



# Partner Garden Scheme Research Outcomes

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March 2026



# Background & objectives

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## Background

- The current Partner Garden offer provides free entry for one main RHS member (one member of a joint membership), with qualifying dates applied by many Partner Gardens
- We wanted to review the scheme with both Partner Gardens and RHS Members to ensure it was delivering satisfaction on both sides and take on board any feedback
- We also wanted to look at how the scheme might evolve in the future if the RHS were to include new Membership types

# Partner Garden Research

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Online qualitative discussion with **Partner Gardens** included:

- Benefits of being a Partner Garden
- How to better meet the needs of Partner Gardens
- Conditions of entry, especially around the second joint member who doesn't get in free
- Limitations on entry dates for Member visitation
- Other schemes and moving to a different model such as 2 for 1 or 50% off

## PARTNER GARDENS FOCUS GROUPS

- 3 x 1.5 hour focus groups, conducted online
- 20 Partner Gardens participated in total
- Representation of different types of garden – in terms of their size, region, access restrictions and entry prices.

# RHS Member Research

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**RHS Member** feedback through Membership survey included:

- Satisfaction with, and understanding of, the PG scheme
- Testing of different models of entry to improve member experience

## MEMBERS SURVEY

- 10 minute online survey with a representative sample of RHS members
- Sample size = 1049
- Data weighted to reflect known member profile in terms of membership type and membership tenure.
- Survey was conducted in February 2026



# Partner Garden Research Feedback



# Highlighted Benefits of PG Scheme

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## Main Benefits


- Brand association – link with RHS ‘raises profile in a trusted way’
- Garden promotion via RHS channels to drive footfall especially on quieter days of the week or shoulder months

## Secondary Benefits

- Partner Garden networking meetings
- Complimentary RHS garden entry/Flower Show entry to motivate teams

## Tertiary Benefits

- Access to RHS Advice Service
- Seed Exchange scheme
- Invitation to the President’s Drink Party at Chelsea



**“Our staff love the entry cards – it’s a really nice perk for them.”**

# Other Feedback on the PG Scheme

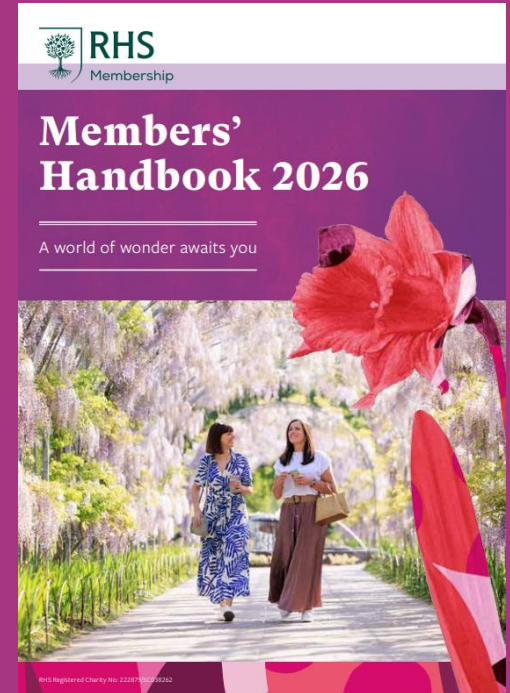
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- **Some RHS Member confusion about restriction on entry dates**
  - This also applies to other schemes *e.g. Gardeners' World 2 for 1*
  - The odd difficult Member remains longer in the memory
  - Most Members will pay if visit on wrong day
  - Improvements in understanding of the scheme in recent times
  
- **Some Member confusion about member qualification for free access**
  - Only one Joint member getting in free causes confusion (common issue)
  - Some Joint Members trying their luck to both get in
  - Some Members think guest gets in free (as per RHS Gardens)
  - Members visiting in large groups despite the restrictions around this

**\* Overall, groups were POSITIVE about nature of the scheme \***

# Partner Garden entry restriction best practice

- RHS member entry **T&Cs added to PG website**
- **Staff training** provided in how to deal with RHS members querying the entry restrictions
- Display of the **RHS roundel & poster** clarifying entry restrictions
- **RHS Handbook** kept at the ticket desk, and used by staff in conversations with visitors as proof of the restrictions
- **Mandatory tickets for RHS members**, ensuring staff verify restrictions, rather than waiving members through
- Any free pre-booked tickets **detailing entry restrictions**



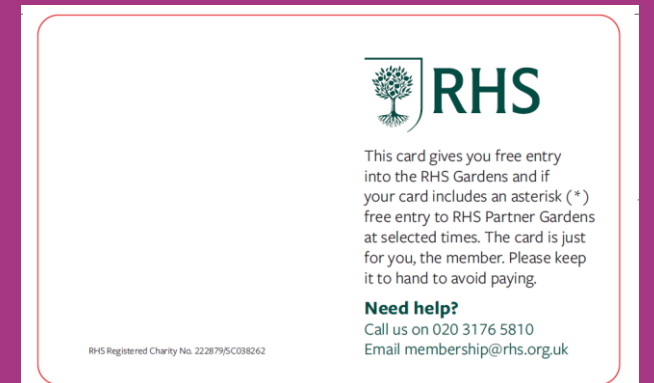
# Analysing the Value of RHS Member Entry

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- Recording free Member entry is either done on the till or manually. There is no RHS system currently to actively track Member visits at each garden
- Only one garden tracked any additional entry payment associated with an RHS visit
- No gardens had a reliable means of measuring secondary spend by Members
- Anecdotally, some gardens felt there was a boost in secondary spend on RHS Member days whereas others felt that RHS Members tended not to make purchases when visiting

# Suggestions for Addressing Joint Membership Challenges

- Consider one card for joint memberships
- Make it clearer which member qualifies for free entry on existing cards *e.g. coloured cards/remove asterisk*
- Improve communications to Members at acquisition about scheme
- Make it clearer a physical card needs to be shown



# Discussion of other Models

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## All Members Allowed in Free

- Limited support for this idea
- It would lead to a drop in revenue at gardens
- There is always a cost to Member visits for example, wearing down paths or using toilets so important to recoup some costs

## 2 for 1 Entry

- Gardens felt this would cause confusion for visitors as the Gardeners' World scheme already exists and tricky for visitors and staff at the gate navigating two different but similar entry mechanisms
- Solo visitors would be disadvantaged
- Gardens less keen on this option, especially if it meant increasing opening periods especially into peak seasons

## 50% off entry

- Avoids duplication of the GW 2 for 1 scheme
- Fairer and simpler as doesn't penalise those visiting on their own
- Easier to adapt to different membership types
- Gardens less keen on this option if it meant increasing opening periods, especially to peak season
- Some gardens felt Members may be less attracted by this offer and the lure of **free** was important

# Discussion of other Models

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## Tiered Access Model

(Gardens receive more support for longer member opening periods)

- Those in a top tier may receive preferential treatment and attract most member attention
- Those in lower tiers may be seen as second rate
- Grouping of sites would still mean Members would have to check what the restrictions were
- Some gardens didn't want to drive volume during peak periods so couldn't compromise on current opening days
- Helpful to have gardens near each other open on different days so they are not in competition with each other for RHS Member visits
- More layers seen as making it more complicated

## As Current Offer

- Most felt current model worked well for them commercially
- Many garden representatives felt Comms/messaging about scheme had improved in recent times
- Some niggles remain but solutions discussed to improve these e.g. further member comms.
- Some can see benefit from additional RHS secondary spend
- Flexibility to set entry dates that fits the gardens' needs is important based on their own individual circumstances and visitor traffic



# RHS Member Engagement with the Partner Garden scheme

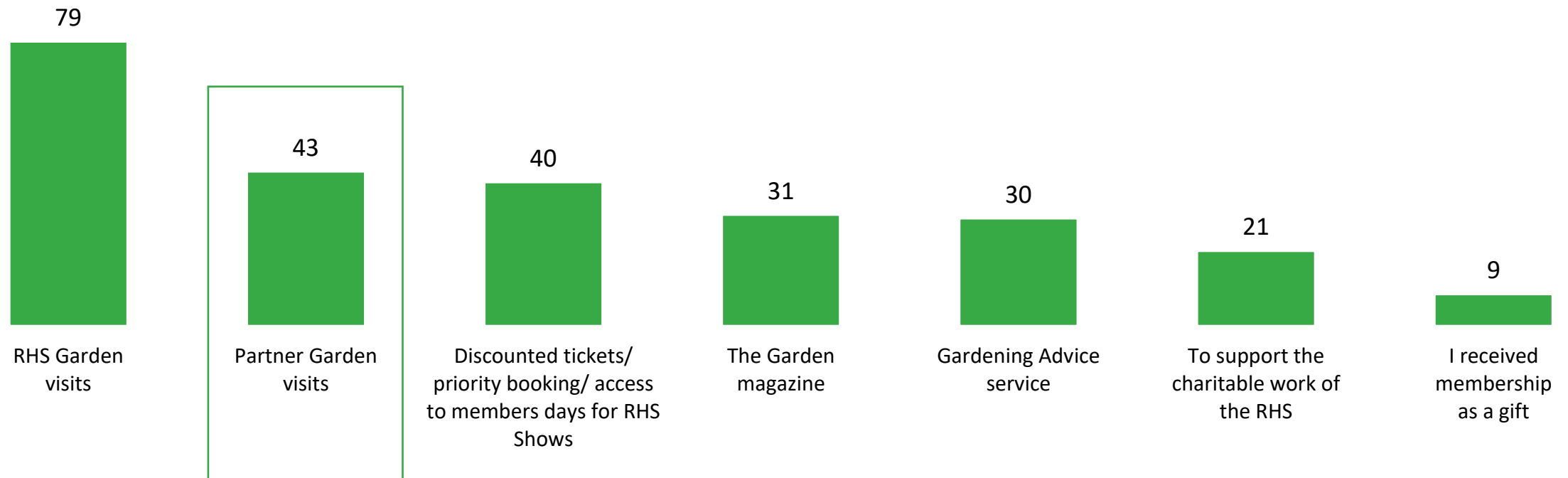


# Visitation Context & Planning

# Importance in membership decision making

The Partner Garden scheme is important to RHS membership sales – it was the second most mentioned motivator, influencing the decision of over 2 in 5 new members. To support acquisition, it's important that any changes to the scheme do not dampen interest at the point of sale.

Thinking back to when you took out your RHS membership, what motivated you to become a member?  
Please select up to four benefits (%). Base: All new members

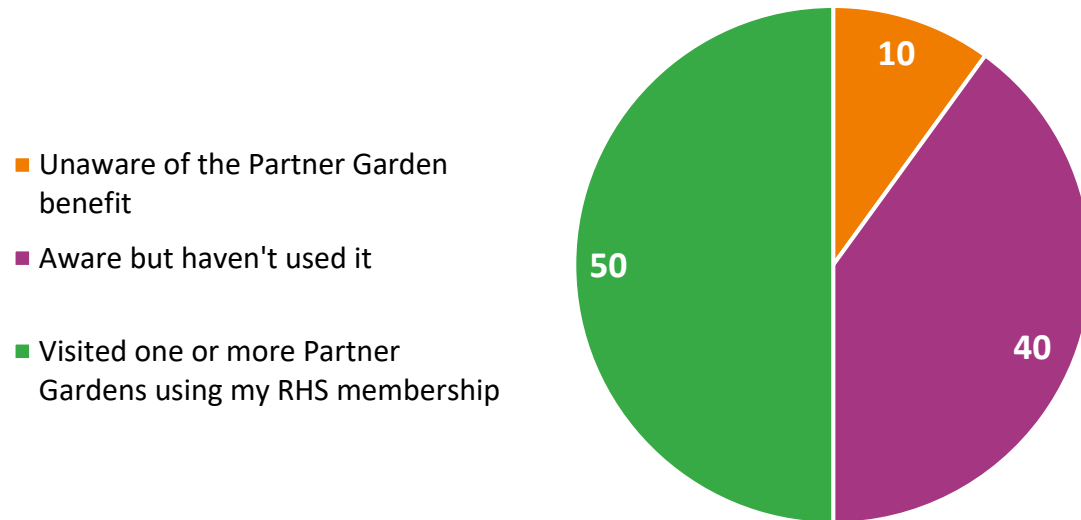


Base: Members who have held their membership for less than a year (153)

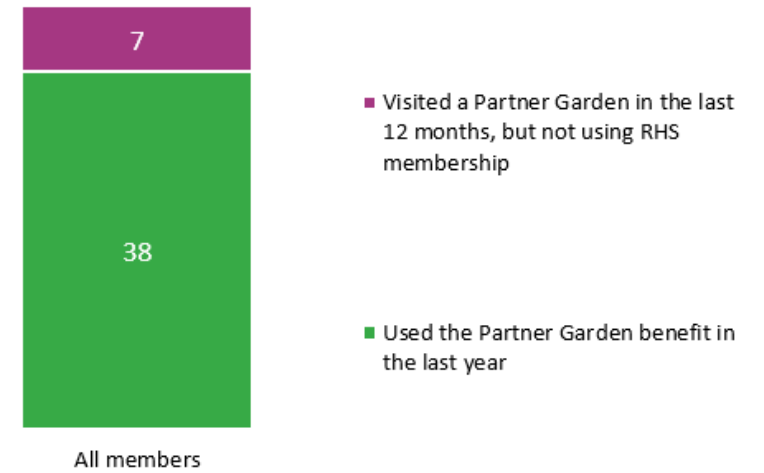
# Familiarity with Partner Garden scheme

Overall, the majority (90%) of Members are aware of the Partner Garden benefit, and half (45%) have used it in the past, 38% within the last year.

## How familiar are you with the Partner Garden benefit, provided through your RHS membership? (%)



## Visits to Partner Gardens and use of free member entry benefit, within last 12 months.

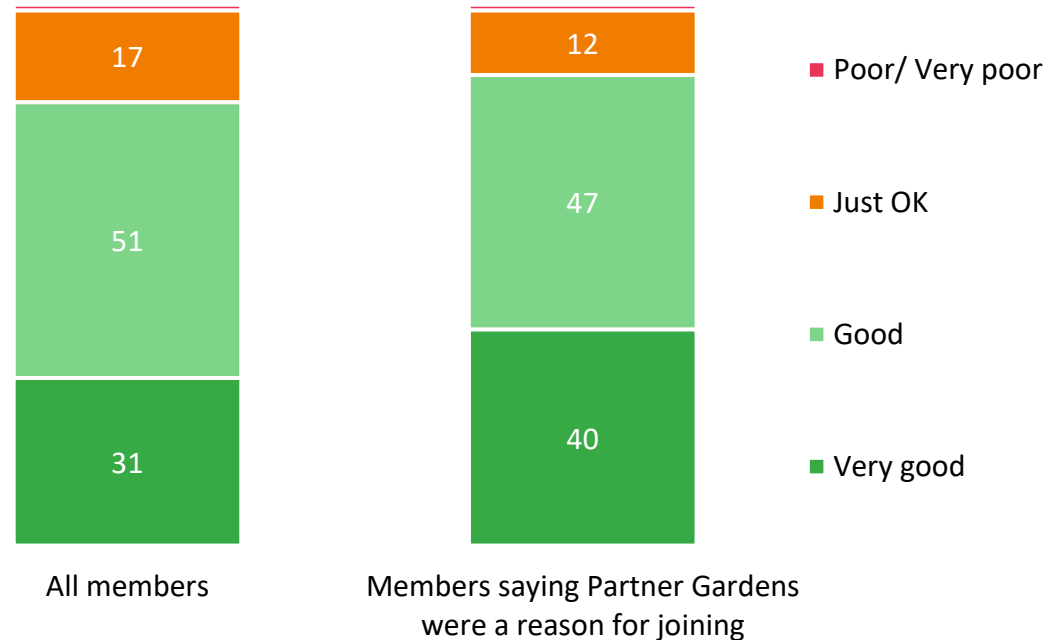


Base: All members (1049)

# Member Rating of Partner Garden scheme

Although Customer Service records flag a number of member complaints about the scheme, this does not appear to be representative of the wider Member base as **only 1% of members rated the Partner Garden benefit as 'poor'**, although the 17% rating it as 'just OK' suggest there is some room for improvement.

How would you rate the Partner Garden benefit provided through your RHS membership? (%)



Base: All aware of the Partner Garden benefit (953), Members aware who said that Partner Gardens were a motivator for membership (318)

# Partner Garden Horticultural Standards

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Members appreciate the selection of Partner Gardens, and nearly unanimously feel that they reflect the RHS's high horticultural standards.

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94%

**Believe Partner Gardens  
reflect the RHS's high  
horticultural standards**

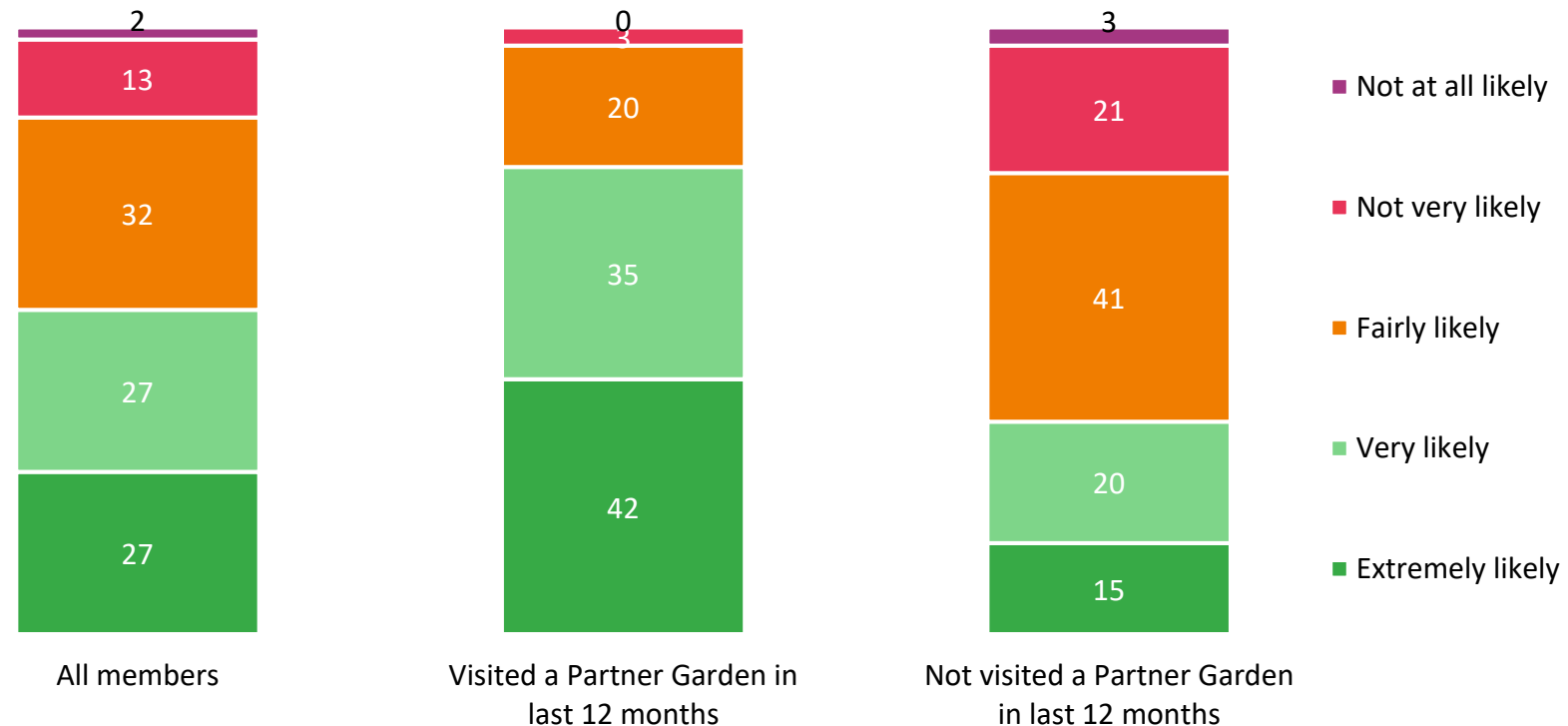
Base: All members visiting a Partner Garden in the last year (484)

# Likely future use of the scheme

54% of members say they are likely to visit an RHS Partner Garden in the future, slightly higher than the 45% who said they had visited in the last 12 months. Intention is higher amongst those who have visited in the past – with only 1% of these saying they would be unlikely to visit another based on their previous experience.

There is clearly a barrier to usage for those who have not used this membership benefit in the last year, with a quarter unlikely to use this in the future. This may be because this part of the Membership offer is not a priority for them *e.g. Happy just to visit their local RHS garden, armchair garden enthusiast.*

## How likely are you to visit an RHS Partner Garden in the future? (%)



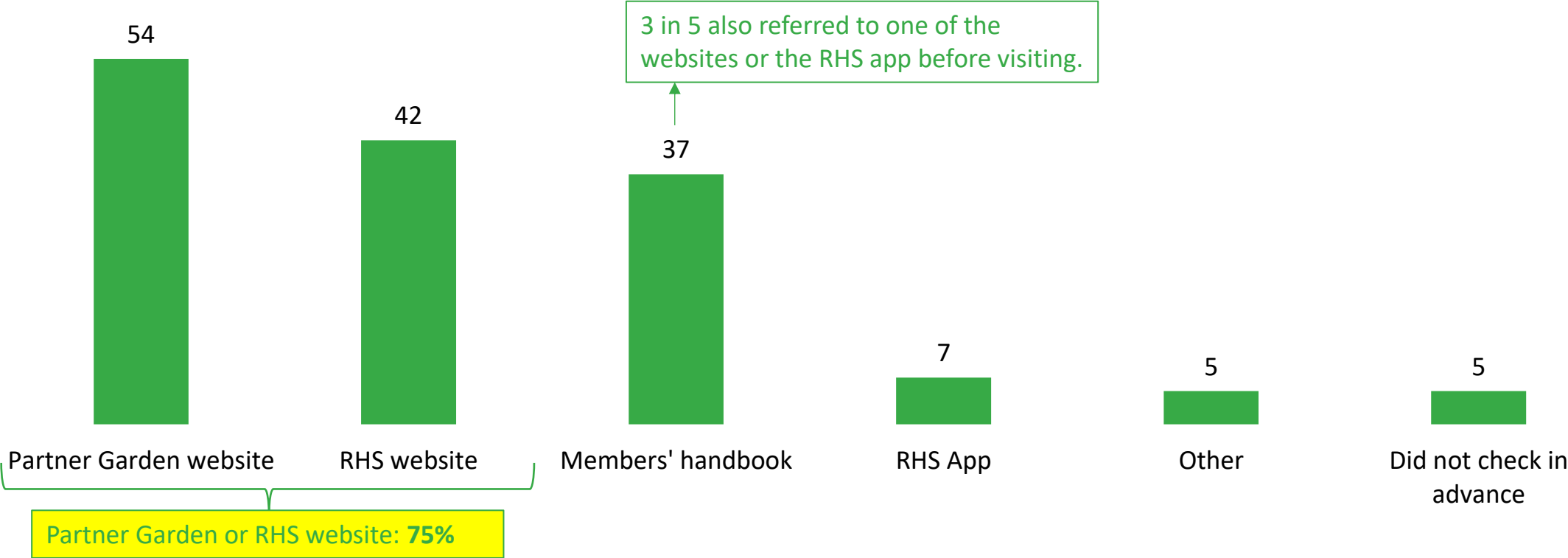
Base: All members (1049)

# Planning Partner Garden visits

RHS members typically refer to the RHS or Partner Garden website to plan their visit.

37% of Members still refer to the Members' Handbook but this is typically in addition to searching for information digitally.

When planning your Partner Garden visit, where did you check details of visitation times? (%)



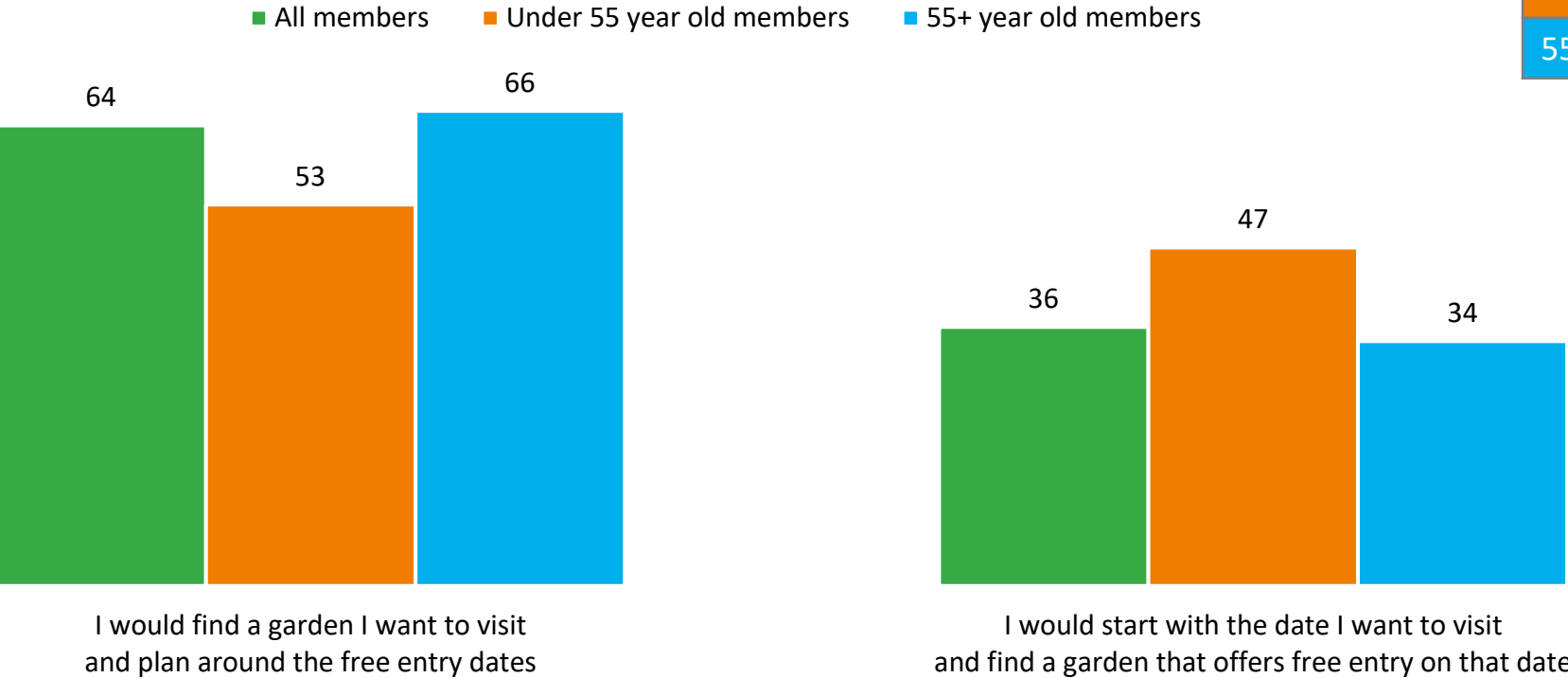
Base: All members visiting a Partner Garden in the last year (484)

# Garden selection

Older members (55+) are less likely to be working full time and so more easily able to visit Partner Gardens whenever they choose. As such they are more likely to select a garden and then plan the date around the free entry restrictions. This is more difficult for under 55 year olds, and we see nearly half starting with the date and then selecting a Partner Garden.

To cater for different member needs it is therefore important to support both selection approaches through the tools we provide.

How do you typically/ would you choose which Partner Garden to visit? (%)



% of members	
Under 55s	16%
55+ years	84%

Base: All members (1049), Members under 55 years (156), Members 55+ years (881)



**Member  
understanding  
of the scheme**

# Understanding of free entry benefit

While the most common understanding of the member entry benefit is correct, this was only selected by 38% of members. So, there is a clearly a need for more communication around this to avoid member disappointment and awkward conversations for Partner Gardens particularly to those who have a joint membership.

**We would like to check member understanding of the Partner Gardens scheme. Please tick the type of entry that you believe the Partner Garden scheme offers. If you're not sure, please indicate what you assume this to be. (%)**

■ All members ■ Individual membership ■ Joint membership



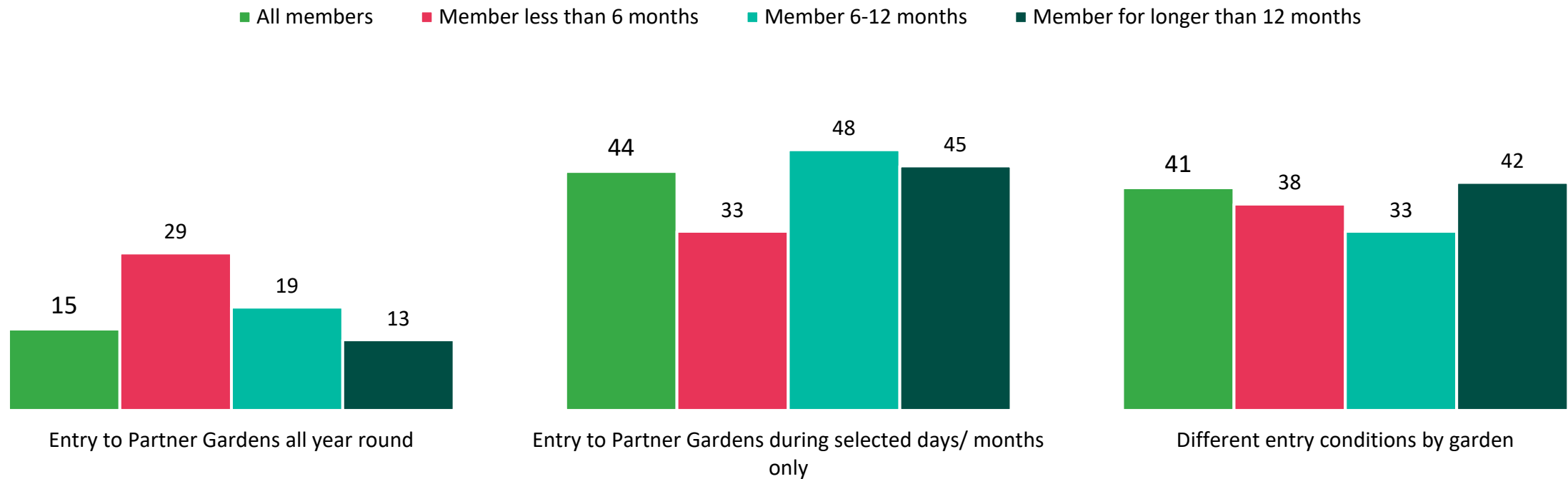
Base: All members (1049), Individual members (800), Joint members (179)

# Understanding of seasonal restrictions

There is uncertainty about the seasonal Partner Gardens entry – most members realise it is restricted, but only 2 in 5 are aware that entry varies by garden.

3 in 10 new members (less than 6 months tenure) believe that they will get access to Partner Gardens year round, suggesting there may be a **degree on confusion in communications at the point of sale**.

**Please indicate your understanding of the access to Partner Gardens provided through your RHS membership. If you're not sure, please indicate what you assume it to be. (%)**



Base: All members (1049), Members for less than 6 months (82), Members for 6-12 months (99), Members for longer than 12 months (868)

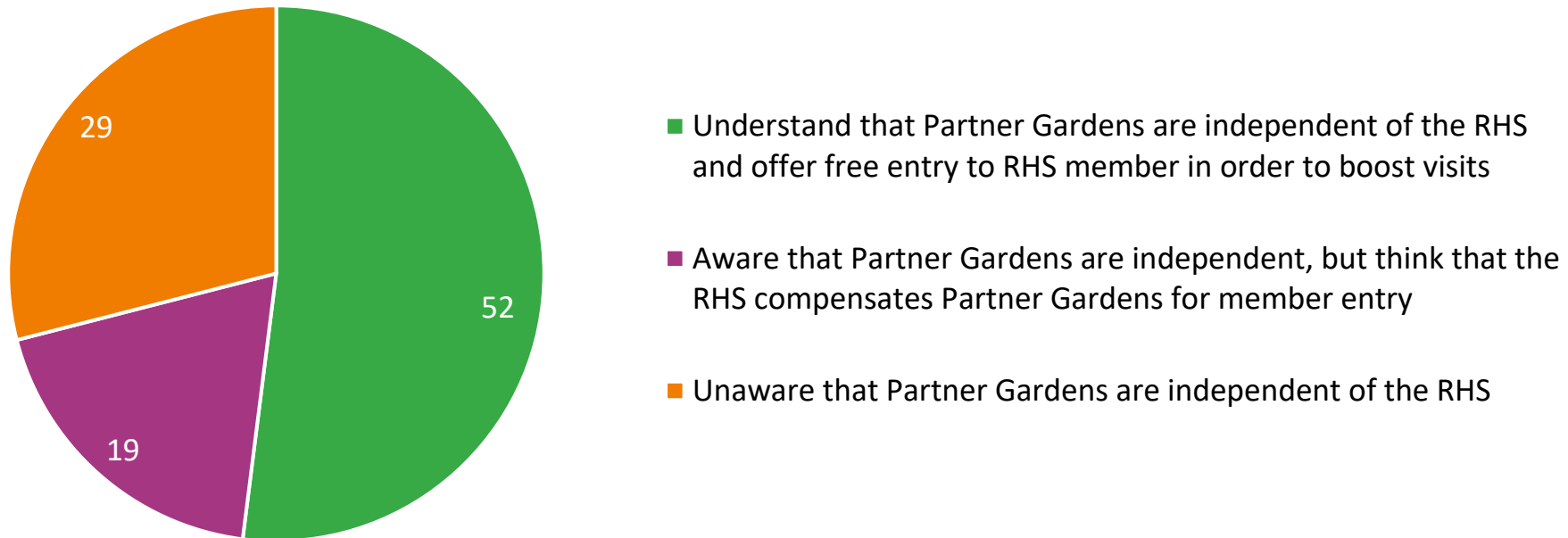
# RHS relationship to Partner Gardens

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Only half of our members understand the RHS's relationship with Partner Gardens, which explains why some members are confused about the entry restrictions. Clarifying this relationship would pave the ground to understanding why entry is inconsistent across Partner Gardens.

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**Before now, were you aware that all Partner Garden ownership and management is independent of the RHS? (%)**



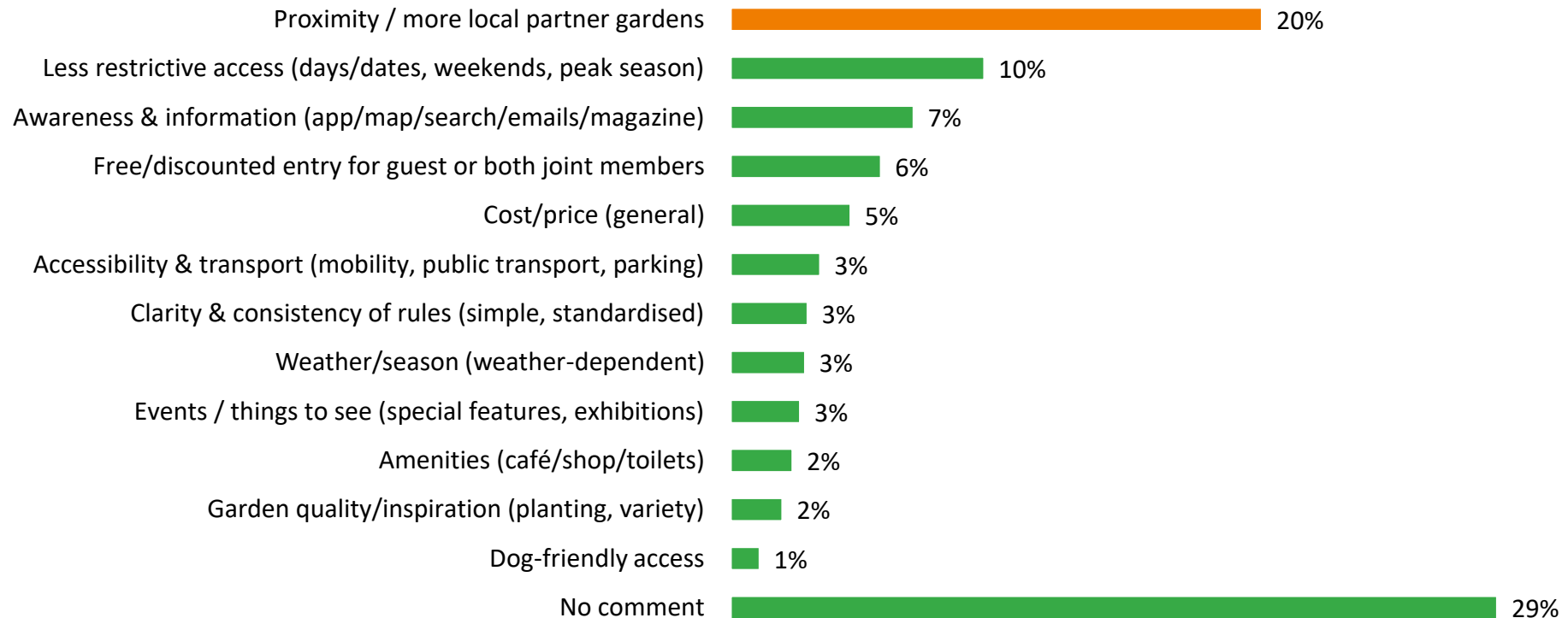
Base: All members (1049)

# Encouraging more Partner Garden visits

Spontaneous suggestions across **all members** about what would encourage more Partner Garden visits primarily focused on the proximity of gardens, with this being twice as important as access restrictions, and more than 3 times as important as price of entry for a joint member or guest.

Additional comms and tools to boost awareness and support searches for Partner Gardens could help to prompt interest. Consider adding filters to show amenities at the site and dog access.

## What, if anything, would encourage you to visit Partner Gardens more often? (%)



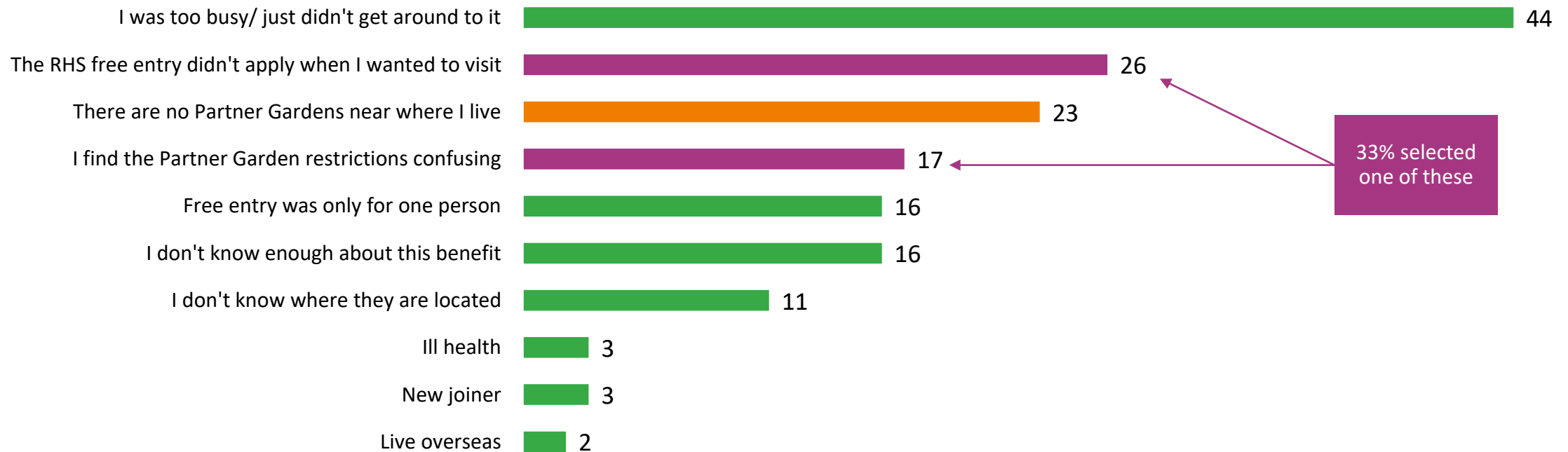
Base: All members (1049)); coding processed by AI

# Barriers to visiting Partner Gardens

Amongst members who haven't used the Partner Garden benefit in the last 12 months, restricted access/ confusion around entry were more likely to be quoted as a barrier than the location...

However, if the number of Partner Gardens was reduced to remove entry restrictions, then we would expect distance to crop up more frequently as a barrier to visiting.

## You mentioned earlier that you haven't visited any Partner Gardens in the last 12 months. What are the main reasons for this? (%)



Base: Members who were aware of the benefit, but who had not visited a Partner Garden in the last 12 months (414)



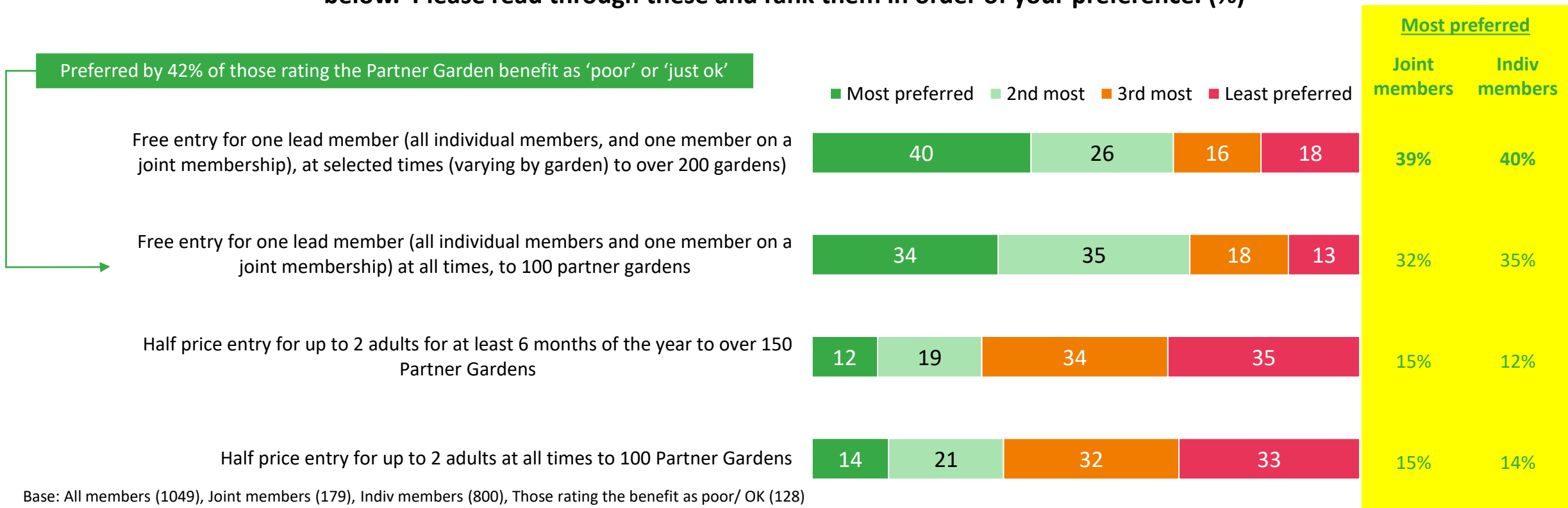
# Member Entry Preferences

# Entry format preference

'Free' is a powerful word and there is clear preference for 'free entry for one member' over half price for two. This preference holds for Joint members as well as Individual ones.

Results were less clear for the trade off between a higher number of Partner Gardens vs. unrestricted access, although members who give low ratings of the Partner Garden benefit did show a preference for unrestricted entry to a smaller number of gardens.

**We are considering different ways of managing the scheme and would like to understand the relative appeal of the different options below. Please read through these and rank them in order of your preference. (%)**

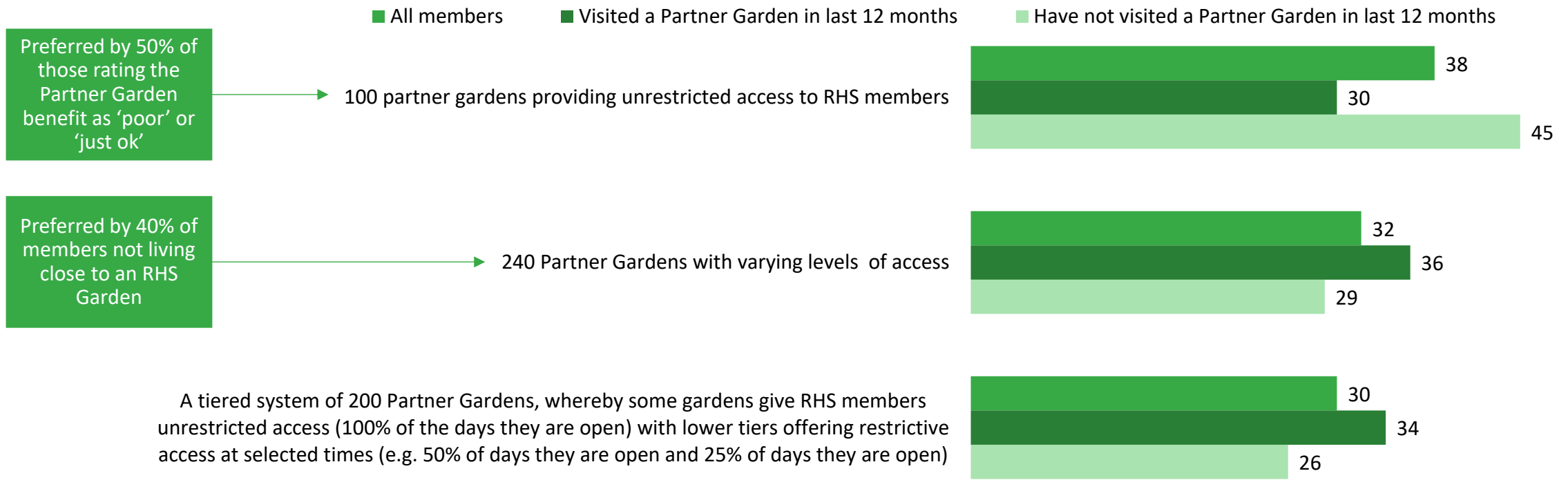


# Access vs. no. of gardens

There is no strong direction emerging from member feedback with regards to the trade off between unrestricted access and number of gardens at an overall level – and we see those using and those not using the scheme leaning in different directions.

The decision should therefore be guided by other considerations – financial impact (on gift aid), RHS brand presence, and the value to members who are less able to make use of the RHS Garden benefit (not living near one of our gardens).

## Which of the following options would you prefer? (%)



Base: All members (1049), Visited a Partner Garden in last 12 months (484), Not visited a Partner Garden in last 12 months (565)



# Benefit to Partner Gardens

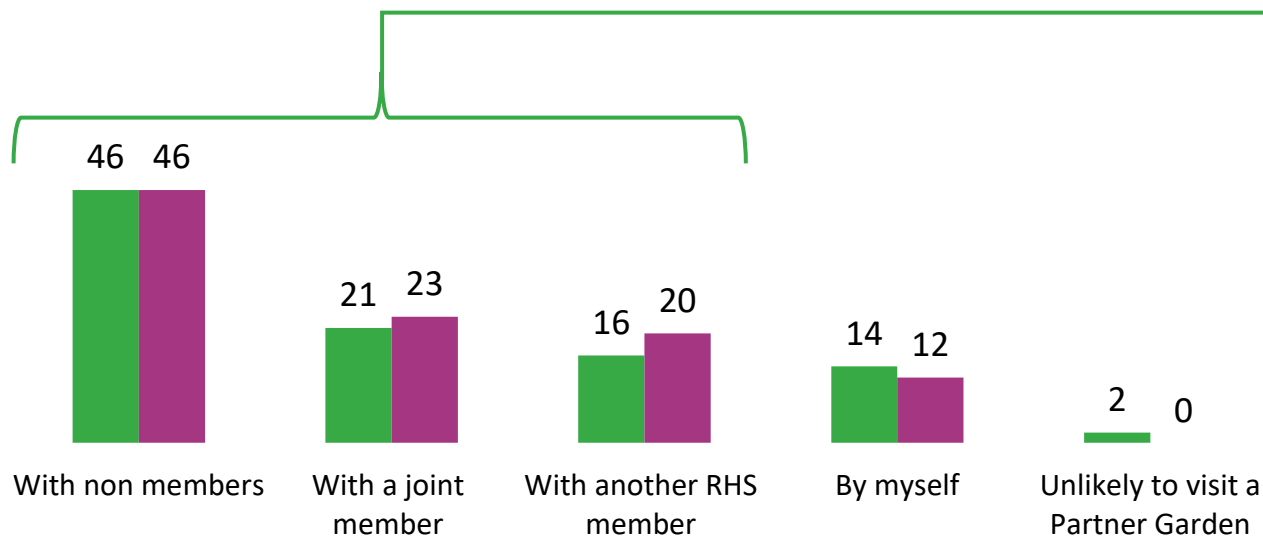
# Visiting Party

Two thirds of members say they are likely to visit Partner Gardens with a joint or non-member, mostly adults. Some may gain entry through another membership, but most of these would pay. **There is a contingent of members who wouldn't pay for entry** – typically visiting with another RHS member (on a different membership) or by themselves.

Intention to visit with children is fairly limited, suggesting the scheme should be designed around the needs of an adult member audience.

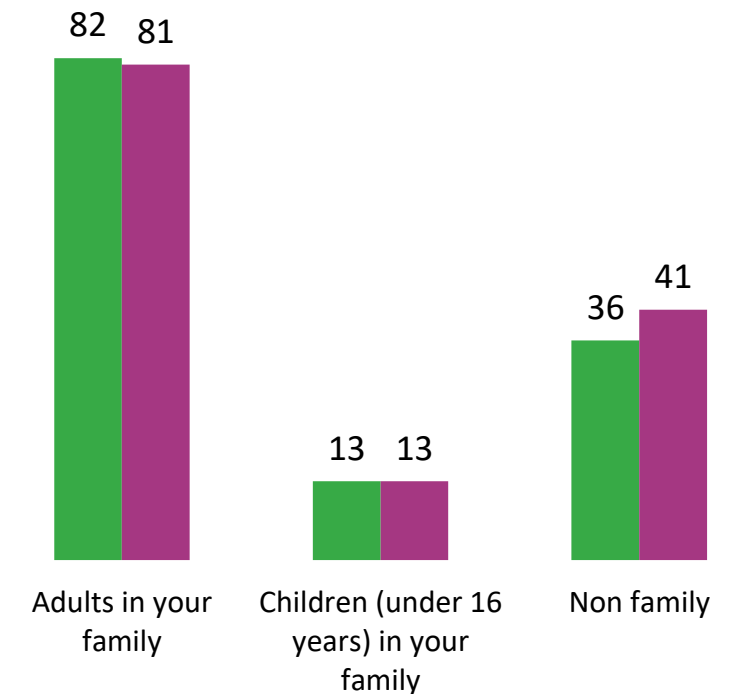
## Who are you most likely to visit a Partner Garden with? (%)

■ All members ■ Members very/ extremely likely to visit Partner Gardens in the future



Base: All members (1049)

## Are the people you would be most likely to visit Partner Gardens with...? (%)



# On site spend

Only half of past RHS member visits to Partner Gardens involve payment for site entry – associated with solo visits and trips with other family/friends who have a separate membership.

**However, 93% spend out on secondary items – with food/ drink being the most common, followed by plant purchases.** Only 4% of member visits to Partner Gardens do not add to Partner Garden revenue.

What, if anything, did you or the people you visited with spend out on during your last visit to a Partner Garden? (%)



Any secondary spend: 93%

Base: All members visiting a Partner Garden in the last year (484)



# Summary & Recommendations

# Summary – Member Entry Criteria

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## The Partner Garden scheme is well received overall

- Partner Gardens on the whole were happy with the scheme and its benefits
- Only **1% of RHS Members rate the scheme as 'poor/ very poor'**
- 94% of Members believe that Partner Gardens **reflect the RHS' high horticultural standards**
- 54% of members are **very/extremely likely to use** it in the future

## One free member entry per membership preferred over half price for member and guest

- Half price only works for Members if given 100% access to gardens
- The research showed a **clear preference for 'free entry for one member'** over half price for two. This preference holds for Joint members as well as Individual ones
- Power of 'free' is significant. **Keep entry as it is to** leverage the power of 'free'
- Partner Gardens were also broadly happy with current system and felt there could be confusion moving to a different offer

# Summary - Communications

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Early communication to new members is needed to address a lack of awareness and understanding about the Partner Garden scheme

- Only three quarters of new members (who joined within the last 6 months), are aware of the PG benefit
- 3 in 10 new members (less than 6 months tenure) believe that they will get access to Partner Gardens year round, suggesting there may be a **degree on confusion in communications at the point of sale**
- 20% of new members say they have visited a Partner Garden in the last 12 months, but have not used the Partner Garden membership benefit... suggesting **confusion may lead to members visiting on the wrong date and having to pay early on**

Explaining the nature of the RHS' relationship with Partner Gardens could help to enhance understanding of the scheme and a deeper appreciation of our Partners

- **62% don't understand that free entry is for one member per membership**
- **Only half of our members understand the RHS's relationship with Partner Gardens**, which explains why many members are **confused about the entry restrictions**. Explaining the relationship would help to:
  - Emphasises that Partner Gardens are independent of the RHS
  - Explain why only one member gets in free (so Partner Gardens see some financial benefit)...
  - ...and why entry restrictions vary by site

# Summary - Opportunities

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## Potential to enhance relationship with Partner Gardens by sharing member usage data

- Qualitative research with Partner Gardens revealed that they typically do not record paid entry associated with RHS member visits (associated with a paying guest/ joint member or a visit outside of permitted times), or have a way to measure members' secondary spend
- Our data shows that around **half of past member visits include entry ticket purchase**, and **93% include secondary spend**
- **54% of RHS members are very/ extremely likely to visit** Partner Gardens in the future
- 3 in 5 members interested in visiting Partner Gardens say they **would visit even in the winter months (Nov-Feb)**

## Distribution of Partner Gardens

- Key motivations for visiting Partner Gardens are for **variety and inspiration**, suggesting that there is value in partnering with gardens that offer a clear point of difference to RHS sites
- Different opening times and seasons of interest for visiting Partner Gardens **is a strength**
- 20% want more gardens 'local' to me so a consideration in recruiting new gardens to the scheme
- Flexibility for gardens to choose their own opening times is a positive of the scheme whilst retaining 28% minimum access

# RHS Actions

- **Improve Communications** on scheme, particularly to new Members
- **Share** more regular and relevant Member feedback on PG visitation
- **Investigate** changing membership card to more clearly denote joint membership
- **Promote** one free PG entry per membership type
- Keep Gardens **informed** of any changes to RHS Membership types
- **Review** tertiary benefits of the PG scheme

# Partner Garden Actions

- Clearly state **RHS entry periods** on gardens' own websites
- **Keep a record** of additional RHS Member paying guest entry for improved understanding of secondary spend opportunities