



SOUTH & SOUTH EAST IN BLOOM & LONDON IN BLOOM

GROWING GREENER COMMUNITIES- JULY/AUGUST 2023



Another year's judging is over, so thank you all for participating, and of course, our judges and assessors for their time and support. The reports and scores are coming in, so over the next couple of weeks, Trustees will verify the outcomes and confirm the final results. These, of course, will not be known until the two award ceremonies in September. For your diary, the London in Bloom Awards are on the 21 September at the Arts Centre at Mile End, Tower Hamlets and the South & South East in Bloom Awards will be at RHS Gardens Wisley on the 29 September. Finalising results, organising trophies and certificates, and making final award arrangements is hectic. So we let you all know the details as soon as they are confirmed.

You may well have read Anne or Kate's emails recently in which we told you about a special award in each region. We wish to recognise those who are embarking on a horticultural career. In London in Bloom, we have teamed up with the Royal Parks Guild and Grosvenor Landscape Management (Grosvenor Property Group) and they, along with London in Bloom, wish to acknowledge an apprentice who is taking full advantage of their studies and training to become a future gardener. In South & South East in Bloom, we have joined forces with John O'Connor Grounds Maintenance to do the same..

So if you are an employer or know of a horticultural apprentice working in the private or public sectors whose determination to become a gardener warrants a nomination, please let us know. First, please send us a nomination with the name of the individual they work for and why you think they are worthy of recognition. In both regions, the most successful nominee will be offered a prize, and all nominees will receive a certificate. Closing date Friday 4 August.

We also wish to send best wishes to those involved in Britain in Bloom finals; whether you have already been judged or are still waiting to be judged, we wish you every success. Our entries are Wareham (Southern England), Royal Tunbridge Wells, Faversham & Eynsford (South East). In London, our entries are; Romford BID, London Borough of Tower Hamlets & Better Bankside/BOST/Southwark Council.

I hope you all have a great summer (weather permitting), and we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our awards ceremonies in September.

Keep on Gardening – Ed.

DOWN ON THE PLOT -KEVIN TAITT, TRUSTEE AND JUDGE

After a warm and dry June, we are experiencing plenty of rain and wind. After the recent windy weekends, I hesitated to go down to the plot fearing the runner beans and French beans had been blown down. Fortunately, they survived and are still OK.



Harvesting is now in full swing. What I am harvesting now includes runner beans, climbing French beans, courgettes, beetroot, cauliflower, red and green cabbage, cut-and-come-again lettuce, second-early potatoes and carrots. Don't forget to protect the crops vulnerable to birds and the dreaded cabbage white butterflies. On my recent visits to the plot, plenty of these butterflies were seen around the site.

If you are growing soft fruit, including strawberries and raspberries, now is the time to do the necessary maintenance. With raspberries, remove any netting and cut the fruiting stems down as soon as you have finished picking the last crop, leaving the new canes for next year's fruit. You will know the new canes because, obviously, these haven't fruited and are mainly green canes. If you are growing autumn fruiting raspberries, these are dealt with differently, and I will explain the difference in the next copy. Strawberries will now have finished, and if you want to increase the amount of plants you grow, it is an easy job. Fill some pots with either potting compost or just some soil from the plot. Some long growths come from the

strawberry plant, called the runners. Secure the runner in the plot with a bent wire or stone. Just take the first growth from the runner and cut the rest off. Please do not cut the runner from the main plant until it is well rooted. This is one way of increasing your strawberry plants and costs absolutely nothing. After three years, strawberry crops start deteriorating, so replace the old plants to keep a good crop.

At this time of year, potatoes and tomatoes are at risk from blight. Potato blight was responsible for the deaths of many people in Ireland during the mid-19th century. These people were particularly poor and depended on potato crops to survive. At that time, there was no cure for blight, but up until a few years ago, chemicals were available to amateurs, but nothing is available to amateurs now. On a positive note, blight-resistant varieties are available, and they work. A few years ago, a chap I knew decided to try one of these varieties out, and he grew this variety next to



an ordinary main crop variety. It was a terrible blight year, and to everyone's amazement, the main crop was decimated with blight, and there was no sign of blight on the resistant variety. What to look for, blight will appear in the form of black patches on the leaves and white powdery stuff on the edge of the leaves. If you do get blight, cut the stems to the top of the ridge, stopping it from going down to the tubers. You need to be vigilant as if it is on the site, and it will soon spread to all plots as blight spores are carried on the wind. Tomatoes are precisely the same, and there are blight-resistant varieties. I have grown these for the past three years, and they are certainly blight resistant, although the seed is a bit more expensive.

Suppose you have grown broad beans if, like me, your crop will have finished now. Don't pull out the plants; just cut them down to the ground, as the plants have nitrogen-fixing nodules in the ground, and you can use this. Plant some cabbages, which will be ready in about 10 to 12

weeks. You should be able to purchase some plants from the garden centre.



Finally, consider the empty areas on your plot and what you will do with them. As I have mentioned, my soil is very sandy and pans down during the winter, and any nutrients leeches out. I sow some green manure in September to dig in in early Spring. This means the green manure protects the soil's surface, and I add some nutrients when digging it in.

Cut a thistle in May; it will come back the next day

Cut a thistle in June; it will be back soon

Cut a thistle in July; it will surely die

THE DARKER SIDE OF PLANTS – KATE HARRIS CO-CAMPAIGN MANAGER

As far back as records began, we can find tales of how plants have been used to heal and protect. Before the arrival of modern medicine, the power of plants and the natural world were harnessed to heal the sick and injured. Garlic, ginger, thyme and cloves were used as antibiotics. Turmeric, black pepper, ginseng, and rosemary, amongst others, were used for their anti-inflammatory properties. Plants were used worldwide to reduce fevers, for calming nausea, poultices to heal wounds, and endless other remedies. Even today, the wonders of the natural world are still used as part of modern medicine, are the basis of homoeopathic remedies and contribute to ancient healing practices still used worldwide.

But, my friends, for all the good that plants can do, there is a sinister side to the use of plants, and for the sake of balance, I decided to lean on my darker side and investigate how plants have been used to make the healthy sick and at times used to kill. Now, I am sure I have mentioned many times before my love of the darker side of history, true crime and the mysterious. So, this particular article is very much up my street.

The urge to kill has existed as long as people have walked this planet. That may sound morbid and somewhat macabre, but it is true nonetheless. And as we developed as a species and our knowledge of the power of plants increased, it was only a matter of time before they were used for more nefarious deeds.



Take Deadly Nightshade (Belladonna), for example. The name *bella donna* comes from the Italian word for beautiful lady. It was used for beautifying oneself during the Middle Ages, with the juices used for blush or in Roman times. Its diluted extracts were used as eye drops to dilate pupils so a woman would appear attracted to a potential suitor. It is still a homoeopathic remedy for various ailments, such as whopping cough, asthma and motion sickness. But it can also be deadly. It has been used to tip arrows, and those who ingest the leaves and berries in sufficient quantities have a range of symptoms, from delirium, vomiting and hallucinations, to death due to respiratory failure. It is said that Macbeth used belladonna-laced wine to poison an invading army. In Rome, Locusta was hired by Agrippina the Younger to create a dish of belladonna-soaked mushrooms to kill her husband, Emperor Claudius.





However, those tales pale insignificantly compared to the true story of Giulia Tofana, the 18TH-century Neapolitan poisoner.

For five decades, Giulia helped seal the fate of an estimated 600 men. Disguised as a topical skin treatment sold only to women for the express purpose of murder, Aqua Tofana was born. Women who wanted to eliminate their husbands purchased small glass bottles made from a mixture of lead, arsenic and belladonna. Easily disguised amongst the other little bottles of beautifying treatments and even easier added to their husband's food. Giulia was only discovered when one of her customers got an attack of conscience just as her husband was about to eat his poisoned soup and confessed all. Giulia, although not directly guilty of these murders, was caught and executed for the part she played.

But this is just one poisonous plant in a long list.

Let us look at *Strychnos nux-vomica*, another plant used in homoeopathy, this time for various conditions, including anxiety and migraines.

The poison this plant creates is one most will have heard of. Strychnine is a deadly poison that prevents nerve signals from being sent correctly and can lead to muscle spasms, sore muscles, and rigid limbs and can eventually lead to death through respiratory failure as the lungs stop functioning. It can be found in street drugs for its hallucinatory properties, and its compound can be used as a performance enhancer for athletes. It has been used in countless murder cases throughout history, including the case of Dr Thomas Neil Cream, who was found guilty and served ten years in an American prison for killing at least seven women and one man. Once his sentence was complete, Dr Cream returned to London, where he continued killing and was eventually executed for his crimes in 1892.





Or how about the story of how Socrates met his end? He was sentenced to death and forced to drink Hemlock by his own hand, a particularly nasty way to die. Plato recorded his death, and it is said that he first began to feel a heavy feeling in his legs, followed by chills creeping up his body until he was unable to move due to full-body paralysis, all the while still being aware of his surroundings, followed by his inevitable death as his heart was paralysed. Created from the *Conium maculatum* plant, commonly known as Hemlock. Water Hemlock closely related and found in North America, was also used as a poison and produced a range of painful symptoms before the sufferer eventually died.

Many more plants have been used to create deadly poisons, like the Castor Oil plant, used to create ricin or Oleander, which is beautiful but deadly if used for the wrong reason. But plants were also used in other ways, which may not have been directly used to kill but were very much intertwined in the death process. Ancient South American civilisations were known to sacrifice young women and children to the gods. They were

thought to have been made compliant by eating cocoa leaves and drinking fermented drinks, making them easy to control as they awaited their fate.

Poisons occur in many everyday foods, and we eat without causing ourselves any harm, taking the seed of an apple or an apricot. Both contain low levels of cyanide, and although these can be used to extract the properties and create the poison, they pose no risk to us in real terms. The same can be said for arsenic; low, non-harmful doses can be found in many foods we eat daily, from fish to cereals to dairy foods.

I find it fascinating that so many of these plants that can be used for deadly purposes can also treat joint, everyday ailments and can be found in foods we regularly have in our cupboards and fridges. I also find it incredible to think that in our history, our ancestors found ways to harness the power of plants for good and evil. I would love to know how the healing and deadly properties were found.

The natural world's power is remarkable, and I am sure more discoveries will be made. So this is your reminder to take a minute to marvel at the natural world around you and to remind you that botanical forensics is a real thing, so you would no doubt be busted very quickly, so absolutely don't get any ideas!



SUBSTANCE OVER SIZE - MOLLY WHITE, TRUSTEE & JUDGE



Living near green space means a lower risk of mental distress; green space is shown in some cases to reduce anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and migraines. Reconnecting with the earth's subtle electrical charge by grounding yourself is an easy way to reconnect with nature and yourself. Simple actions such as sitting on the grass to read a book, walking barefoot across a permeable surface or swimming in open water are all ways to regain that connection and hopefully reduce stress, improve sleep and lower pain levels.

With regular Gardening proven to increase a person's well-being and lower stress levels, it's undoubtedly vital that everyone has exposure to green space, no matter how small it is.

When it comes to green space, is it possible to have an area that is too small to make a positive difference? I will argue that no space is too small, that every pocket of unused land, every roadside verge that is wide enough, all those little pockets of forgotten land, or those areas that are taken for granted. They are invisible to us because we walk or drive past them every day and never give them a second glance. They are all precious areas that can improve a person's mental and physical health and enrich the biodiversity and outcomes for any given area.

The RHS, amongst other bodies, continue researching the benefits of horticulture and green space. We see increased information and tangible results that allow us to argue the benefits many professionals have known for so long.





Finally, evidence points towards the theory that hospital patients recover faster if they see green space instead of buildings from their beds. Indeed that theory works for us all; we are all healthier and happier when we are close to nature. Even if we don't realise or recognise its positive effects.

So if we only have a little space, how can we make the most of it?

Firstly, consider the site, the users, the accessibility, the need and the desired outcomes. I'd also bear in mind the five senses. Our sight, our smell, our touch, our hearing and our taste. Let these factors guide you but not restrict you; sometimes, our outcomes are things we never considered.

1. Creating a wildflower meadow is a trendy gardening style, but when you go back to basics, the benefits of a wildflower area are invaluable. Providing a resting place and sanctuary for beneficial insects, food, nectar and egg-laying habitats. These mini-ecosystems are brimming with possibilities and don't need to be significant.
2. Planting fruit trees for the community. Use smaller, dwarf varieties that can be managed. Residents can use fruit, and they can maintain the trees. Even one fruit tree in any one location is beneficial. Involve them in the planting, ensure everyone knows the plan and show them how to do maintenance.
3. Sensory planting; use fragrant planting that engages smell and touch. Plants such as *Matthiola longipetala*, the night scented stocks and Chocolate Cosmos; *Cosmos atrosanguineus*. Plants that can evoke a memory can be helpful for people living with Alzheimer's; consider Delphinium, Honeysuckle, Sweet peas, Roses and Antirrhinum.
4. Create a food garden to produce a decent crop from a 1m squared plot. Choose the right plants for the site; consider height, companion & succession planting, crops that are easy to grow, especially from seed and those with a quick lifecycle to help engagement.
5. Find ways to bring sound into space. This could be water bubbling, a windchime, rustling plants, or stones underfoot.
6. Make a home for wildlife; many living things use our green spaces. Find out what uses yours or what you want to invite and create a suitable home. This could be as simple as a bird box, a bat box or a home for solitary bees.
7. Please don't get hung up on flowers; nectar and pollen are great, and pretty flowers are fabulous, but there are so many beneficial projects that don't include blooms, and they are all completely valid and worthy.
8. A place to rest; the world is moving faster and faster. A little corner with an inviting seat could be all it takes for someone to stop and take stock. Create a sign and welcome people to sit down; sometimes, people must be told it's OK.

THE ALBION STREET CAR PARK IN BROADSTAIRS – SUE WALL

BROADSTAIRS TOWN TEAM



Broadstairs is a popular traditional seaside resort on the North East Kent coast. The Albion Street car park is in the heart of the historic part of the town and very near to the main beach, so well used by residents and visitors throughout the year.

Over the years, the number of employed gardeners has been drastically reduced. In 2014, the Broadstairs Town Team Garden Group (BTT GG) took over responsibility for maintaining the three established raised beds. The first project was redesigning a neglected section as a seaside bed featuring a gently disintegrating boat stranded on a shingle beach. See picture

In 2019, Broadstairs & St. Peter's Town Council completed the renovation of the former town gasworks in the car park to create a community leisure centre. The Town Council were keen to improve the area's appearance, so they were delighted

when we suggested a project to give the area a makeover.

Our garden group volunteers cleared large amounts of building rubble and metal cans to create six new perimeter planting areas. We then appealed to residents to help to fill the "trench" with donated topsoil, leaf mould and homemade compost, much of it with a high seaweed content.

Gardening in a busy car park has many challenges, including vandalism, fly-tipping, litter and damage to plants by cars, people and dogs. The good news is that this anti-social behaviour has been significantly reduced since the volunteers have made the area so much more attractive. This illustrates that plants really can bring pride to an area.

The car park has some additional challenges, specifically its vulnerability to the effects of the weather. The large expanse of tarmac acts like a mini urban heat island, with the surrounding flint walls reflecting and radiating heat. This coastal location is in one of the driest parts of Britain and is exposed to strong northeasterly winds. This challenges the volunteers to choose the plants that can cope with this environment. Beth Chatto's 'right plant, right place' approach to Gardening is vital when each of the nine named beds has its own set of weather and soil conditions. We are taking much of our inspiration from what grows on the cliff tops, so we try to work with nature. The range of plants supports pollinators throughout the year.



The availability of water is an important consideration. When our community gardening began in 2014, the public toilet in the car park provided a place to fill our watering cans. Subsequently, the toilet block was closed, and we relied on volunteers bringing water bottles from their rainwater butts. One of our local councillors paid for a rainwater butt to collect the run-off from the toilet block roof, and the volunteers installed it. We only use this much-appreciated addition to water in new plants. One of our volunteers is a self-confessed rain gauge geek who records rainfall. These records illustrate that the rainfall pattern

has changed from frequent gentle drizzle to long periods of drought interrupted by hefty downpours.

The weather since spring 2022 has been extreme by British standards, which has undoubtedly taken its toll on some of our plants. For example, this year, the *Calendula officinalis*, a great success for many years, was severely affected by the lack of rain in May and the very strong sun in June. - attached photos illustrate A much-appreciated grant from the RHS Sustainable Futures fund has allowed us to review adding more drought-tolerant plants and a thick layer of composted bark as mulch on our beds. We keep detailed records of our gardening sessions so we can assess our progress and adapt accordingly.

The reward for all the hours of volunteering effort is the appreciation shown by organisations, residents and visitors when they tell us how much our plants brighten their day.



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Our business's heart is a desire to make a visual difference. This includes stunning floral arrangements in calm, peaceful villages and fast-paced city environments and keeping Britain tidy through our wide range of bin products. We believe that conversation and collaboration are essential to offer the best solutions for our customers. Collaborating closely with our customers, we offer tailored advice and free demonstrations to ensure they make the right decisions. Amberol also sponsors London in Bloom.

John O'Connor Grounds Maintenance Contractor

John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance employs over five hundred staff and manages over 250 vehicles across the UK, providing complete landscape solutions to various sectors, including commercial and local authorities. The Company has always been mindful of its business's environmental impact.



The Nineveh Trust

The Nineveh Trust supports South & South East in Bloom through a Trust Grant.

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London in Bloom is grateful for the continuing support of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, which has provided a grant to London in Bloom for 2023. MPGA is a long-established Charity that has played a vital role in preserving and improving countless gardens, neglected sites, and green open spaces across London.

The Worshipful Company of Gardeners, first mentioned in City Corporation records in 1345, is a survivor of the medieval craft guilds which exercised control over the practice of their crafts and ensured proper training through the system of apprenticeship. The Company is a "living" guild, and the numbers of its members are both professionals and amateurs



actively involved in the craft. A common bond of horticulture and gardens unites all.



Grosvenor Landscape Management manage many green spaces across Belgravia and Mayfair as part of Grosvenor Property UK. Grosvenor Landscape Management has worked closely with London in Bloom for many years. It is an award-winning organisation that joins as a partner to further its and London in Bloom's aims of supporting diverse and sustainable Landscapes, Parks & gardens across Greater London.



The Royal Parks Guild is a voluntary Partner Organization of The Royal Parks responsible for managing and preserving over 5,000 acres of historic parkland across London. Our aim is a serious one – championing The Royal Parks by promoting their qualities, including horticultural excellence and historical significance, whilst offering practical support where appropriate. Allied to this is the service to its members through providing and developing a broad range of social activities and keeping members abreast of current and past news of The Royal Parks.

The Royal Parks has worked with London in Bloom since its inception in 1967.

Windowflowers is the original and still the largest independent, comprehensive supplier of Floral and Horticultural Services to the commercial sector in the UK. We supply and maintain commercial premises and local authorities, mainly within London, surrounding areas, Southern England, and the Midlands. We are a long-established, family-owned, and managed business with no outside investors. Our enthusiasm and attention to detail have resulted in the longstanding patronage of an impressive collection of loyal prestigious clients, including The Ritz, Claridge's, Corinthia Hotel, Langham Hotel, Grosvenor House Hotel, and Bulgari Hotel. Also, companies, local and central government, including The Houses of Parliament and Westminster City Council. Windowflowers support the London in Bloom Annual Seminar & Awards.



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