

How to... garden sustainably

Gardening and the environment are inseparable – but sometimes our horticultural activities are not quite as green as they could be. Environmental responsibility forms a key part of the Britain in Bloom judging criteria, with groups expected to garden with sustainability in mind.

Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups carry out a wide range of environmental activities including: recycling materials, growing their own plants/ fruit and vegetables, ensuring a good spread of sustainable and pollinator-friendly plants across their entries, making their own compost, sourcing local materials, installing water butts and other water-saving devices and maintaining nature reserves and wildflower areas, among many others.

Not only is gardening sustainably good for the environment, it is also good for the pocket, reducing resource and maintenance overheads.

For more advice about gardening sustainably, visit the [RHS website](#).

Tips from groups

- **Saving water:** This year we used locally-sourced sheep's wool to line the flower mangers we install round the village. Although it looks a bit strange at first, we discovered that it retains water far more effectively than moss, so needs far less watering (something like twice a week instead of twice a day!). It is also a good insulator so keeps plants warm and promotes good growth. We can't take all the credit for this however as Barnoldswick in Bloom used the wool in their hanging baskets last year. (*Chipping in Bloom*)
- **Sustainable planting:** To reduce our maintenance requirements and make our planting more pollinator friendly, we have reviewed how we plant our barrels with annual colour. Over the last 12 months we've been trying different schemes in the village and we now have plant lists, locations and top tips for summer and winter planting, which we've turned into information sheets for residents (all 300 copies have been taken). The new schemes reduce the watering requirement by about a third, in a dry year. We've also replaced a high-maintenance bed on a south facing slope with a combination of nectar-rich perennials and annuals, which, once established, has been much easier to care for than the annual planting, which was thirsty. I think this year we have probably spent less than £10 as perennials have grown in size and annuals re-seeded themselves. Also "in bloomers" have contributed plants that they have seen attract insects to their gardens. When seeds have set we'll put up a sign for people to help themselves to seeds – we did this last year and noticed quite a few seed heads had disappeared! (*Hunmanby in Bloom*)
- **Conservation:** If conservation is not your area of expertise, work with local wildlife groups to get their support and experience. (*Maun Conservation Group, IYN*)
- **Turf management:** We have obtained permission to bring sheep into our cemetery to help with the grass management! (*Devizes & Roundway in Bloom*)

RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM advice sheet

We have started leaving some areas of the park un-mown or mown less frequently and we feel that this will greatly increase diversity. This area will not require the intense regular mowing it used to and now just needs one cut. *(Grange Park Community Group, IYN)*

- **Dealing with graffiti:** Our group paints three bus shelters every year. We have a theme every year; last year it was the 90th year of poppy selling and this year it was the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Members painted red white and blue Union Jacks with crowns and bunting. We have found it stops the graffiti and because it's so colourful it always makes the bus users smile. *(Elloughton cum Brough In Bloom)*
- **Flooding:** We were badly flooded this year - if you get flooded then wash all the leaves you can as the rain will not get rid of the silt, and if you do not wash the leaves, then the plant will not be able to photosynthesise and will die by going nice and crispy on top. *(Growth Project, IYN)*
- **Japanese Knotweed:** We cleared Japanese Knotweed from our local nature reserve. The quote to clear the knotweed was £10k, which didn't include taking away rubbish. We decided to do it ourselves - we used recycled materials to make funnels to allow Roundup to be poured down into the roots, this was after we'd sprayed several times. We burnt on site to save money and the whole project cost us £104 in total for the Roundup. *(The Rhuddlan Environment Group)*