat, peaceful atmosphere

Cultural Artefacts

Artworks and memorial garden celebration space

3 How a wind-swept paddock became a garden sanctuary

Rob and Mary Morris

📍 South Birmingham £ £10,000 📏 2,500m²



DESIGN PRINCIPLES APPLIED

Wayfinding

Mown pathways through wildflower meadows

Multisensory Planting

Right plant, right place philosophy

Exploration and Play

Arboretum paths and meadow discoveries

Spatial Organisation

Enclosed rear garden with open valley views

Serenity

Wildlife pond and strategic seating for reflection

Explore more examples of wellbeing gardens in homes, communities, public spaces, and organisations, on our [website](#).

1 Growing friendship and wellbeing through a home garden

Julie and Richard Hill find joy in sharing tips, cuttings and plants with fellow gardeners in their local community

How the wellbeing garden began

In spring 2013, soon after moving to a rural hamlet in Devon, Julie and Richard Hill started developing their new back garden. Although tidily maintained by previous owners, it lacked variety, colour and imagination. They wanted to recreate everything they had enjoyed in their previous split-level garden – flowers, shrubs, water, birds, and spaces for relaxation and socialising.

Budget and process

With less than £500, Julie and Richard retained some original border planting, relocated other plants, and removed a poorly placed wooden shed. Two distorted Acer were replaced with an *Amelanchier arborea* and *Betula pendula*, plus three pleached *Carpinus betulus* for screening. They relocated pergolas with solar globe lighting supporting *Clematis* and climbers. Steps were widened and pavers extended to create a secluded seating area near water irises, jasmine and roses. With less than £500 annually for maintenance, the garden remains an ongoing project.



AT A GLANCE

TYPE OF GARDEN

Back garden

📍 Devon

£ £500, plus £500 for maintenance per year

📏 200m²

IMPLEMENTATION

PHASE started in 2013, ongoing

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

APPLIED Accessibility, multisensory planting, spatial organisation, serenity, cultural artefacts

Challenges and solutions

Digging revealed concrete chunks and bricks dumped by house builders 30 years ago. The soil had hardly any worms. The north-west facing garden receives only a few hours of sunlight. They reversed soil conditions by regularly mulching with well-rotted horse and farm manure. Planting adapted to shade-tolerant plants: *Helleborus*, ferns, *Brunnera*, *Hosta*, *Camellia* and foxgloves. Sunnier borders host *Salvia*, coneflowers and roses. Rather than using pesticides for caterpillars, they relied on natural predators. Salad crops were grown in a raised 'cot' structure with mesh protection. By taking cuttings and swapping seeds with friends, they increased plant stock without costs.

Impact of the wellbeing garden

The physical and mental exercise of creating and maintaining the garden, spending time outdoors and eating their own produce contribute to wellbeing. They find joy in sharing cuttings, helping neighbours with pruning, and being members of a local gardening club. Creating memories is important – a rose-pink *Camellia* received as a gift when they lost a well-loved pet reminds them of kindness each time it blooms. A willow obelisk created with a friend's help is a constant reminder of a delightful experience. The sense of peace shared with visitors, their Labrador Leo and local wildlife, has a long-term positive impact on their wellbeing.

READ THE FULL JOURNEY

Growing friendship and wellbeing through a home garden

RIGHT: A water trough under a pergola, with plants including yellow iris and blood grass **BELOW:** A variety of *Hostas* thrive in the wellbeing garden



FAR LEFT: Julie and Richard Hill's Labrador Leo loves playing in the garden **LEFT:** Salad crops grow in a raised 'cot' structure



2 Gardening through cancer treatment in a home wellbeing garden

From diagnosis to loss, Alison and Andrew's garden became a place of hope, healing and connection to nature.

How the wellbeing garden began

In 2018, Alison France's husband, Andrew Farrell, was diagnosed with myeloma, an incurable blood cancer. Together, they embarked on regenerating their grass-only home garden to create a peaceful space supporting mental and physical wellbeing during a challenging time. After Andrew's passing in November 2022, Alison continued nurturing the garden, finding solace in completing their shared vision.



AT A GLANCE

TYPE OF GARDEN

Rear and side garden

📍 West Yorkshire

£ £33,000

📏 1,200m²

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE 2020-2025

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

APPLIED Accessibility, multisensory planting, spatial organisation, serenity, cultural artefacts



ABOVE: In July 2024, a party took place in the wellbeing garden to celebrate Andrew's life



ABOVE: Alison France and her husband, Andrew Farrell
TOP: In March 2020, a wooden greenhouse was erected in a formerly abandoned corner of Alison and Andrew's garden
TOP RIGHT: Now, a greenhouse, a lotus bowl and colourful flowers are giving that corner new life

Budget and process

The garden is now a vibrant tapestry of life with running water features and artworks. They started by erecting a wooden greenhouse (£10,000) in March 2020, days before COVID-19 lockdown. 'Andrew had never been interested in gardening before, but when he started his treatment, we believed it would help us both,' said Alison. They created flower and raised beds, erected fencing, and introduced plants with noticeable scents, textures and shapes. The garden features hedges, borders, a fountain and wildlife-friendly elements like bird feeders, log piles, insect hotels and a beehive. Major costs included planning permission, concrete base, regrading the lawn, fence panels and porcelain tiles – totalling about £33,000.

Challenges and what went well

The biggest task was levelling the garden's half-metre slope and creating a 16x5m patio with bi-fold doors. 'We thought Andrew may eventually need a wheelchair. Therefore, we decided to level the patio and grass so he could move around freely. Unfortunately, he never saw the finished patio.' Work began days after Andrew passed away in November 2022. They meticulously planned both sheltered and sunny seating areas – Andrew struggled in sun, so pockets of shade were important. A willow tree acted as a natural umbrella. Growing everything from seed brought excitement, especially edibles: tomatoes, sweetcorn, courgettes, herbs, strawberries. They planted *Lupinus* for easy care, roses and peonies for scent, and white flowers – *Hydrangea* 'Annabelle', *Agapanthus*, *Cosmos*, weeping cherry – because Andrew loved how they brighten at dusk.

Impact of the wellbeing garden

As Andrew underwent treatment, the garden became their refuge. 'We knew he was very ill, so this garden provided us with a sense of purpose and a way to make happy memories together.' After his passing, gardening helped Alison through grief and became a place to celebrate Andrew's life. In July 2024, she hosted a garden party for family and friends, raising funds for Myeloma UK. Today, Alison continues finding joy in changing flower beds, busy bumblebees and nocturnal visits from bats, owls, foxes and badgers. The garden is a testament to their love, resilience and the healing power of nature.

READ THE FULL JOURNEY

Gardening through cancer treatment in a home wellbeing garden

3 How a wind-swept paddock became a garden sanctuary

Over the past decade, Rob Morris has designed and nurtured a garden where him, his wife and friends can unwind and find peace.

How the wellbeing garden began

Spanning 2,500m², Rob Morris' garden is a harmonious blend of nature's finest elements. At its heart lies a tranquil water feature, surrounded by thoughtfully placed seating areas that invite reflection. Rob and Mary moved to their current home in 2015, inheriting a bare, wind-swept paddock. 'My father wasn't a gardener. It was mostly lawn and paddock, very bare and exposed to the west, at the top of a valley.' Despite the windy position, his vision was clear: to create a space supporting the wellbeing of himself, his wife and visiting friends.



AT A GLANCE

TYPE OF GARDEN
Paddock and rear garden

📍 South Birmingham

£ £10,000, plus £5,000 for maintenance per year

📏 2,500m²

IMPLEMENTATION

PHASE started in 2015, ongoing

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

APPLIED Wayfinding, multisensory planting, exploration and play serenity, spatial organisation





FAR LEFT: Rob, Mary and their friends enjoy spending time in the garden to unwind and find peace
LEFT: Mary enjoying the naturalised pond in the paddock

Budget and process

After extending the house, Rob – who completed a Garden Design course at the Cotswold Gardening School – built hard landscaping structures (£20,000), then gradually introduced borders and created a meadow with a naturalised pond. ‘We planted hawthorn and dog rose hedging for twenty metres either side of 35 meters of fencing, leaving a 15-metre gap in the middle. This gives us protection from the wind without spoiling the valley views.’ During COVID-19, they dug informal borders and planted perennials and shrubs. Rob created a large kidney-shaped border filled with shrubs, small trees and perennials. In the paddock, he’s establishing an arboretum and orchard

yielding apples, pears and plums. He’s developing a wildflower meadow with mown paths where *Centaurea nigra*, *Ranunculus* and *Primula veris* are establishing. Total garden investment was around £10,000, with ongoing maintenance costing around £5,000 per year.

Challenges and what went well

‘Our garden has clay soil, which gets very boggy in winter and very dry in summer. I had to try many times before finding what works.’ Rowan trees, *Helium* and *Echinacea* don’t do well. The site is very exposed to western wind. Muntjac deer raid in winter, and moles dig among plantings. Rob discovered the

importance of ‘right plant in the right place.’ The shaded area is perfect for small *Acer* trees, *Aucuba*, *Hosta* and *Pieris*. Being dry and windy means heathers, *Hylotelephium*, *Gaura*, lavenders, conifers, *Cistus* and alpines thrive. *Valeriana officinalis* loves dry conditions, flowering from June into autumn. *Verbena bonariensis* self-seeds successfully. Successful perennials include *Rudbeckia*, *Perovskia*, *Monarda*, *Heuchera* and *Geranium*. ‘The wildlife pond is a real haven for bees, birds, newts and dragonflies. Purple loosestrife looks amazing over summer, along with irises and wild mint. We have a large pink-flowering waterlily. We get huge amounts of birds and it’s a joy watching them flying around.’

Impact of the wellbeing garden

‘This garden is my happy place. I can go out and lose myself for hours. When I’m planting, pruning or composting, I just focus on what I’m doing and forget the rest. My wife and I are in our late 60s and the importance of wellbeing has never been more significant for us.’ The seating areas provide a perfect spot for meditation, reading or enjoying nature’s beauty. Their garden is not just a place of beauty, but a haven where Rob and Mary find daily solace. Visitors often marvel at the garden’s splendour. ‘I’m a perfectionist and I can see the garden is not immaculate, but I’ve learned to accept its limitations and appreciate what I have. If you get obsessed with perfection, it can become stressful – which is the opposite of what I want for a garden created to enhance wellbeing.’

READ THE FULL JOURNEY

How a wind-swept paddock became a garden sanctuary

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If you'd like to explore the RHS research that has supported this Blueprint, please see the references shown in green.

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