

# Growing Communities



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The RHS Community update

A photograph of four women standing in a field, smiling and posing for a photo. They are all wearing bright yellow high-visibility safety vests over their casual clothing. The woman on the far left is wearing a red top, the second woman a grey jacket, the third a dark top, and the fourth a red top. They are standing in front of a large, dense, brown hedge. A young tree is being planted in the foreground, and a shovel is visible on the ground. The background shows a green field and a fence under a clear sky.

## Transforming Communities

### The Britain in Bloom effect

**The very Best “in Bloom”**  
We visit Cricklade,  
Champion of Champions winner

**Breaking the disease  
cycle in allotments**

**Wild About Wildflowers**  
Apply for your free seed pack now





## Your magazine

Welcome to the New Year issue of *Growing Communities*, the magazine for all RHS “in Bloom” and It’s Your Neighbourhood participants and RHS Affiliated Societies.

New Year in the garden is a great time for reflection. What will you do differently this year? What will you give up on and what will you try afresh? For your group, is it time to make that connection with the local school? Are there new areas of town you’d like to transform or new sponsors you’d like to approach?

Whatever it is you’ve set your sights on for 2012, we wish you the very best of luck with it. The RHS is here throughout the year to provide all “in Bloom” and IYN groups and RHS Affiliated Societies with horticultural advice and support (see page 11).

We hope that “in Bloom” and IYN groups will use the new report, *Britain in Bloom: Transforming local communities* (pages 6 – 7), as a tool for explaining the benefits of the campaigns. Published in November 2011,

the report examines the far-reaching impacts of Bloom. From reducing crime to increasing levels of healthy eating, participants are found to be changing the fortunes of their towns, villages and cities and transforming people’s lives.

In this issue we also bring you news of April’s launch activity (pages 4-5) – open to all community groups in 2012, including Affiliated Societies– as well as updates from community groups around the UK (pages 12-15).

As you know, we’re always looking for groups’ stories to publish so please send your news to: [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118.

We wish you all the best for a successful 2012. Sophie Dawson, Editor

## New letters page

Do you have a query you’d like to put to other groups, or feedback to share on an article published? Please send your letters to [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) or Sophie Dawson, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE. Letters on all community gardening topics are welcomed, but may be edited for publication.

First to be published is this query from Cold Ash Horticultural Society in Berkshire: *Cold Ash Horticultural Society has about 200 members, hosts three shows each year, with talks each month attracting about 30 people. In recent years we have noticed that fewer competitive gardeners enter the different classes, judges are becoming more difficult to find and our show secretary has retired without a successor. We need to develop a strategy that makes our shows and events more family-friendly and attractive to younger gardeners. Do any other affiliated societies have similar problems and can they offer bright ideas for activities that are appealing to the younger generation?*

*If you have any ideas, please contact Fred Davison at [coldashhort@aol.com](mailto:coldashhort@aol.com). Many thanks.*

The Royal Horticultural Society is the UK’s leading gardening charity dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting gardening. Our goal is to help people share a passion for plants, to encourage excellence in horticulture, and inspire all those with an interest in gardening.

Our community campaigns support more than 5,000 groups in creating greener and more interconnected communities. For more information about RHS Britain in Bloom, RHS It’s Your Neighbourhood and RHS Affiliated Societies, please visit [www.rhs.org.uk/communities](http://www.rhs.org.uk/communities)

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Cover: Bloom volunteers plant trees in Cricklade, 2011

Image: John Barratt

Image page 2: Forres in Bloom

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## Affiliated Societies invited to compete

The RHS Shows Department would like to invite Affiliated Societies to compete with some of the best amateur and professional growers in the UK.

Events are held in London, Cheshire, Surrey and Devon and include competitions for Camellias, Rhododendrons, Ornamental Plants, Daffodils and Fruit & Vegetables. Schedules are available from Georgina Barter ([georginabarter@rhs.org.uk](mailto:georginabarter@rhs.org.uk) or RHS, Shows Department, 80 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PE). 2011 was a great year for Eastcote Horticultural Society who won ‘The Affiliated Societies’ Challenge Cup’ at the Autumn Fruit & Vegetable Competition, followed by the Nottingham District Association NVS in 2nd place and Yealmlpton Allotments & Gardens Association in 3rd.

Left: Vegetables at the RHS Autumn Fruit & Vegetable Competition.



### The wider benefits of gardens

Although environmentally-aware gardeners can see the benefits of home composting, their understanding of indirect advantages such as planting to reduce localised flooding is not as clear.

A summer survey by the RHS found that just 10 percent of respondents thought their garden had a role to play in flood mitigation but 73 percent said they would be less likely to pave their gardens if they knew it prevented flooding. Similarly just 20 percent understood that plants help to reduce pollution.

“It’s obvious from these results that the RHS can further help gardeners understand the wider environmental benefits of their gardens,” said Leigh Hunt, RHS Principal Horticultural Advisor. “We need to offer practical solutions with the science to back it up,” he added.

To read the 2011 RHS review of the benefits that gardens provide, *Gardening matters: Urban gardens*, visit [www.rhs.org.uk/urbangreening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/urbangreening)

### Community orchards

New guidelines to help create community orchards have been published by the government. Download the document from:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardshowto](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardshowto)

### Rotary Spring Clean

Rotary clubs across Great Britain and Ireland are calling on communities to get involved in the ‘Rotary Spring Clean’ from 20 February

2012, to help tidy up local neighbourhoods. There are nearly 2,000 Rotary clubs around the UK and many already work in partnership with their local “in Bloom” or IYN group, gardening club or society.

To find your local club and get your group involved in the Rotary Spring Clean, visit [www.rbi.org](http://www.rbi.org)

### It’s Your Neighbourhood promoted to housing associations

A new good practice guide from Neighbourhoods Green confirms that residential green spaces do boost community cohesion and lists the IYN scheme as a useful resource in developing them. *Greener Neighbourhoods: A good practice guide to managing green space* aims to inspire social landlords to take more action to plan for and improve their green spaces.

The report, which could be used to engage your local housing providers in your “in Bloom”/ IYN campaign, can be found at [www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk](http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk)

### New support packs – Bloom & IYN

Updated support packs will be provided to all “in Bloom” and It’s Your Neighbourhood groups. The packs contain useful information about starting and developing your activities, as well as advice about where to find funding and how to generate media coverage.

We are liaising with the Regions and Nations “in Bloom” for packs to be sent to all groups once they have registered for 2012.

### It’s Your Neighbourhood group wins People’s Millions



Above: LUOS celebrate their win.

Living Under One Sun (LUOS) in Tottenham, London, are celebrating securing £58,000 from the Jubilee People’s Millions for their new project ‘Blooming Beds and Bees’. In an area with little local green space, the group will be training volunteers to help residents grow plants in gardens, balconies, schools, community centres and local green spaces.

LUOS coordinator, Leyla Laksari, said, “We are based in Northumberland Park and Tottenham Hale which has some of the most deprived wards in the country. It also has a ‘bee crisis’ as well as a need for more healthy and affordable food, so we’re delighted to receive this funding – it’s a great big helping hand toward our community outreach.”

[www.livingunderonesun.co.uk](http://www.livingunderonesun.co.uk)



## Wild about Wildflowers

Apply for your pack now

Above: Milton Keynes' wildflower meadows

The RHS is inviting all “in Bloom” and It’s Your Neighbourhood groups, as well as RHS Affiliated Societies to celebrate the launch of RHS Britain in Bloom 2012 by planting wildflower seeds.

Wild about Wildflowers will see hundreds of communities across the UK sowing wildflowers to boost colour and biodiversity in summer 2012. This nationwide “in Bloom” celebration of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee will take place at the start of the first ever RHS National Gardening Week, on 14 – 15 April.

Registered groups can apply for a free pack of cornfield annuals to cover an area 10m<sup>2</sup>. Seeds are provided by environmental charity Landlife, and are suitable for planting in managed environments only across the UK.

To register your group for your free seed pack and to download the support pack, please visit:

[www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch](http://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch)

If you do not have access to the internet, please phone 020 7321 3069 to request a registration form in the post.

\*One seed pack is available per registered group.

### Planting with a Buzz



Helen Bostock, Senior Horticultural Advisor with the RHS, explains how your wildflowers can help our pollinators in plight;

“Both native and non-native garden flowers can hold a wealth of appeal, not just for gardeners but for the hundreds of species of pollinating insects we have in the UK.

#### Why is this so?

Well, flowers that offer accessible pollen or nectar for insects make them a valuable resource for our wildlife. The insects that benefit most are well-loved by gardeners –

butterflies, moths, bees (honey bee, solitary bees and bumble bees) and hoverflies to name a few – and in visiting such flowers they also perform a vital role in pollination.

#### What makes this so important?

For a variety of reasons, one of which is the loss of natural habitat such as verges and field margins, many pollinating insects have suffered serious decline in recent decades. By offering pollen and nectar rich flowers such as cornflowers and poppies, we are giving these insects a helping hand.

Furthermore, without pollination, crops such as apples, strawberries, raspberries and indoor commercial tomatoes would fail to set fruit!

#### Which insects will my wildflowers support?

Corn poppy: Bees, hoverflies especially  
Corn marigold: Bees, butterflies, hoverflies  
Corn chamomile: Bees  
Corncockle: Bees, butterflies, hoverflies  
Cornflower: Bees, butterflies, hoverflies

The RHS and Buglife will be inviting groups to record the pollinators that visit their wildflowers in an online survey this summer. We hope all groups will get involved and help us to track invertebrate species around the UK. Details will be emailed to registered groups and will also be available at [www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch](http://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch) in spring 2012.

## Wildflower meadow for Cheshire town

Delight from residents as Bloom group brings wildflowers to Knutsford



Above: Pete Pealing and Sophie Lewis from Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, with Knutsford in Bloom's Mary & Yvonne (centre right); Top right: Volunteers broadcast the seed in March; Bottom right: Cheshire East Council help the group to prepare the ground.



In 2010, a year after its formation, Knutsford in Bloom (KiB) met Cheshire East Council with its proposal for transforming an underused grassy area into a field full of flowers.

Yvonne Bancroft, the group's Chairwoman, explains, “The council agreed to the meadow on condition that our group find the funding to cover the cost of the wildflower seed, and that we organise the purchase of the seed and the sowing.” To ensure the maximum chance of success the council agreed to help the group prepare the land.

KiB bought their seed from Landlife, who advised them which mix would be best for their site. “We have a 30 percent slope; acidic, damp soil; and sun only in the afternoons, so their guidance was invaluable,” explains Yvonne. With Landlife's help the group chose a combined annual and perennial mix to give them flowers the first year after sowing.

They spent just over £600 on 4.5kgs of wildflower seed to cover the 2/3acre site. Funds were provided by Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, whose tenants overlook the area.

“After the council had prepared the land we invited residents along to help broadcast the seed and by July we had a fabulous meadow, which, if looked after properly, should give us pleasure year on year,” says Yvonne.

Last summer locals enjoyed a mixture of corn chamomile, cornflower, lesser knapweed, meadow buttercup, meadowsweet, red campion, ribwort plantain, and ox eye daisy.

“It was an astounding success,” says Yvonne. “There were residents bringing friends to come and see it, people walking by smiling taking photographs, and elderly residents reminiscing about their childhood memories of meadows. So many people came up to us saying how much they loved

the meadow, and lots of people also wrote in to the local papers to voice their support.”

It's been so popular that Cheshire East Council is now hoping to create more meadow areas around Knutsford and the rest of the county, a move which delights Yvonne. “It looks good, it's good for the environment and wildlife, and saves on labour costs,” she says. “Cheshire Peaks and Plains are also thrilled with the outcome.”

[www.knutsfordinbloom.co.uk](http://www.knutsfordinbloom.co.uk)



It looks good, it's good for the environment and wildlife, and saves on labour costs.

Yvonne Bancroft,  
Knutsford in Bloom  
Chairwoman



# Britain in Bloom transforms communities

Above: Volunteers keep Richmond in Bloom; Top right: Orange Rockcorps volunteers repainting the railings at Bunhill Fields; Bottom right: Improving Islington's green spaces.

## The Britain in Bloom campaign has far-reaching environmental, social and economic impacts, according to a new report commissioned by the RHS.

The report, based on the responses of 231 "in Bloom" and IYN groups and 11 in-depth case studies, found that the lives and livelihoods of individuals up and down the country have been radically transformed, thanks to the campaign.

### Social Impact

- 90 percent of Bloom groups stated the main benefit of participating in the campaign was the 'creation and development' of communities.
- More than 50 percent of groups saw a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour since participating in Britain in Bloom.
- Many groups grow fruit and vegetables, accompanied by cooking classes, meaning that more residents have access to healthy food and exercise in the form of gardening all year round.

### Economic Impact

- On average, groups fundraise £6,044 each to carry out their work.
- One local authority estimated that from an investment of £67,000 towards their community's Britain in Bloom campaign they got back as much as £2.6 million from the work undertaken by volunteers.

- Businesses reported seeing the direct impact of Britain in Bloom on their profits, thanks to cleaner streets and more appealing surroundings, which attract more customers.
- Upwards of 4.4 million volunteer hours are given each year through Britain in Bloom to improve local surroundings. This is the equivalent of £155 million worth of labour at the national minimum wage.

### Environmental Impact

- Bloom groups look after an average of 15 acres of green space each.
- Nearly 70 percent of groups undertake litter picks, 33 percent care for street furniture and 25 percent remove graffiti.
- An estimated 115,000 trees, 352,000 shrubs and 21.6 million plants and bulbs are planted by groups annually.

### Transformational Impact

- 50 percent of groups listed transformation of disused space as a benefit of participation, citing that this space was previously an eyesore and a hub for anti-social behaviour which often created a fear of crime among residents.

To read the full report, visit:  
[www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](http://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)



Harvest time at the Ham United Group in Richmond, part of Richmond in Bloom

Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN), supported by Anglian Home Improvements, are community horticulture programmes changing the physical and socio-economic landscape of the UK.

Under the stewardship of the RHS, the campaigns involve over 2,100 communities ranging from small street-level groups to villages, towns and cities, from the Channel Islands to the north of Scotland.

## Case study: Brightlingsea, Essex From beleaguered battleground to tourism hotspot

### Community

Category: Coastal Town  
Leadership: Volunteer  
Size of community: 8,900  
Number of volunteers: 70  
Average volunteer hours per volunteer: 'hundreds' per year  
Years as an "in Bloom" participant: 16

Above: Brightlingsea in Bloom has helped to make the town a tourist destination with colourful flower beds and extensive tree planting (below).

Brightlingsea is a small town on the Essex coast. With the demise of its shipyards the town fell on hard times and by the mid-1990s there were over 15 vacant shops in the high street. Then a fierce battle over live animal exports meant it was fast becoming known as a no-go area.

Frustrated by the negative atmosphere, a small group of residents established Brightlingsea in Bloom and embarked on a tentative planting exercise, quickly attracting support from businesses and the local horticultural society.

Volunteers created several new gardens in sites that were previously dull and disused, transforming waterside areas and helping to make the town the tourist destination it is today.

The group has been instrumental in turning the town's fortunes around, says Brightlingsea Town Councillor Karen Yallop. "All the good publicity generated over the years by Brightlingsea's success in the competitions has helped to boost our local economy," she says.

"I see the 'in Bloom' project as an essential part of our tourism strategy," she adds. "Funded by local businesses and residents, it injects a substantial sum of money annually into the care and overall

appearance of Brightlingsea that the town council couldn't possibly afford."

Today there are no longer any empty shops and businesses are capitalising on increased visitor numbers. The town has also seen a reduction in vandalism and graffiti as civic pride has been boosted and more people are involved in efforts to care for their environment.

Brightlingsea is now an increasingly popular place to live. New residents have told Bloom volunteers that their reason for relocating to the town is "because of the flowers".

Des Rowson, Chair of Brightlingsea Business Association is certain of the difference the plants and flowers have made. "The town now looks clean, looks good and looks thriving and that's why virtually everyone takes part in one way or another," he says.

Chairman and group founder Val Gilders is delighted with its success. "Little did I realise when I suggested creating a few flower beds and putting out a few pots that 16 years later we'd still be blooming! Long may it last to keep Brightlingsea bloomin'," she says.

[www.brightlingseainbloom.co.uk](http://www.brightlingseainbloom.co.uk)



**The town now looks clean, looks good and looks thriving and that's why virtually everyone takes part in one way or another...**

**Des Rowson,  
Chair, Brightlingsea  
Business Association**



# RHS Science & Advice

News and tips from RHS Scientists and Advisors. To suggest a topic for this section of the magazine, please contact [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118.



Image: RHS Neil Hepworth

## Allotments: Breaking the disease cycle

Potato blight attacks tomatoes

Allotment groups often ask about avoiding disease outbreaks as allotments can be hotbeds of disease. In your own garden it is relatively easy to remove dead and diseased plants and reduce the pathogens that will re-infect the following year. In allotments some plot-holders may omit good plant hygiene at the appropriate time, usually through failure to appreciate the benefits, which can cause problems for everyone. So what can realistically be done?

Potato blight, which can also devastate tomatoes, is typical. Here the fungus-like organism causing the disease lurks in living tissue, such as potato tubers left in the ground. Potato blight can produce robust resting spores that can survive several years to infect future plantings, but these have not yet been recorded in British crops. However the prudent gardener assumes they might be present, as they have occurred in Nordic countries, and therefore scrupulously clears up spent tomato and potato crops.

Lifting all potatoes and eradicating any

survivors in spring is clearly vital; the same applies to any stored and subsequently discarded tubers. As this is a relatively easy solution it should be feasible to insert a clause in tenancy agreements requiring this of plot-holders.

If the over-wintered pathogens can be reduced, potatoes can be set out and, later, tomatoes planted out with a much smaller chance of early infection. All the same, it is highly likely that infection may arrive later in the season as spores are carried on the breeze.

Potatoes and tomatoes can be protected by copper fungicides, but in wet weather this will only slow and not prevent or cure disease. Happily there is some resistance in many potato cultivars and some tolerance in certain tomatoes. By combining these with copper fungicide, enhanced control is possible.

When a serious attack occurs, is it reasonable to require plot-holders to scrap affected plants when a spell of dry weather may lead to partial recovery? To avoid losing all plants, we would advise removing unsprayed tomatoes when

disease strikes; for unsprayed potatoes, remove foliage and harvest two weeks later (when the risk of spores infecting tubers has diminished). Treated crops might reasonably be left until it is clear that disease levels are at around 50 percent infection; at this point the crop should be cut back or removed.

Ideally, spent infected crops should be burnt, or where bonfires are not permitted, consigned to the green waste collection. Commercial composting is highly effective in reducing disease levels. It is usually impractical to collect potato roots; however it is sensible to destroy tomato roots if you can.

Although eradicating diseases is seldom possible, it is often feasible to disrupt the disease cycle. Where gardeners appreciate that breaking the cycle can significantly limit crop losses they may be willing to improve their 'crop hygiene'.

For more about diseases visit:  
[www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)

## Ten tips for easy edibles:

- 1. Pea shoots** – keen gardeners often sow too early, so scratch the itch by sowing seed trays of peas on a sunny windowsill and gathering the tender young shoots for salads or stir fries.
- 2. Gooseberry cuttings** – if you know of a tasty, disease-free gooseberry bush, hardwood cuttings are easy to take in winter. Most soft fruit is best bought in as certified disease-free stock, but gooseberries should be all right.
- 3. Leafy salads** – like pea shoots, sowing leafy salads such as corn salad, lettuce, pak choi and chicory in tubs of peat-free growing media in greenhouses, conservatories and windowsills can produce masses of fresh greens. Wash all leaves carefully before use.
- 4. Red-fleshed apples** – several have come on the market such as Redlove TM Era. These are so new we have no idea yet how good they are. They seem to have been bred from red-fleshed crab apples and may or may not be tasty, but if red apples appeal they should do the trick. Let us know if you like them.
- 5. Blackberry** – Reuben is an easy to grow blackberry that crops on young wood so it is easy to prune. It is quick-growing and can even be grown in tubs.
- 6. Sweet blackcurrants** such as 'Ebony' and 'Big Ben', have bigger than usual berries and are so sweet that they can be eaten fresh without sugar. We have grown these for some years at Wisley and are very pleased with them.
- 7. Rock samphire** (*Crithmum maritimum*) – there is more than one edible plant called samphire, but seeds of this one are now available for anyone fancying unusual cooked greens.
- 8. West Indian lemon grass** (*Cymbopogon citratus*) – as well as rooting shoots of supermarket lemon grass, devotees of this tropical plant can raise it from seed to grow in a warm bright place indoors.
- 9. Sweet cicely** (*Myrrhis odorata*) – the leaves of this plant can be used as sweetener, or at least reduce the need for sugar in stewed rhubarb for example, and the young roots can be used as a vegetable. Seeds as well as plants are sold.
- 10. Microgreens** – if you think of mustard and cress then you've got the right idea. Alternative microgreens include beetroot, celery, chard, chervil, kale and rocket. It is **essential** that only seeds sold for use as microgreens should be used. Other seed may not be safe to use in this way.



Image: RHS Tim Sandall

Above: Early salad crops ; Below: Red-fleshed apples at the Organic Lea Community Project

To search for advice covering more than 700 common gardening topics, visit [www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)



Image: RHS Tim Sandall



# A top mark school

A Yorkshire school celebrates a double triumph, with top marks in two campaigns.



Above: The junior school garden; Right: Pricking out vegetables; Below: Pupil Ellie with a home-grown Snake Gourd.

Travis St Lawrence in Doncaster used to be two schools (infant and junior) but recently merged into one primary. Both schools joined the RHS Campaign for School Gardening (CfSG) in 2009 but decided also to become an It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) group in 2010 as they were keen to be involved with the local community and felt the two schemes complemented each other.

Led by Sue Jordan (junior school) and Philippa Cousins (infant school), the children became involved in activities including planting trees in the grounds with the local park ranger and holding an open school garden day in aid of charity. Additionally, the school has created links with a local nursing home where they look after a community bed. The lower school has worked with Lloyds Bank employees to help kick-start their vegetable plot and parents and carers are regularly invited to take part in gardening activities with their children.

In July of this year, the schools were assessed under the IYN scheme and

were delighted to be awarded a Level 5 (Outstanding) award. Earlier in the year the school also achieved a Level 5 in the CfSG benchmark scheme.

Sue says, "These awards are fantastic for the whole school and recognize all the hard work that the children have undertaken."

"Planning our future gardening activities together proved to be very helpful in supporting the process of amalgamating the two schools", adds Philippa.

The school is currently a CfSG partner school, receiving regular visits from Regional Advisor John Hickling, who advises them on the development of the garden and runs gardening sessions with pupils. In return, Travis St Lawrence host after-school gardening training sessions run by John. These provide the perfect opportunity for the school to demonstrate its achievements, share its plans for the coming term and generate discussion with other school staff who are able to share their ideas and experiences.



## Tips for winter

- Chop up willow stems to lengths about the size of a large pencil and push them in all the way to the soil surface. When these grow long shoots you will be able to harvest them for craft activities.
- Spend time looking at a seed catalogues and deciding which crops to grow this year. Children love being involved and can cut pictures out of old catalogues or gardening magazines.

## Leigh Hunt

RHS Principal Horticultural Advisor

The RHS Advisory Service, based at Wisley, answers over 65,000 enquiries each year. As well as drawing on the 10 advisors' practical knowledge, the team work with RHS Scientists to find all the evidence needed to give the best possible gardening information.

### How did you become the RHS' Principal Horticultural Advisor?

I was a student at Birmingham Botanical Gardens and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. I then joined BBC *Gardeners' World Magazine*. Much of my time was spent advising the editorial team on horticultural matters and checking the pages for technical accuracy, so a move to the Advisory Service felt very natural in 2004.

### What are the most common queries you receive?

"How do I prune my wisteria?" is an old favourite. Otherwise, enquiries often relate to the weather, from brown leaves caused by frost to mildew caused by humid conditions. As a result, we have put the answers to many common questions online at [www.rhs.org.uk/gardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/gardening).

### And what about the most bizarre questions?

There was a letter asking "do you think my camellia self-combusted?" Probably not was the answer! Likewise, there are common turns of phrase that often lead to a laugh being shared with an enquirer. For example, when a person wants a plant identified and their description begins "I've got a plant with green leaves..." Well, that narrows it down!

### Do you get many queries from community groups?

We do get horticultural enquiries from community groups. Recently, I have been supporting an enthusiastic group in North Summerfield, Birmingham, who want low-maintenance planting for sun and shade. As always, choosing the right plants and getting an appropriate commitment to maintenance are the key challenges.

### Can all RHS community groups contact the Advisory Service?

Yes, if you are a registered "in Bloom" or It's Your Neighbourhood group, or the Science & Advice Liaison Contact of an RHS Affiliated Society, you can contact us with horticultural queries relating to your group's activities. If you're an individual member of the RHS you can also receive advice about your own garden.

Email: [gardeningadvice@rhs.org.uk](mailto:gardeningadvice@rhs.org.uk) or Tel. 0845 260 8000 (Mon-Fri 10am-4pm) alternatively you can post enquiries and samples to: Advisory Services, RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. When sending enquiries to RHS Advice, please always quote your Society's Affiliation number or BiB/IYN and the name of your "in Bloom" or It's Your Neighbourhood group.

[www.rhs.org.uk/advice](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)

Are you an RHS Affiliated Society, "in Bloom" or It's Your Neighbourhood group working with your local school? We're always looking for examples of innovative partnerships to feature in the magazine. Please send an outline of your story to [deirdrewalton@rhs.org.uk](mailto:deirdrewalton@rhs.org.uk) or call 01423 724 683.



# Wiltshire town shines in Bloom Finals

2011 was a good year for Cricklade: the 9th Century market town scooped top prize at the RHS Britain in Bloom UK Finals, winning the Champion of Champions category.



Anita Barrett and Cricklade community groups celebrate their Champion of Champions win at the group's community garden.

Chairlady of Cricklade Bloomers, Anita Barratt is delighted with the result. "It truly is clear recognition of all the hard work that people have put in over the years to make Cricklade a better place to be," she says.

The volunteer-led group was established in 2004 after South West in Bloom judges suggested to the town council that a committee be formed from a cross-section of the local community. Today 20 volunteers are regularly involved, with another 20 volunteering occasionally. In 2011, they put in over 6,000 hours between them.

The Bloomers work on a huge variety of projects, from planting up and maintaining a community garden full of shrubs and perennials to supporting the local primary schools in teaching their children how to garden.

For Anita, it's the group's partnerships with other local organisations that lie at the heart of their success. "It's important for us to engage with every section of the town to

make the campaign sustainable. We work with the Community Payback teams, who clear the ditches and hedges, the fire brigade, Scouts, schools and the Royal British Legion - every age group is involved and every local resident represented," she says.

The group marked last year's 90th anniversary of the Legion by planting up a poppy design in the middle of one of the flower beds. "It was so bright and beautiful that people would stop, admire and contemplate its meaning before continuing with their day; it was lovely to see," says Anita.

This year will see the team partner with the Cricklade Youth Centre to design and plant a new display around a bike rack. Getting the young people engaged is crucial, says Anita. "We used to experience little pockets of anti-social activity like all places do, graffiti on walls and broken windows, but last year there was none. I can only put this down to the Bloom effect and the wonderful

community spirit it has helped to create," she says.

Last year's campaign started with a unique approach: Cricklade Bloomers joined forces with the local council to conduct a tour of the area, creating a snagging list of everything they felt needed attention; from broken street signs to loose manhole covers and unkempt flower beds, three spreadsheets worth of actions were noted. "We really wanted to look at Cricklade through fresh eyes, to see it as a visitor or Bloom judge would and we felt the best way to do this was to go around and write a list of everything that needed fixing," explains Anita.

"We didn't really expect to be able to tick everything off but we did. By working with everyone in the town, along with the big utility companies, we identified who was responsible for the different jobs, and as such everything got done. In some ways I'm still amazed, but I guess this just proves what



great community action can do."

Every year, thousands of visitors flock to the town over the four weekends in April to see the snake's head fritillaries in the North Meadow National Nature Reserve.

"We sell them tea and cakes as they go, raising not only the funds we need for our work but also awareness of our Bloom campaign and the work Natural England does in helping to keep the meadows alive with wildlife," says Anita.

All funds are ploughed back into the community-run nursery, where plants are grown for the town's flower beds, planters and public gardens. With around 4,000 sown each year it's a hive of activity, but it's also a great community resource, says Anita. "People can drop in, give a helping hand, or just stop for a cuppa and a chat. We're open every Wednesday and Saturday morning and the kettle is always on. It's nice for everyone to be able to see what we're doing all year

round and feel they can volunteer if they wish."

2012 is already off to a flying start, with a new woodland area and wildflower meadow in the pipeline, to be funded by The Big Tree Plant.

"It's a great place to visit and we're hoping that tourism will increase in 2012," says Anita. "Come and visit us and you will receive a very warm welcome; if you are a community that is thinking of entering Britain in Bloom come and talk to us about getting started."

[www.crickladeinbloom.co.uk](http://www.crickladeinbloom.co.uk)

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**Anita Barratt, Chairlady of Cricklade Bloomers**

*Top: Cricklade celebrates 90 years of the Royal British Legion; Below left: visitors enjoy the snake's head fritillaries; Middle: Planting 800 trees provided by the RHS and the Woodland Trust on Fairview Fields Conservation Project; Right: The community-run polytunnel.*



## Hedge funds and DVDs in Norwich

Above: ERRA volunteers Richard Waterfield and Kathleen Rowlands water the newly planted saplings. Below: The planting team in autumn 2011.

**Eaton Rise Residents' Association (ERRA) – an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group – has brought together neighbours on Eaton Rise for the last 50 years. But a recent project to save a local hedge has seen community action grow to unprecedented levels.**

Something of a local landmark, the 200-year-old hedgerow lining the A-road to Ipswich had grown increasingly patchy following years of neglect. With the council struggling to finance its maintenance, residents looked on in dismay as the living corridor of wildlife screening their homes from the road gradually fell into disrepair. In 2011 they decided to act, and ERRA took on the mammoth task of reinstating and conserving over 500m of the ancient row. Planting was planned in phases with the first in March 2011.

Kathleen Rowlands, Chair of the Association explains, "We applied for 820 saplings as part of last year's Britain in Bloom launch and residents raised enough money to buy almost 600 more, so we put in over 1,400 trees in total."

Ivy, dead wood and debris were cleared and the saplings were mulched and protected with a line of temporary fencing. The completion of the first stage was celebrated with an event, with the Lord Mayor of Norwich planting a whip.

"We've since started the second phase and everything's looking great. We can see that in

a year or two these sections of the hedge will be much thicker and healthier," says Kathleen.

To galvanise support and to thank those who'd been involved, ERRA created a DVD showing the first phase of activity. Local resident Eric Wilson used Apple movie software, working with Kathleen to develop a story board, choose images and set these to music.

"The DVD's brought us lots of interest," says Kathleen. "It really helps us to bring the project to life and inspire more people to get involved." The group sent copies to volunteers and sponsors, thanking them for their help and encouraging them to continue with the next phase. "We've already confirmed support from the local nursery and B&Q, who'll provide free buckets and tools," says Kathleen.

ERRA aims to have the second phase complete by March 2012, when phase three will begin. They hope to continue raising funds with an open gardens day to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and there are also plans for a second DVD.

"There's a new enthusiasm in the street and it's all thanks to our hedge; it has

rejuvenated our community. It really has been a great success," says Kathleen.

<http://eatonrise-erra.blogspot.co.uk>  
Watch the DVD on Youtube.com



**[The DVD] really helps us to bring the project to life and inspire more people to get involved.**

**Kathleen Rowlands,  
Chair of Eaton Rise  
Residents' Association**

## Plot to Pot with Easton on the Hill Horticultural & Crafts Society

Above: The plot in July 2009, one year after clearance; Below: Plot to Pot – the feast begins.

**With three full allotment sites in a village of just 1,200 people, the residents of Easton on the Hill in Lincolnshire could be seen to have a healthy interest in growing vegetables. But three years ago it was a very different story, with many of the plots lying weed-choked and unused.**

This about-turn can in part be attributed to the village's active horticultural and crafts society, which in 2008 took on a neglected plot with the aim of promoting grow your own.

Committee member Deborah Davenport explains, "The project was conceived as a way that the society could help not just members interested in growing produce, but other plot-holders and villagers too."

The 30m plot was sub-divided into 14 manageable strips and notices went up inviting newcomers to take one on. Society members offered help and organised a series of talks inspiring people to learn more.

Three years on and the plot is so successful that growers struggle to consume all of their produce, a problem quickly resolved by the society. "We were simultaneously thinking of a new 'members only' event for the calendar", explains fellow committee member Ken Rawson. "Here was our solution – some inventive sample dishes cooked from produce grown on the allotments and served up as a

thank you for their support."

2011's Plot to Pot event featured starters, mains and puddings prepared by plot-holders, with a token entrance fee to raise money for the society. More than 50 members enjoyed the spread. "It was so good everyone went staggering away!" says Deborah. "There were three different soups; sweetcorn fritters; beetroot hummus; Squash, Chard and Stilton pie; Shallot and Red Onion Tatin; Parsnip Cake; Beetroot Brownies and fruit crumble – and this is just a sample from more than 20 dishes. Everyone was eager to taste everything, even things they wouldn't normally try and because there was just a small amount of each, it was a bit like British tapas."

A recipe booklet was sold, with all copies snapped up on the night. "The aim was really to highlight one of the benefits of society membership," explains Treasurer Joy Forster, "but the money raised went towards daffodil bulb planting around the village."

The project has been great for boosting

membership, says Deborah, with about 30 new members joining in the last two years. "We've already planned this year's events and of course we'll have another Plot to Pot in the autumn. There will also be craft workshops, plant sales, garden visits, our new Rose Day and the annual show."

[www.eastononthehill.com](http://www.eastononthehill.com)





# Special offers for groups

Community groups can access great rates to visit RHS shows and gardens in 2012, making substantial savings. Book your day to remember now at [www.rhs.org.uk/groups](http://www.rhs.org.uk/groups)



The country garden at RHS Garden Wisley.

## Group rates for RHS shows:

Call 0844 871 7672 or book online at [www.rhs.org.uk/groups](http://www.rhs.org.uk/groups) – please quote 'COM' when booking group tickets.

### RHS Show Cardiff

Celebrate the start of the gardening calendar with inspirational Welsh horticulture.

20 – 22 April, Bute Park, Cardiff Castle, Cardiff

Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £7.50pp; individuals £8pp.

### RHS Chelsea Flower Show

Marvel at a star-studded array of glamorous gardens and cutting-edge plants, showcasing the best the gardening world has to offer.

22 – 26 May, Royal Hospital, Chelsea, London

Advance full day prices: Individuals £49pp; special for Affiliated Societies, purchase up to 4 tickets for public days for only £36pp.

### RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show

Discover hands-on gardening alongside leading garden design at the world's largest annual flower show.

3 – 8 July, East Molesey, Surrey.

Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £27pp

booked by 29 Feb, £28pp thereafter; £26pp for Affiliated Societies; individuals £29pp.

### RHS Flower Show Tatton Park

Showcasing promising new talent with innovative and inspirational garden designs, set against one of Cheshire's Gardens of Distinction. 18 – 22 July, Knutsford, Cheshire.

Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £21pp booked by 29 Feb, £22 thereafter; £20.50pp for Affiliated Societies; individuals £23pp.

## Group rates for RHS gardens

### RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Grow Your Own Weekend, 24 – 25 March

Spring Plant Fair, 6 May

Great Garden Swap, 16 – 17 June

Taste of Autumn, 20 – 21 October

Groups of 10+ £6.50pp, please call 0845 265 8070.

### RHS Garden Hyde Hall

Grow Your Own Weekend, 24 – 25 March

Spring Plant Fair, 21 April

Hyde Hall Flower Show, 3 – 5 August

Chilli Pepper Festival, 8 – 9 September

Taste of Autumn, 20 – 21 October

Groups of 10+ £6pp, please call 0845 265 8071.

### RHS Garden Rosemoor

Grow Your Own Weekend, 24 – 25 March

RHS National Rhododendron Show: 21 – 22 April

Rose Weekend: 23 – 24 June

Vintage Weekend: 21 – 22 July

Grow Your Own Autumn Weekend:

20 – 21 October

Groups of 10+ £5.50pp if pre-booked and pre-paid, £6.50 if pre-booked, please call 08452 658 072.

### RHS Garden Wisley

Butterflies in the Glasshouse,

14 January – 26 February

Orchids in the Glasshouse, 17 March – 15 April

Grow Your Own Weekend, 24 – 25 March

Contemporary Craft and Design Fair, 3 – 7 May

Wisley Flower Show, 6 – 9 September

A Taste of Autumn Festival, 18 – 21 October

Groups of 10+ £9.50pp if paid 3 days in advance, please call 01483 212 307.

*(Please note, this does not replace the Affiliated Society group visit benefit; this is for additional group visits by Affiliated Societies and for other groups' information).*



Show garden at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show.