



Royal  
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Society

Sharing the best in Gardening

# GROWING COMMUNITIES

The RHS Community Update

Issue 12 • Winter 2012/13 [rhs.org.uk/communities](http://rhs.org.uk/communities)

## EDIBLE BRITAIN

Apply for your  
free seeds

JEKKA MCVICAR

Why we should all  
grow herbs

GENERATION GREEN





WELCOME

Jerry Harpur

## To the winter issue of *Growing Communities*, the magazine for all RHS "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood participants and RHS Affiliated Societies.

And a Happy New Year from all of us here at the RHS! It's still cold outside but we're already planning this year's Edible Britain in Bloom launch. We'll be giving away free herb and vegetable seeds in a few months' time so that groups across the UK can join us in planting edible community gardens for everyone to enjoy (see pages 4-5 for more about how you can get involved).

Edibles in public spaces make perfect sense: they provide free fruit, vegetables and herbs at a time when shop prices are ever-increasing and they help to reduce our carbon emissions. Growing them is also a great way to enthuse people about gardening.

So spread a little happiness around this year and plant an edible garden in your community. This issue of the magazine is full of ideas and advice about how to grow edibles and what to watch out for. Remember, if you have any horticultural questions, all registered groups are able to contact the RHS Advisory Service for free (see page 7 for the full details).

Best wishes, and happy gardening,

Sophie Dawson,  
Editor

## YOUR LETTERS Protecting roadside wildflowers

Our group is involved in sustaining the meadows that run through the 215 acres of Birmingham City Park and the River Rea green corridor.

A problem has arisen where roadside and pathway verges in the area have been sprayed by highways maintenance or parks

contractors. We're keen to address this. It has been suggested that next to street name signs there could be an indication that the community has planted flowers or encouraged wild flowers to grow in the verges, which might help us to raise awareness of our work and change the approach of the contractors.

Do any groups have any advice or experience which they can pass on to us?

Many thanks,  
Tony Fox  
Friends of Cannon Hill Park,  
Birmingham  
Email: cannonhillfriend@aol.com



Friends of Cannon Hill Park

Members plant wild flowers along roadside verges in the River Rea green corridor in Birmingham

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.

## Gardening reaches 3 million UK school children

Since the RHS Campaign for School Gardening was established in 2007 it has worked with more than half of all UK schools and the number is growing each day. This means that an estimated 3.2 million children now benefit from gardening through the RHS initiative.

The campaign has been so successful that schools in 96 countries outside the UK, including Cambodia, Mexico, India and the USA, have joined the scheme for access to a large bank of online resources that incorporates lesson plans in all subjects, risk

assessments, planning resources and more.

RHS Head of Education, Sarah Cathcart says, "We need to ensure that every school in Britain is making the most out of its green space, and five years into the campaign we are over half way there. As of today more than 8,000 teachers have attended 600 training sessions with our school Regional Advisors to help more children learn through gardening."

To register your school for free visit: [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)



John Baskeyfield School

Last summer over 40 community groups and schools surveyed the pollinating insects that visited their Wild about Wildflowers mini-meadows. The Buglife survey data revealed that all five cornfield annuals were popular with the pollinators, with each being visited by a wide range of insects. This picture shows pupils at John Baskeyfield School in Stoke-on-Trent completing their survey.

## New online hub for communities

From January 2013, all Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups will be able to access free resources from the RHS via a new online hub (an area for Affiliated Societies will follow later this year).

The online hub will replace the hard-copy support packs sent out to registered groups. However those groups without internet access will continue to receive hard-copy information from the RHS. To access the online hub, visit: [rhs.org.uk/bloomIYN](http://rhs.org.uk/bloomIYN)



## RHS Dig Together Day

In November 2012 groups across the UK celebrated the fourth RHS Dig Together Day by planting trees. In Knutsford, 25 volunteers helped Knutsford in Bloom to



plant cherry blossom trees, daffodil bulbs, *Crocsmia* and *Skimmia* at the entrance to Knutsford Station. Yvonne Bancroft, Chair of Knutsford in Bloom, said, "We had a brilliant day and now we can look forward to an increasingly wonderful display over the years to come."

Knutsford in Bloom

## Free trees for communities

The Woodland Trust is offering community groups, youth groups and schools the chance to apply for packs of free trees for delivery in autumn 2013. They have 1,250 tree packs to give away, available in three sizes: 30 saplings, 105 saplings and 420 saplings in various themes (wildlife, wild harvest, year-round colour, future firewood and wetland). Applications will open in January 2013. Apply online at:

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/communitytrees](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/communitytrees)

Groups can also apply for funding from The Big Tree plant to purchase trees to plant in their communities. The next funding deadline is March 2013. For more information, visit:

[www.defra.gov.uk/bigtreeplant/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/bigtreeplant/)

## Track invasive species on your Smartphone

The Environment Agency and University of Bristol are asking the general public to help them to record the distribution of invasive plant species in the UK using their PlantTracker app.

The app, which is available for both the iPhone and Android platforms, enables members of the public to effectively and easily record the location of invasive species, using photographs and geo-location technology.

Amongst some of the most invasive plant species in the UK are Japanese knotweed, Australian swamp stonecrop, giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam, water fern and floating pennywort.

To download the free app, please visit: <http://plantracker.naturelocator.org/>

## £100million for parks

Heritage Lottery Fund and BIG Lottery Fund have announced that they will invest £100million in public parks over the next three years. The new-look Parks for People programme aims to get local people more involved in the management of their parks and, for the first time, will provide funding to conserve historic cemeteries and offer help and advice about long-term park maintenance. Grants will range from £100,000 to £5million.

[www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)

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Cover image: Young and old get involved in the Shelthorpe Community Association's edible food garden in Loughborough.  
Credit: RHS/ Julian Weigall

Image top right: RHS Garden Hyde Hall

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The Royal Horticultural Society is the UK's leading gardening charity, dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting gardening.

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

To launch the 2013 Britain in Bloom campaign the RHS is offering all registered groups the chance to apply for free herb and vegetable seeds to create edible community gardens.

Each group can apply to receive one free seed pack, which contains a selection of 15 different herb and vegetable seeds, suitable for sowing directly into the ground in April. Seed packs include: chives, parsley, coriander, dill, garlic chives, sage, thyme, red frills mustard, radishes, carrots, fennel, spring onions, spinach, nasturtiums and marigolds (for their edible flowers).

All registered Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups, as well as RHS Affiliated Societies are able to apply for seeds.

Groups are encouraged to hold their seed-sowing events during the weekend of **13 – 14 April 2013**, when the RHS will be promoting the launch activity to the national media; however you can hold your event at any time in April. Please remember that your seeds should be sown in a public place(s) where the wider community can enjoy the harvest. For advice about positioning and sowing your edible garden, please see pages 6-7.

**Next steps:**

- To apply for your group's free seeds, fill in the form at: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch](http://rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch) (for those without internet access, please call 020 7821 3069)
- Identify a spot in a public area where you can plant edibles. Ensure you have permission from landowners and have checked that the soil is not contaminated.

*A little extra inspiration from groups around the UK:*

Group	Incredible Edible Wakefield, IYN
Project	Town Centre Herb Trail

Last summer, Girl Guides from Ossett helped volunteers from Incredible Edible Wakefield to fill planters in Ossett town centre with sage and thyme.

The It's Your Neighbourhood group is now calling on other local organisations and businesses to follow the Guides' example and 'adopt a planter' to help form a herb trail, together with a map and herb quiz, around the whole of Ossett town centre.

In December 2012 the group's work was mentioned at the Doha UN Climate Change Conference, as Lizette Simpson from Ossett Girl Guiding was interviewed for Climate Change TV. "Who says tiny steps can't make a difference!" exclaims Yvonne Smith, Co-ordinator of Incredible Edible Wakefield. "In a few years' time we hope that everyone in Ossett will have access to free, locally-grown herbs, saving money as well as carbon emissions."

[www.incredible-edible-wakefield.co.uk/](http://www.incredible-edible-wakefield.co.uk/)



Ossett Girl Guides  
The Guides with their herb planter



# Edible Britain

Celebrate this year's launch by planting edible community gardens!

Free seeds for all registered Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) groups, and RHS Affiliated Societies

A young Bloom volunteer harvests crops from a street-side edible bed in Woolton, Merseyside

Group	Donington in Bloom
Project	Aromatic Library Garden

The residents of Donington in Lincolnshire have been enjoying more flavour in their food following the creation of a community herb garden in the grounds of the library.

The plot of land skirting the building had lain empty until Donington in Bloom volunteers approached the library service. "All the rubbish used to blow in there," explains Liz Walker, Chair of Donington in Bloom. "It wasn't being used and so just kept filling up." The group suggested creating a public herb garden and the library jumped at the idea.

With funding from a local trust and donations from B&Q the group planted a range of herbs, including thyme, mint, chives, dill, chervil and rosemary.

Each herb is clearly identified and people are encouraged to pick their own. Inside the library a plan of the garden sits alongside a special selection

of books about the culinary and medicinal uses of herbs, helping visitors to identify and make use of the offering outside.

"It's been hugely popular," says Liz. "Everybody is very conscientious and just takes what they need. One resident asked me if he could go back for more as he was preparing his Christmas stuffing!"

[www.doningtonidea.org/bloom.htm](http://www.doningtonidea.org/bloom.htm)



Donington's new herb garden is open 24/7

Group	Garstang in Bloom
Project	Edible Jubilee Garden

In Lancashire, Garstang in Bloom teamed up with the local Transition group to create a new edible and wildlife-friendly garden to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Pollinator-friendly shrubs and perennials were planted alongside vegetables and herbs and the residents of Garstang were invited to 'help themselves'.

"It's been really popular," says Norah Hoyles, Chair of Garstang in Bloom. "All this year's crop went. We had cabbages and kale, artichokes, onions, carrots and lettuce. It's inspired people to grow their own - you think 'I've got a space just like that, so maybe I could do something at home.'"



The space before and after Garstang's edible transformation

Images: Lynn Horner

James Russell

## RHS ADVICE

## Edibles

Help for your community with regular news and tips from RHS scientists and advisors. To suggest a topic for this section of the magazine, contact [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3118

## Where to grow edibles

Most herbs and vegetables grow best with full sun and light, well-drained, moisture-retentive, fertile soil with plenty of organic matter incorporated.

Consider if there is any possibility that your proposed site might be contaminated. Your local authority is the best first point of contact for determining whether a site in the public domain has already been tested for contaminants. However, the history of the site should be considered and where industrial or waste disposal uses have been recorded it would be wise to have soil tested by a specialist laboratory, or grow in containers of imported soil or potting media.

## Sowing your seeds

Enrich your soil with roughly a bucketful of rotted compost per square metre and eliminate all weeds prior to sowing/ planting.

Rake the soil into a fine tilth (a fine, crumbly texture) and create seed drills at the depth specified for each plant (see seed packets for details).

Ensure that you water the ground before you sow your seeds - don't water them afterwards as you'll wash them away. After sowing, wait until the seeds have germinated before you water again. Water thoroughly every 10-14 days in dry spells.

Sowing/planting in rows enables you to control subsequent weeds, especially if the spaces between rows can be easily hoed. Scatter the seed along your drills as thinly and evenly as you can. Place labelled markers at either end of the drill to help identify the seedlings. Gently fill in the drills with soil and press down lightly.

Watch out for slugs and snails in the early stages - seedlings are very vulnerable to slug attack.

## Harvesting

Some herbs and salads such as coriander, wild rocket and cress may be ready to harvest within a few days of sowing, while others, such as parsley and garlic chives, may take a few weeks. They can be picked easily by pinching out or cutting before flowering to promote bushy growth. See individual seed packets for details of when to harvest.



Above: Sowing seeds in drills with labelled markers at each end helps to identify seedlings when they appear. Right: Mint is often planted in pots to prevent it becoming invasive



Left: Take root cuttings of mint in spring, potting up segments of the root in fine compost

## Seeds in your Edible Britain seed pack:

- Chives (perennial)
- Parsley (biennial)
- Coriander (annual)
- Dill (annual)
- Garlic chives (perennial)
- Sage (perennial/ evergreen)
- Thyme (perennial/ evergreen)
- Fennel (perennial)
- Red frills mustard (annual)
- Nasturtiums – edible flowers and leaves (annual)
- Marigold – edible petals (annual, though sometimes hardy)
- Radishes (annual)
- Carrots (annual)
- Spring onions (perennial)
- Spinach (annual)

To apply for your group's free seed pack, visit: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch](http://rhs.org.uk/britaininbloomlaunch)

## Propagating

Cuttings of some herbs such as bay, marjoram, mint, rosemary, sage, tarragon and thyme can be taken from late summer to early autumn. Take root cuttings of mint in spring.

Divide hardy herbs such as sweet marjoram, oregano and mint in spring. Collect the seeds of your annual and biennial herbs such as coriander, dill and parsley and sow again in spring and throughout the growing season at three week intervals until August.

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

- Rich, well-drained soil in full sun, though tolerant of wet conditions and heavy soils.
- Cut down to the ground after flowering to produce fresh leaves.
- Mild garlic-like flavour; leaves, bulbs and flowers are all used.

Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*)

- Well-drained fertile soil in part shade.
- Leaves and roots used fresh, especially in Thai cooking.
- Seeds used dried in curries and pickles.

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)

- Well-drained neutral to slightly acid soil in sun.
- Leaves are cut in spring and summer for using fresh or dried; seeds harvested in summer for use dried, all widely used in cooking, especially Scandinavian cookery.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

- Rich, well-drained neutral to alkaline soil in sun or part shade.
- Pick leaves just before flowering and use fresh; an essential ingredient in French, Italian and Middle Eastern cookery.
- High in vitamins and minerals.



A few of the edibles in your Edible Britain seed pack

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

- Well-drained to dry neutral to alkaline soils in full sun; sage dislikes damp conditions and low light in winter.
- Hard prune in early spring to promote bushy growth.
- Leaves are used to flavour many dishes, especially meat. Fresh or dried leaves are used for tea.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

- Well-drained, even stony poor soils in sun; most thymes prefer neutral to alkaline soil.
- Trim lightly after flowering to maintain bushy habit.
- Fresh or dried leaves and flowers used to flavour many dishes, especially French cookery.

Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)

- Well-drained soil in full sun.
- Marigold petals can be eaten; they are known as 'poor man's saffron' as they can be used to colour rice.

Spinach (*Spinacia*)

- Full sun (light shade in the height of summer) and fertile moist soil.
- Water well as they will flower (bolt) if they get too dry.
- Harvest leaves when big enough.

Carrots (*Daucus carota*)

- Open, sunny site and fertile well-drained soil.
- When the plants have grown you can thin to 5 – 7cm apart.
- The smell that arises from thinning carrots can attract the carrot root fly. To reduce damage from carrot root fly, cover your crop with fleece or mesh.

## Potential problems with edibles

- Herbs such as coriander, dill, basil and wild rocket can be quick to bolt and go straight to flower, especially if overcrowded or in poor dry soil. Make regular sowings to have a good supply of these crops.
- On lettuces, downy mildew can be problematic and mint rust can affect marjoram and savory as well as mint.
- Rosemary beetle can be a problem on lavender, sage and thyme as well as rosemary. Protect young seedlings from birds, slugs and snails.
- Parsley can suffer from aphids and carrot fly – grow under fleece or insect-proof mesh where these pests are troublesome.

For more advice about each of these problems, visit: [rhs.org.uk/advice](http://rhs.org.uk/advice)

## Free RHS advice for communities

All "in Bloom" and It's Your Neighbourhood groups, as well as RHS Affiliated Societies, can contact the RHS Advisory Service for free gardening advice relating to their group's work. Your support pack explains

how to make the most of this free benefit. To request a replacement support pack, please contact: [communities@rhs.org.uk](mailto:communities@rhs.org.uk) / 020 7821 3069.

To search for advice online visit: [rhs.org.uk/advice](http://rhs.org.uk/advice)

Ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*):

Ash dieback is likely to be spreading more widely this summer as the fungus living in fallen leaves produces spores. Unfortunately there is not much that can be done about this, but it is useful to recognise affected trees and report these to the authorities to track the progress of the epidemic and to implement any measures to slow



the spread of the disease. For the latest advice and information see the RHS website.

Left: An ash leaf showing signs of dieback



## Wildflower guerillas

Overgrown and full of litter, the area adjacent to the busy car park on Queen Street in Broughty Ferry, Dundee, was a well-established local eyesore. That is, it was until the local school decided to do something about it.

Looking for environmental projects to inspire her students, Mary Holligan, Eco School Co-ordinator at Grove Academy, Dundee, was struck by the idea of guerrilla gardening the site with senior pupils. In 2009, with the school's support, she set up the Queen Street Car Park It's Your Neighbourhood group with the aim of transforming the neglected corner into a wildflower meadow.

Technically, guerrilla gardening is gardening on another person's land without permission. Usually, the land worked upon is abandoned or neglected, and so the guerrilla gardeners take it over, often at night or in secrecy, to improve the area or repurpose it.

Being a teacher, Mary had to be careful with what form of direct action she chose to inspire in her teenage pupils, so she first tried to find out who owned the land. "It's situated between a railway line, which is presumably owned by Railtrack, and a car park owned by the council," she says. "But no one laid claim to it, so we went ahead with the plans. The idea of guerrilla gardening made it an attractive proposition for the students."

Work was split into two stages. The first, which took part in daylight, involved clearing the vast majority of the rubbish

and brambles. "For the second session, we adopted the guerrilla gardening approach and went down at night when it was dark, which the pupils loved. Some even dressed for the occasion in balaclavas!" says Mary.

A couple of other eco teachers and 20 students from the school, all aged 17 to 18 took part in each session.

Three years on and pupils continue to improve the site, removing rubbish, putting up bird boxes and 'bee homes' and planting up adjoining areas. In 2012 they were awarded a 'Level 4 - Thriving' It's Your Neighbourhood award. Next year they're hoping to create a new herb garden and have plans to establish a Facebook page to get more people involved.

"It's become a focal point in the town," says Mary. "And for the teenagers involved, it's been excellent. It's not often that they have the chance to make a splash of colour on their local environment."

One of those involved was Matthew Pandrich, who worked alongside other students to spread wheelbarrows of compost over the area. He hopes the work done will be continued by future generations of pupils and that ultimately it will create something that is "as vibrant as it is ecologically beneficial."



Images: Mary Holligan

Stuart Morrison, another former pupil who took part says he enjoyed giving something back to the local community. "I loved the idea and knew it would not only be a lot of fun, but also a great opportunity to give something back to the community in our final year at Grove Academy.

"It was fantastic to see passers-by taking an interest in what we were doing. For what was only a few hours enjoyable work to have had such a great impact has been amazing and hopefully our little bit of land will continue to brighten up the area and inspire the community."

<http://grove.ea.dundee.sch.uk/>  
[www.guerrillagardening.org/](http://www.guerrillagardening.org/)



Clockwise from top: the 'guerrilla gardeners' ready to start work; a class at Grove Academy builds bug hotels for the area; the meadow in bloom in high summer; the corner before work started, a well-known local eyesore.



### Funding for youth projects:

**vInspired Cashpoint** provides grants of up to £500 to young people aged 14-25 who have ideas that will solve a problem in their community.

[www.vinspired.com/cashpoint](http://www.vinspired.com/cashpoint)

**O2 Think Big** awards £300 to people aged 13 to 25 years old to help make things better in the local community.

[www.o2thinkbig.co.uk/](http://www.o2thinkbig.co.uk/)

**The Prince's Trust** provides cash grants of up to £500 to help young people get into education, training or employment.

[www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

**HLF Young Roots** aims to engage young people aged 11 – 25 with

their local heritage. Grants of £10,000 to £50,000 are available.

[www.hlf.org.uk/youngroots](http://www.hlf.org.uk/youngroots)

**The Rank Foundation** funds a range of locally-based, developmental projects for young people.

[www.rankyouthwork.org](http://www.rankyouthwork.org)

**YouthBank** is open to 11-24 year olds, with grants of £500 for community based projects to engage young people in their communities.

**The Alec Dickson Trust** awards up to £500 to people under 30 towards local community projects.

[www.alecdicksontrust.org.uk/](http://www.alecdicksontrust.org.uk/)

## Digging boarders

An innovative partnership between a skatepark and an allotment group is crossing generations to overcome mistrust in Hereford city.

When the Hereford Skatepark opened in 2009, plot-holders at the neighbouring allotments were initially a little wary. "There were worries that there might be issues with noise, vandalism or antisocial behaviour," explains Sharon Baugh, a plot-holder at the Holmer Road Allotments. "We generally kept to ourselves, but there was a feeling that it was them and us."

A series of break-ins seemed to justify the plot-holders' worst fears, even though these were later found to be unconnected to the skatepark. The episode, however, led Sharon to an idea.

Walking past the site every day she could see how much the young people enjoyed the park, but also how barren it was, with no shade or wind breaks. "The allotments had been invited to get more involved in Hereford in Bloom and I thought perhaps we could combine with the skatepark to form a community project," she explains. "We could help them put some plants in there, and bringing the two groups together might improve relations."

With the support of a few fellow plot-holders, she signed up for the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood scheme and, with the donation of several free trees and bamboo plants, she approached the skatepark about organising a planting day.

"The kids thought it was a great idea and lots of them wanted to get involved," she explains. "We set a date for a joint working day and 18 young boarders and seven plot-holders turned up."

Plot-holder Colin Prosser was initially sceptical of the project, but was so inspired by working with the young boarders that he's now considering becoming a mentor. "I really enjoyed showing the young people how to use the garden tools for particular jobs. They were interested and keen to learn and I felt I had taught them a new skill," he explains.

Another plot-holder, Fran Coles admitted



The joint efforts of the boarders and the plot-holders are improving the barren landscape around the skatepark

the skatepark, but insists that they will not push their ideas on the youngsters. "If that happens it will come from them," she says smiling. "At the moment we just want to build on the relationship we have and work together on projects within the park."

Will any of the plot-holders reciprocate and take up boarding? "Maybe someone will have a go in the future," laughs Sharon. "It would be only fair as we are getting boarders to dig. However it won't be me!

"It's been wonderful what's been achieved so far," she adds. "In mixing with the younger generation, we've developed

that she'd enjoyed the day much more than she'd expected to: "It all took me by surprise as there seemed to be no generation gap during the tasks. No matter what age, we all pulled together as one."

Skateboarder Elliot Pemberton, 12, enjoyed giving something back to the place he spent so much of his time. "It was really nice to know you were helping our park where we spend all our time. And it was good to work with older people as they had interesting stories to tell. We don't always get the chance to speak to the older generation."

Learning more about gardening has left Elliot keen to do more. "I do some gardening at home, but now I know how and why," he says. "Before it was a chore, now it is my hobby."

Since that first joint event in 2011 the new group - Digging New Boarders - has met monthly to share projects and ideas. They have applied for funds and hope to plant more fruit trees, perennials and grasses around the skatepark.

"Two lads were particularly keen to continue with the gardening," says Sharon. "One lad's parents have an allotment on our site and he grows stuff himself to plant on the plot. He's offered to mentor the others in future growing activities."

Sharon confesses that the plot-holders would love the boarders to be inspired to grow their own fruit and vegetables around

a new respect for them. The work has completely changed the atmosphere here."

Sharon recommends the approach to others. "The support we've had from the Heart of England in Bloom and the It's Your Neighbourhood scheme has been excellent," she says.

"I hope our project encourages other communities to have a go, because it certainly makes a difference in a short time and it has a great legacy."

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



A winter working group ready to start planting in the skatepark

Do you know a group that would benefit from joining the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood scheme? It's free to sign up and provides registered projects with advice and support.

For more information, visit: [rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood](http://rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood)

### How you can help your local school this winter

January is a busy time for schools and most will be grateful for offers of support for their gardening projects. Why not see if your group could help with some of those important gardening tasks:

- Dig over and weed beds ready for early sowings.
- Turn compost heaps; fork in the ready-to-use compost from the bottom of the heap to the beds.
- Plant fruit trees and fruit canes (such as raspberries and blackberries) and rhubarb, to extend the range of fruit grown in schools – choose a day that it isn't frosty!
- Check on existing fruit trees and fruit bushes and offer to help with pruning.
- Sort out the gardening shed! Put up some shelves and hooks to organise tools and gloves; check all tools are in working order.
- Help to save water by connecting shed/roof guttering downpipes to water butts.
- Share old plant catalogues with the school – children can plan what they would like to grow by cutting out photos of their favourite fruit and vegetables.

Right: an orderly shed to start the new term. Below: Pupils use catalogues to choose the crops they will grow in spring.



## Working in the community

When Fox Hollies School and Performing Arts College moved to its new site in Birmingham's King's Heath eight years ago it was keen to develop links with the local community.

The school was using the high street for life skills training when teachers found out about the King's Heath Floral Trail, the local Bloom campaign which links together the suburb's green spaces. They saw this project as an ideal way of getting to know their new neighbours while putting something back into the community.

Over the years, students have taken part in a variety of projects to enhance the area, including planting shrubs in the new village square and clearing a derelict area to sow wildflower seeds.

The school garden, featuring raised vegetable beds and a clay pizza oven, also forms part of the trail and pupils welcomed the 2012 Heart of England in Bloom judges, proudly showing off their achievements at the start of King's Heath's judging tour. This resulted in not only a Silver Gilt medal for the school, but also helped the Floral Trail achieve the same award in the RHS Britain in Bloom Urban Community category.

The school believes that its involvement with the trail has been of great value to students. "They have thoroughly enjoyed

Fox Hollies pupils show off their Heart of England in Bloom Silver Gilt award



being involved in planting, clearing and sowing," explains Fox Hollies' Sarah Youngson. "The added benefits have come through getting to know people and businesses in the community, some of whom now support our pupils through offering work placements."



Harvesting herbs for the school kitchen. Above: a pupil prepares a mint cutting for propagation.

Bob Prew, former chair of King's Heath Floral Trail, believes that the partnership has been "one of the great successes of the Floral Trail". He says, "The commitment, energy and enthusiasm of both staff and pupils has been inspirational. King's Heath is now a lot cleaner and greener because of their help."

[www.foxhollies.bham.sch.uk](http://www.foxhollies.bham.sch.uk)  
<http://kingsheathfloraltrail.com/>

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 [sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk](mailto:sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk) or call 020 7821 3118

### Training for volunteers working with schools

The RHS Campaign for School Gardening Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses are open to all adults involved in teaching and inspiring children about plants and gardening. A wide range of topics is available, encompassing the use and development of school grounds, giving you practical experience, activities and ideas for using horticulture in all areas of the curriculum. For more information about the courses please visit: [rhs.org.uk/cpd](http://rhs.org.uk/cpd)



## Beautiful bedding

Ian Cooke

Whilst judging East Midlands in Bloom, I'm constantly amazed at the efforts to produce colourful displays, but sometimes disappointed by the end results. Various small changes, with little additional effort and minimal extra cost, could quite easily achieve that all-important 'Wow' factor.

### Containers & baskets

When using containers or hanging baskets, be sure to use the largest units possible and most importantly, position them in groups. Individual containers or baskets spread out over a large area lack impact. A group of three or five containers with planting at varying heights will create a feature which catches the eye, including the judges'!

When planting up baskets, be sure to completely fill them with plants. Use a good reliable main plant such as Surfinia petunias and an interplant such as a complementary ivy-leaved pelargonium or *Begonia* 'Illumination'. Add trailing plants such as *Plectranthus* or *Dichondra*. Beware of *Helichrysum petiolare* which is over vigorous. Remember to use water retaining gels and slow release fertilisers.

### Flower beds

Rather than five small flower beds spread around the community, try to find an area such as a village green or other open space that can act as a focal point. Concentrate the colour and impact with fewer and larger flower beds. Use reliable plants and plant in big blocks of colour rather than mixing too many plants together. Use some plants that give height to the display and always choose a colour scheme with a limited range of colours. Do try to be different – the 'Wow' factor comes from originality as well as quality - but try it in a quiet corner first to see if it works.

To keep costs down you can mix herbaceous perennials, grasses and shrubs with bedding plants. Rather than use bedding plants to fill odd gaps choose permanent shrubs or groundcover plants. Remember – if cost is an issue cut down on the number of beds, not on the number of plants per bed.

Finally, beware of trying to create logos with ordinary bedding plants – it doesn't work. These are areas for 'carpet bedding' plants such as *Alternanthera*, *Sedum* or *Echeveria*.

*Ian Cooke is a retired horticulturalist, author, RHS shows judge and judge for East Midlands in Bloom.*

#### Ian's recommended reliable bedding plants

*Begonia* 'Non-Stop' cultivars  
*Cosmos* 'Sonata' cultivars  
*Dahlia* 'Moonfire' & 'Bishop of Llandaff'  
 French marigolds  
*Ageratum* 'Blue Horizon'  
*Coleus* 'Henna' or 'Juliet Quartermain'  
*Petunia* 'Frenzy' cultivars  
*Antirrhinum* 'Liberty Classic' range  
*Rudbeckia* 'Toto' range or 'Prairie Sun'

#### Jeff's recommended summer perennials

*Helenium*, *Rudbeckia* and *Echinacea* – all these 'daisies' provide stature with their erect habit  
*Gypsophila*, *Thalictrum* 'Hewitt's Double', *Verbena bonariensis* – all are good perennials for adding movement  
*Dierama*, *Gaura*, *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer' – perennials for an arching habit  
*Heuchera*, *Ligularia*, *Sedum* – foliage interest

Main picture: *Verbena* and *Stipa* dazzle in Cricklade. Left: Market Deeping's hanging baskets overflow with petunias



# Floral Fantastic

Horticultural achievement accounts for 50% of the Bloom judges' marks, assessing everything from appropriate plant choice to design, impact and colour. Groups should try to show a good mix of perennial and seasonal planting, with year-round interest and attention to biodiversity and sustainability. Here two of the judges share their tips.

## Providing the perennial wow-factor

Jeff Bates

Stunning and colourful displays, with equal 'Wow' factor can of course be produced with perennials, and with the big advantage that you don't need to re-do the borders anew twice a year. The borders can be planted for a long season of colour, though to get the most impact they are usually focused on a shorter period.

The principles are the same as for bedding: a mix of heights (with the taller plants in the middle of island beds); a mix of form (some plants stiffly erect, some with an open habit, some that move in the breeze); a carefully considered colour scheme (hot, cool, pastel – there are many options).

In general, plant in drifts and groups of the same variety, rather than creating a scattered display; a good guide is that the more varieties you use, the less impact you achieve.

Don't forget that many perennials are also excellent nectar plants, providing food for bees, butterflies and other insects, and that many are very fragrant (*Phlox*, *Monarda* etc).

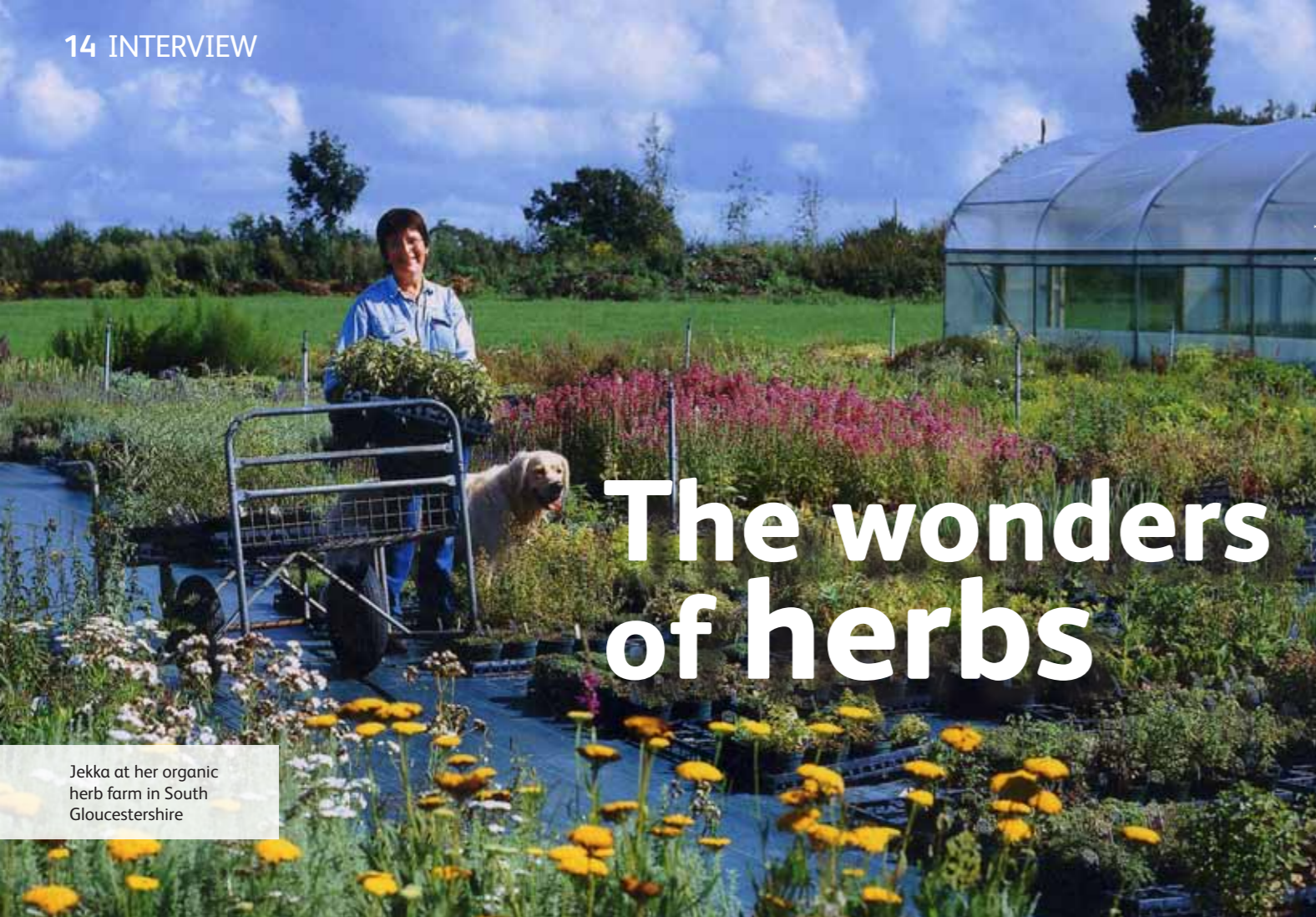
Many grasses associate well with perennials and again can add stature, grace and movement to the display; varieties of *Miscanthus* and *Stipa* are effective in this respect, and tend not to be invasive.

Plants will need to be cut back in the late autumn or early spring (where attractive seed heads are left up overwinter for birds), and depending on your choice, some will need to be lifted and divided every three or four years to retain vigour – but that gives you the bonus of more plants for more borders or for plant sales to raise funds! Feed the borders in the spring and then mulch.

To extend the colour throughout the year, consider hellebores for winter and early spring; *Euphorbia* and geraniums for spring and early summer; *Anemone hupehensis* and *Schizostylis* for autumn. The perennial border is also an ideal place for mass planting of spring bulbs, the foliage of which will have disappeared by the time the Bloom judges come around.

So go on – give it a go and wow the judges, but most of all your own community, with your imagination.

*Jeff Bates is a freelance lecturer, consultant and examiner in horticulture. He is also an RHS Britain in Bloom judge and Chairman of East Midlands in Bloom.*



# The wonders of herbs

Jekka at her organic herb farm in South Gloucestershire

The President of the Herb Society Jekka McVicar has been cultivating herbs at her organic farm for 25 years. In the next year she will be transforming the farm into a herboretum and a school to share her passion with others. Jekka is supporting 'Edible Britain', the 2013 Bloom launch activity.

**RHS:** How easy it is to grow herbs?

**JM:** Herbs are a really great way to start gardening and they are very rewarding. They're ideal for small spaces - from just one pot you can grow a cut and come again herb salad; it transforms a sandwich into a feast and it's something the children can easily do. Things like mizuna, or frilled mustards - they've got good flavour and they're not difficult to grow.

**RHS:** Is there anything to watch out for when planting a new herb garden?

**JM:** It's well worth going on slug and snail patrol when your seedlings come out. When I first moved to my farm we were inundated with snails. I used to go out at night and pick them off and I got dustbins full. The trouble is, I can't kill anything, so I drove them up the road and dumped them about a quarter of a mile away. My children and husband, in exasperation, marked the biggest snails with Tipp-ex and you know what, they returned within the month. I still struggle to kill them though you do need to try to protect your seedlings in the early stages.

**RHS:** How did you get into herbs?

**JM:** Through my stomach! My mother had a herb garden and my grandmother was a great cook and so I could pick and choose mints before I went to school. Today I grow over 300 culinary herbs. I want to lead people to medicinal herbs through culinary ones, because they are so interchangeable. Rosemary is not only good in lamb or tomato sauce, you can also drink rosemary tea, which is excellent for the memory. Its botanical name is *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *officinalis* meaning that it was officially used by the apothecaries, the founders of modern-day medicine. So, as Hippocrates said, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food."

**RHS:** What are some of the other medicinal uses of herbs?

**JM:** In ancient times, dill seeds would have been used medicinally - as an antispasmodic and to ease flatulence. Today it's used in gripe water for children. Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is a really important medicinal herb. You can clean your teeth with the leaves and it's also fantastic as a gargle for sore

throats - put three leaves in a cup, add boiled water, strain and let it cool and gargle. Don't worry if you swallow it by mistake because sage tea is really good for your memory too - sage stands for wisdom.

Thyme is also medicinal, it's a natural antiseptic. Boil up some leaves and wash down your surfaces with it. Fennel is a good diuretic and coriander helps you digest heavy foods and stops bloating. Yarrow is used to stop blood flow - the SAS still use it today. Chives and spring onions, in the allium family, are really good for lowering blood pressure, as are all onions. The list is endless!

**RHS:** So herbs can be strong natural antiseptics then?

**JM:** Yes, garlic is known as one of the best antiseptics there is. During the First World War they used to crush it onto sphagnum moss and put it on wounds to stop them getting gangrene. That goes back to when the artisans who built the pyramids were given a clove of garlic a day, not just to put in cooking but to rub on any cuts so they didn't go septic.



Above: Chives are good for lowering blood pressure, while thyme (right) is a natural antiseptic. Below: Garlic is one of the best natural antiseptics there is. It was used by the ancient Egyptians to treat their wounds.



**RHS:** How can we inspire more people to grow herbs?

**JM:** The easiest way to inspire people to garden is through food. Throughout history we have always nurtured edible crops, for survival. We've become disconnected from that today. I'd love to see more herb gardens grown in public spaces. Herb gardens can look untidy because herbs by their nature are wild plants - they're the same plants that we've been cultivating for over 2,000 years. The best herb gardens are the ones that are used, because we then look after them and keep them in shape. They're also wonderful for encouraging biodiversity. I'd love every school to have a herb garden. It links geography and history, sociology, biology and biodiversity and at the end of it you can eat it and you have better digestion.

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

## Saving Jersey's cider apples

In its 180th year, the Royal Jersey Agricultural and Horticultural Society (RJA&HS) is proud to be a part of protecting the island's cider heritage.

Over the past 180 years, Jersey's once-thriving cider industry has all-but disappeared. In the 1830s, when the Society was formed, two-thirds of the island was covered in apple orchards and nearly 300,000 gallons of cider were exported annually. But from the mid-19th century onwards, potatoes and tomatoes gradually replaced the trees and by the 1980s very few orchards remained. Following the destruction wrought by the Great Storm in October 1987, the risk of entirely losing many cultivars prompted local action.

In October 1988, the Société Jersiaise and National Trust met with volunteers to formulate a plan to preserve the remaining trees. Over the next three years approximately 350 trees were inspected and 172 were tagged for further selection and propagation.

In 1991 an orchard was planted on land now owned by the National Trust and in 2012 the Trust and the RJA&HS joined forces to run the site as a community orchard.

The Society has maintained the field and picked its first crop of apples, which were turned into cider to raise funds for the site. In 2013, RJA&HS hopes to involve more community groups and the local primary school in activities such as sowing wild flowers and monitoring wildlife in the orchard.

Pam Laurens, Horticultural Department Secretary at RJA&HS is delighted that the Society has been able to help open up the site. "We're planning to organise a special event to celebrate the apple and its wide range of uses," she says. "There will be lots of cider to taste and activities to try!"

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



Clockwise from above: RJA&HS sign their first lease with the National Trust in 2012; last year's bountiful crop, ready for pressing; RJA&HS member Richard Allo winter prunes the trees.



# Special offers for groups

Community groups can access great rates to visit RHS shows and gardens in 2013. Book your day to remember now.



Enjoy cutting-edge design at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Below: Spring starts early at RHS Garden Wisley, where there's plenty to enjoy at year-round events such as the Taste of Autumn Festival.

RHS / Neil Hepworth

## Group rates for RHS Shows:

To book your visit please call our groups line on 0800 358 0058 (Opening times Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm)

### RHS Flower Show Cardiff, 19-21 April

Bute Park, Cardiff Castle  
Set against the stunning backdrop of Cardiff Castle, RHS Flower Show Cardiff is the first showcase of the year for all that's best in gardening.

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

### RHS Chelsea Flower Show, 21-25 May

Royal Hospital, Chelsea  
Celebrating 100 years at the Royal Hospital, the RHS Chelsea Flower show is set to dazzle with spectacular show gardens and displays.

Advance full day prices: No group rates available, individuals £55pp

### RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, 9-14 July

East Molesey, Surrey  
With a Royal Palace for a backdrop, RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show is brimming with ideas and inspiration to help you create your ideal garden at home.  
Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £25pp, groups of 40+ £20pp, individuals £29.50pp

### RHS Flower Show Tatton Park, 25-28 July

Knutsford, Cheshire  
Set in the grounds of one of Britain's most historic estates, RHS Flower Show Tatton Park is the setting for chic style, innovative garden designs and the best young talent around.  
Advance full day prices: Groups of 10+ £20.50pp, groups of 40+ £17pp, individuals £23.50pp

## Group rates for RHS Gardens:

### RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Yorkshire

#### Event highlights:

- Grow Your Own Spring Festival, 23 – 24 March
- Rhododendron Show, 4 & 5 May
- Spring Plant Fair, 5 May
- National Sweet Pea Show, 13 – 14 July
- Autumn Plant Fair, 8 Sept
- Grow Your Own Autumn Festival, 12 & 13 Oct

Groups of 10+ £6.70pp. To book please call 0845 265 8070

### RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Essex

#### Event highlights:

- Grow Your Own Weekend – 23-24 March
- Spring Plant Fair – 20-21 April
- Spring Craft Fair – 4-6 May
- Garden Party – 29-30 June
- Essex Craft & Design Show – 27-28 July
- Flower Show – 1-4 August

- Autumn Plant Fair – 21-22 September
  - Grow Your Own Autumn Festival – 12-13 October
  - Christmas Craft Fair – 23-24 November
- Group of 10+ £6.20pp. To book please call 0845 265 8071

### RHS Garden Rosemoor, Devon

#### Event highlights:

- Grow Your Own Weekend, 23 - 24 March
- RHS National Rhododendron Show, 20 - 21 April
- Rose Weekend, 22 - 23 June
- Vintage Weekend, 20 - 21 July
- Taste of Autumn Weekend, 12 - 13 October

Groups of 10+ £6.70pp. To book please call 08452 658 072

### RHS Garden Wisley

#### Event highlights:

- Grow Your Own Weekend, 23 – 24 March
- Contemporary Craft and Design Fair, 2 - 6 May
- Garden Party, 29 – 30 June
- Wisley Flower Show, 4 - 8 September
- Taste of Autumn, 16 – 20 October

Groups of 10+ £9.75pp. To book please call 01483 212 307



RHS / Adam Duckworth



RHS / Carol Sheppard