London & South & South East in Bloom

Bloom Bulletin

Welcome to our July edition and we hope that you are all now able to carry on gardening or community gardening once again and that our colleagues in professional horticulture are starting to get back to “near” normal.

Just a reminder to those who have chosen to keep going this year and be part of our “desktop challenge” the closing date for your submissions is the 31st July. For those who have not yet submitted an entry, we would be grateful if you could incorporate your images into your main document without additional attachments will help us when using our system to provide the judges with your information. Our Judges and entrants system will be able to cope much better and it will be easier to archive your information for later use. One document either in word or better still as a pdf document would be brilliant. Thank you.

Photo Competition

Having said we wish to minimise the number of photos and images we receive, we thought we would hold a photo competition this summer so that you can all show off your gardening efforts either during or post lockdown, or what you saw on a local walk. We may even consider (if the images are of a high enough quality) to use them in an SSEIB or LIB Calendar for 2021. Not exactly “Country File” but along those lines.

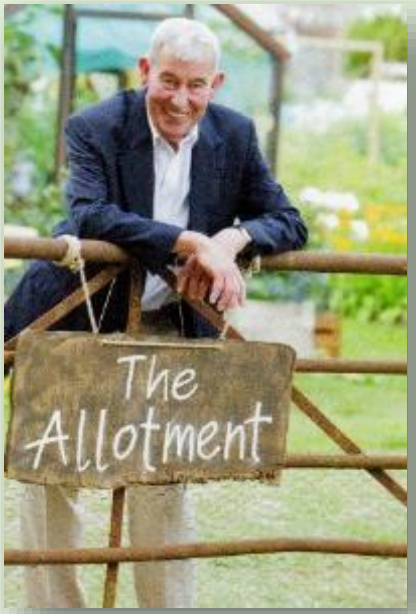
The competition is open to residents from Bloom participants and within the areas covered by London in Bloom or South & South East in Bloom. Images must be taken in this current year and we have set a deadline 14th August 2020

The theme is Gardens, Garden Plants & Insects. It up to you how to interpret this but it might be from a private garden, balcony, a public garden, park, or open space or a local area of conservation that you visit. We are looking for stunning images that represent the amazing diversity in our regions. You can enter up to three images.

We will select the twelve best images (six from each region) which will be posted on our websites and possibly in a 2021 calendar.

Images should be high-resolution jpeg’s between 1mb-3mb and sent via email. If you wish to send larger images they will have to be sent by one of the various companies who can send larger images via WeTransfer. If preferred please post printed images (not on paper or card please) to South & South East in Bloom, Photo Competition, 124 Gravel Hill, Croydon, CR0 5BF and provide sender information. Name, Bloom Entry, Contact details etc.

Judging: A panel of judges will be made up of Trustees who will select the winners, who will be notified in September with a certificate being sent out via email. Images of all entries will be shown at the 2021 awards. Please note we will not be able to return images.



Jim Buttress VMH, South & South East in Bloom Judge

Memories of a South & South East in Bloom Judge.

I was still working in Hyde Park when once again my boss Ashley Stephenson, who was also Chairman of South East in Bloom, asked me to undertake some judging as they had insufficient judges. Both London in Bloom and the South East was administered by the Tidy Britain Group and the Tourist Board. In the South-East the offices were based in Brighton and he suggested I contact the Co-ordinator Janice Dockrill.

We met at the Tidy Britain Group Offices in London, but I had hoped she was going to suggest the Brighton Offices and would suggest a date that coincided with the Brighton Races!!

It was evident from our meeting that the usual pool of judges was struggling to visit all of the entrants. Once again the entries were classified by population.

When I started judging all the coastal resorts were included with everyone else. The local Parks Depts had to provide fantastic floral displays, particularly along the seafront. Carpet bedding displays or Floral Clocks, Coats of Arms, even sponsored displays paid for by local companies. Decorated roundabouts and parks full of colour. Hanging Baskets were everywhere. This was a fantastic time to be a judge.

Once again there would only be a winner of each category and the entrant did not receive any feedback.

For every entry, two judges were appointed and as I mentioned earlier there were so many entries and so few judges that it was not unusual to judge three entries in a day.

It was a nightmare juggling the time spent judging and then driving to another entrant. Each judge usually travelled in their own car and going to each entrant was akin to being in the Monte Carlos Rally.

During the eighties when I started judging in the South East there was no limit on the number of people who would accompany the judges on their tour and would all want to have their say at the same time in most cases.

To say you went home exhausted was an understatement and a lunch break was unheard of.

The transportation provided by the entrant sometimes verged on the ridiculous. Both the Tidy Britain Groups and the Tourist Board encouraged entrants to go to great lengths to gain as much publicity as possible. They hoped to attract local television and radio on the day as well as local and national newspapers reporters and more bizarre modes of transport would attract attention.

One seaside resort provided a stretched limousine and all the seats laid back, so the judges were nearly horizontal. However, the biggest problem was that all of the windows were blacked out and the judges were unable to see anything!!

On another occasion, judging with a co-judge we were nearly reaching the stage of holding hands on one of the most hair-raising tours I have ever experienced. The two ladies that were our escorts were disagreeing with each other before we started. This continued throughout the whole tour. The one lady with the itinerary kept telling the other lady who was driving where to go. This incensed the driver who would go in the opposite direction as a matter of course. We were sitting in the back and my co-judge Peter, passed me his clipboard on which he had written "have you made a will"

Other modes of transport included a vintage bus with solid tyres and the route included long cobbled sections of road. Then there was the slowest form of transports which was a Horse & Cart, with hay bales to sit on. The horse which had got out of the wrong side of the stable that mornings so despite being offered treats from its handler would just stop and refuse to carry on.

It always upset me that you could be taken to some entrants that you knew would not win but showed some incredible decorative pubs, local business and shops and all their efforts would receive nothing other than the thanks from the judges on the day.

I, therefore, introduced the Certificates of excellence that we still award today. I once awarded a certificate to a Funeral Undertakers who had one of the most colourful gardens leading up to his office. He reckoned that naturally, his clients would be upset when they arrived to make their arrangements and the colourful garden provided an initial talking point. He also had a great sense of humour as he signed all of his letter "Yours Eventually".

I need to recharge my batteries before I tackle the next draw. I wonder what is in there!!

Keep Safe

idverde
CREATING AND MAINTAINING LANDSCAPES

Major grounds Maintenance Company gives support to London in Bloom

"*i*dverde are once again delighted to be able to support the regional 'In Bloom' campaign which underscores the like-thinking and values of our respective organisations and in this year particularly, the importance of the environment to us all"

Patrick Phillips - Director of Parks Management Strategy

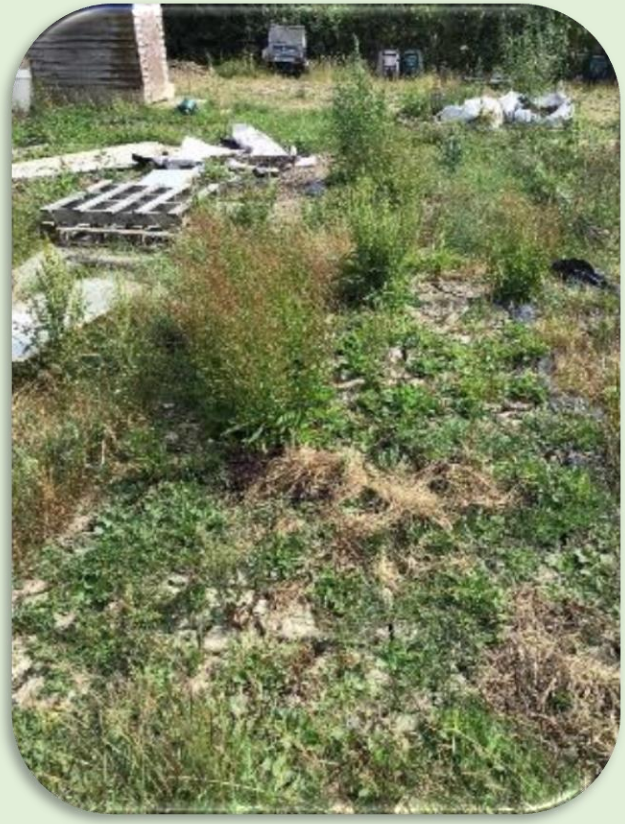
London in Bloom's Co-Chair Mark Wasilewski said: " I am pleased that *i*dverde are giving us support once again, their contribution will help greatly in this most difficult of years".

First steps as an Allotmenteer. Paul Dalby, In Bloom Judge

I consider myself to be have been extremely fortunate to have taken over an allotment before COVID 19 had made its way to this country. Let us not get too carried away though, it is not the full 10 rod of yesteryear, I suppose it is about ¼ the size of what Dad and Grandad would have known as an allotment.

Three years ago, when we looked at this house I was as ever optimistic that with a little thought we would be able to grow everything we wanted. When it comes to it Mrs. D. would eat Runner Beans every day if we could grow them year-round and she always wants a vase of sweet peas (three colours, lavender, pink and white) I want to grow lots of dahlias and other flowers as well as onions, leeks, French Beans and other assorted vegs not to mention soft fruit. I tried beans and sweet peas in the flower beds on wigwams, yes they grew but four or five wigwams take up a lot of flower growing space and are never easy to get to when flowers need cutting, and beans need picking. I built several raised beds for vegs and dahlias but try as I might, I could not tailor my growing ambitions to the space I have.

We needed more room for growing. We found out that the next village has an allotment site and was able to track down the Chairman of the allotment society who I arranged to meet.



On first sight, the prospects did not look good! It was a wet miserable day in January Mick (chairman) told me it had started raining on September 23rd and had not stopped since. The paths were rivers and several plots were underwater. “You are seeing it at its worst,” said Mick who though being an enthusiastic allotmenteer was not the worlds best salesman! “We have got plans to improve the drainage, but at the moment everything has to be grown in raised beds otherwise all the stuff gets washed away” he added in case I needed any further encouragement. Looking around the site I could see that amongst the lakes and puddles there was evidence that things could be grown and there was an enthusiastic community judging by the number of polytunnels and fruit cages around. Mick also told me that there was a good free supply of stable manure and wood chippings, I thought there was potential so decided to take the plot.

I decided the best approach was to clear the site completely. I had a word with Mick (salt of the earth) and he lent me a brushcutter. There were fruit bushes and other shrubby plants but who knows what varieties they were and whether they had any diseases. I cleared everything to be sure all is healthy going forward.

Having cleared the site, the next thing was to cover the whole area with landscape fabric to stop the weeds growing again. I have seen people use all sorts of things like carpet and cardboard to cover ground, but landscape fabric is designed to suppress growth and let water through and does not turn into a soggy mess that has to be got rid of.

Having covered the ground the plot was tidy, there was no need to rush into digging or other preparation and it was easier to deal with the site in manageable sized pieces. I took Mick's advice and decided to use raised beds. I ordered enough wood to make five 12 ft by 8 ft beds which were delivered on Friday before the lockdown was announced on the following Monday. Fortunately, Michael Gove told us our daily exercise could be working on allotments so I could crack on. I cut out the landscape fabric for each bed leaving the rest of it in place which meant everything stayed clean during the building. When the beds were finished I covered the remaining fabric with wood chips and was ready to start planting when the weather improved.

I have been asked at different times how to tackle an allotment or any other overgrown and neglected site. I would say do not be too ambitious to start with, the worst thing is to try and do too much, feel overwhelmed, become disheartened and give up. There is a lot of benefits to be gained from gardening. Both physical and mental wellbeing can be improved and the joy of eating homegrown food and having a vase of fresh flowers on the dining table is priceless.

GARDENING TIPS & TASKS FOR JULY – Reg Leach, Judge and former Parks Manager, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

As I write the Lock-Down measures are continuing to ease, but please keep yourselves as safe as possible by using all measures you think necessary.

Future Planning:

While it is looking its best, now is a good time to review your garden. Draw up a list of improvements that can be tackled this autumn/winter. Look to see what is doing well and what is not doing so well and consider what improvements you can make for next year. For example, you may find you have taller plants in front of smaller ones that are lost at the back of the border; you may have colour clashes that do not work; there may be a dominating shrub that swamps everything else out, or you may have a tree that casts a heavy shadow over plants beneath that need full sun so are struggling. Also, consider whether your perennials and herbaceous plants are becoming too large for their space. They can be lifted and divided in the dormant season. Review this year's summer bedding scheme and consider changes and improvements for next year.

It is a good idea to take photos of your garden to use as a reminder later in the year when finalising next year's scheme for your garden.

Water Butts:

As part of your future planning review the waterbutt situation. If like me you have a large waterbutt to collect rainwater, but it was quickly emptied during the dry May period, consider linking up more waterbutts to the main one as an overflow, so you can store more winter rains. Kits to do this is readily available and allows the rainwater, once the first waterbutt has filled up, to overflow and run into the next waterbutt. Also consider more water collection from outbuildings, garages, and sheds. Using rainwater to water in dry spells is so much better than mains tap water, especially when many of us are now metered!

Going on holiday:

If you are going away this summer, which this year may only be for short periods and probably within the UK because of the Covid-19 pandemic, ask a friendly neighbour or relative to look after your garden. If you cannot do this, move containers and pots to a shadier spot in the garden while you are away. Dunk pots into the water so the roots at the centre of the pot are wetted – giving a longer period before they dry out. You can also set pots in saucers to catch any rain to help them last until your return.

Another option is to set up an irrigation system – using a hosepipe that trails around the garden with directional feeds along the pipe to direct water to individual pots or and plants. You can also automate the system with a battery-operated timer.

If you have pot plants such as Coleus why not plant them, still in their pots, into gaps in the border, plunging them beforehand into water to soak the roots. They will survive better while you are away, as their roots will expand out of the bottom of the pot into the soil beneath. The plants can then be lifted at the end of the season and put back into the greenhouse.

Lawns:

Feed regularly to keep a green sward and water well afterwards. If we are experiencing hot, dry weather this month hold off feeding as the lawn may get scorched. But please remember if there are water shortages please do not water your lawn, even if it goes very brown it will recover.

If you are struggling with a mossy lawn, it is likely to be compacted and therefore not draining well, or the lawn is in too much heavy shade. Make a note to de-compact in the autumn using a fork to allow air in and lightly dress with a good fine loam, mixed with grass seed and brush in. Alternatively, reduce the area of lawn that is in shade and create or extend the patio, or create a shade border using plants that survive well without too much sun – a collection of Hostas for example.

Roses and Shrubs:

Cut out rose suckers coming from the base, as they will weaken the plant. Regularly deadhead all roses to keep them flowering throughout the summer. Feed regularly to help encourage repeat flowering and to maintain strong, healthy plants which will be more resistant to pest and disease.

Cut out the more vigorous green shoots from variegated shrubs that are reverting, e.g. Spiraea; Eleagnus; Euonymus. Prune back shrubs after flowering to encourage new growth for next year's flowers which will also keep the shrub's size in check. Check large shrubs for bird nesting and if in evidence leave until the young have fledged. With the warm spring weather, we had this year, there may be a second nesting for birds, so check before pruning.

Beds and Borders:

Regularly check herbaceous plants, summer flowering bulbs and standard bedding plants for staking and tying to avoid wind damage. Deadhead regularly to keep them flowering. Cut out old flowering stems of Delphinium and Lupin, as they can often have a second flowering period. As mentioned above, consider lifting and dividing large perennials in the autumn.

Feeding:

It is particularly important to regularly feed plants, particularly those in baskets, pots, and containers. As the season progresses the containers will be become increasingly pot bound and the plants will starve themselves if not fed regularly. Where possible re-pot into larger pots/containers giving the roots more room to grow.

Hedges:

To maintain hedges at their best trim lightly and regularly and avoid cutting back too hard into the older brown wood. Check underneath for weeds and litter. As with large shrubs check for birds nesting and leave until the young have fledged the nest.

Winter/Spring Bedding:

If you sowed Polyanthus, Bellis, and Wallflowers earlier in the season, into open ground they will need thinning out now, to allow them to grow to be a good size before planting out later in the year, once the summer bedding has been removed - usually around early October.

If you did not do a review last spring, now is also a good time to start thinking about the winter/spring display - looking back at the best and the not so good of last spring and adjust your plans accordingly.

You could not make it up – The Adventures of a Bloom Judge – Ruth Growney, Regional in Bloom & Britain in Bloom Judges

Chapter 2 – The one with the helicopter!

"Can I ask you, Ruth, what do you wear when you are judging?" asked an entrant at a "Meet the Judges" session during a Britain in Bloom seminar a couple of years ago. Quite a personal question I thought - but all the same I answered that I usually wore trousers and comfortable shoes (Judges do an awful lot of walking in a day and comfy shoes are a must – as are trousers for getting in and out of vehicles with any dignity!) "Oh good" replied the entrant and I thought no more about it until later in the session when the same entrant asked, "And are you good with heights?" Intrigued by this question I asked, "Why?" The response from the entrant was a huge surprise "We are going to use a helicopter for part of our tour, and I wanted to check that you are alright with that". My immediate thought was "What fun!" but this was swiftly followed by "Are judges insured for helicopter travel?"

The other entrants at the session then joined in the fun and tried to "out-do" each other for modes of transport with people asking if we were alright with a horse and cart, a boat, and even if we were alright travelling on the London underground – I did respond to the last question with the thought that, as judges, we perhaps would not see very much if we were underground?

My fellow judge and I thought no more about it once the seminar was over until we were sent the itineraries for the places we were due to judge. And there on this one particular itinerary, it said: "Depart in a helicopter for a tour of the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) nature reserve". So, there it was in black and white – they were really serious about the helicopter trip!

Judgement day came and the tour went off swimmingly until we got to the SSSI and stood waiting for the helicopter to make its appearance.

Anyone who has been in the location of a helicopter when it lands knows how the downdraft flattens everything in the immediate area and such was the case when this very swish looking helicopter came into land. The only difference was that this particular landing was on an SSSI site and I leave you to imagine the impact a helicopter landing made on insects, flora, and fauna of this nature reserve.

Once the rotors stopped, we made our way out to the helicopter, accompanied by the SSSI's Ranger who was going to tell us all about the reserve whilst we were flying over it. This had been the main reason for the helicopter journey – the reserve is vast, and the entrant thought that the best way to appreciate it would be from the air. I, personally, would have preferred to have had a walk through a section of the reserve to see it at close quarters, and perhaps been shown some drone footage to give the

scale of the reserve but hey ho in for a penny in for a pound as they say and we clambered aboard and strapped ourselves in – the two judges in the back and the Ranger and pilot in the front.

We were instructed to put our headsets on (so that we could all hear one another) and after a safety briefing, the pilot went to start the engine. It was then I noticed that the Ranger's door was not closed properly and was still open - so I casually asked the pilot if it was supposed to be like that? "Oops" was the response from the pilot who jumped out and went round to shut the door properly. We tried to laugh it off, but I can tell you it did not instil me with much confidence in this particular adventure.

My fellow judge had never been up in a helicopter before and was SO EXCITED it was not true. I, on the other hand, have made a couple of trips so sort of knew what to expect.

We lifted off and - in a manoeuvre that I would think would have impressed any James Bond fans – swooped low over the reserve before climbing to turn and repeat the manoeuvre and swoop back the way we came.

It was chaos in the cabin! My fellow judge's camera had decided to pack up so I was frantically attempting to take reference photos for the both of us (plus some "memento" photos for my fellow judge) whilst trying to listen to the poor SSSI Ranger who was vainly trying to read his notes. The helicopter was moving around and vibrating so much that it was quite impossible for us, as judges, to write any notes – or for the poor Ranger to read his. Fortunately, he said he would give us his notes when we got back on the ground.

When we had finished swooping back and forth across the reserve, scattering the grazing sheep, and performing aerobatics worthy of the Red Arrows (or so it felt!) the pilot decided to give us a birds' eye view of the town so took the helicopter around the town a couple of times at quite a low level before heading back to the nature reserve to land.

By this time quite a crowd has assembled back at the reserve – perhaps wondering what the helicopter was up to and moreover who was inside it? Were they famous? Was its royalty?

When two very ordinary looking but slightly dishevelled people with clipboards emerged from the back of the helicopter the crowd's faces were a picture of disappointment – unlike ours who was grinning from ear to ear! You could see them thinking "Who on earth are they?"

The helicopter trip was a thoroughly enjoyable distraction, but it was time-consuming and not environmentally friendly on all counts and one which we suggested (in a nice way, in our judges' written report) not be repeated for future judging tours.

It was, however, yet another example of the extraordinary adventures of a Bloom Judge.

The ups and downs of being a so-called 'expert' gardener on the airwaves. Jean Griffin Deputy Chair, Trustee & Judge South & South East in Bloom

Although I have been broadcasting for several years now, there is always a chance that someone will catch you out!

Although the programme is called Sunday Gardening for BBC Radio Kent, with the wonders of technology we cover the World or so it seems.

The main trick is to have a good rapport with the person who 'twiddles the knobs', not my forte that bit, just give me a microphone and I am away! But not with the fairies, hopefully.

The next trick is never to 'flannel ' if I don't know the answer I will say so but add a rider to say' give me time and I will find out for you ' NEVER LET THE LISTENER DOWN !!!

Why do I do it? Certainly not for huge financial gain but for a love of plants that I can pass on to others. I like giving tips which work for me, for example, a Garlic Pest Control, as I do not like spraying anything I want to eat to start with, then, of course, there are the BEES and other beneficial insects. Why spray noxious stuff when we can be more wildlife-friendly. ? Happy Gardening

Bloom Bulletin.

If you have found the recent additions of gardening hints and tips and articles and you wish to see them continue please help us by contributing. We would like to hear from community gardening groups and Bloom Groups who have managed to keep going this year.

The bulletin is published early each month so the deadline for images and text is the last day of each month.

Happy Gardening ……Ed

2020 is Farnham in Bloom's 30th Year

2020 is Farnham in Bloom's 30th Year, the planned celebrations, and events to mark this milestone had to be put on hold as many have been up and down the country when the country went into lockdown.

The first hiccup was how do we pot on and nurture 26,000 plants with the help of only six outside workforce members and three office staff. Most of our normal volunteers and community groups who normally help us are mostly over 70 and were at home shielding.

Plants were also late being delivered but after these initial problems were solved, we were well on the way to creating our 30th Year of Farnham in Bloom during a global pandemic.

Events went online with a successful Bloomin' Kids Lego competition which delighted parents who were looking for ideas to occupy their children during the lockdown. We had nearly 50 entries from children aged 3 – 14!

The Secret Garden Competition also went virtual with participants sending in photos of their gardens instead of being judged in person. A video was created and zoom session set up to show off the wonderful plants in the greenhouse and volunteers were invited to wander around one by one at a social distance. Schools were not left out either, hanging baskets with instructions and all the materials were delivered to the schools for them to make up and grow on involving staff and keyworker children. Two new social media channels were set up at the start of lockdown to keep residents up to date with the growing and the progress of the plants and flowers.

A VE day carpet bed was planted to mark the low key VE day celebrations in May. As lockdown restrictions lifted, 40 new planters softened temporary barriers which were installed to help businesses and shops support socially distancing and safe queuing. In June, the 200 hanging baskets, troughs and planters went out around the town and Farnham began to Bloom in 2020.

Windowflowers and Colditz Castle – Miles Watson-Smyth – London in Bloom Trustee & Judge

In June 2013, Lord Campbell of Alloway died at the age of 97. He was incarcerated at Colditz from the time of Dunkirk to the end of the war and was President of The Colditz Association until it was disbanded in 1996.

He said that one of the few pleasures during his five years of incarceration was provided by the tiny wildflowers which grew within the mortar of Colditz Castle. He found these lifted his mood and helped him through the dark days of being a prisoner of war.

Upon his return to London, he recounted the effect of the flowers to his brothers in law and suggested that they use the mental healing properties of flowers to start a business supplying windowboxes within war-torn London.

So Windowflowers Ltd was founded in January 1947 by Michael and Peter Watson-Smyth. Michael was awarded the DFC and was an RAF navigator with the Special Operations Executive whilst his brother Peter served in the Special Forces.

They purchased a large quantity of WW2 ammunition boxes which they installed, filled and planted on commercial properties and hotels in London, crucially with maintenance contracts.

The East India Club in St James Square was one of their first clients and remains Windowflowers' oldest customer after more than 70 years of continual service. Other clients include The Houses of Parliament, The Headquarters of The Royal Horticultural Society (over 30 years), Claridges Hotel (over 30 years) and The Headquarters of the Law Society (over 55 years).

The new business was helped by The Festival of Britain, The Coronation and some years later by the commencement of the *in Bloom* movement. The Company now grows over one million plants each year for use in over ten miles of windowboxes. Windowflowers supplies and maintains fifteen thousand hanging baskets attached to lamp columns from Colchester to Weymouth, Leicester to Brighton but mostly in London including those in Downing Street and Trafalgar Square.

Last year Windowflowers helped their clients achieve fourteen *in Bloom* Gold Medals and collect seven trophies.

"The business is going well," says Miles Watson-Smyth "but you can't relax. We pride ourselves in our very high standards and our innovation. We have pioneered a new free-standing movable internal living wall on castors. We are working on a planting mix to best tackle air pollution, both inside the workplace and our busy streets."

Meanwhile, it seems that horticulture is being used more and more as a therapy to assist with mental health, but not necessarily using ammunition boxes.

The Grazing Principal - Tom Brown, Head Gardener, West Dean Gardens, Sussex

Very few gardeners have the luxury of enough time or indeed enough space to indulge their horticultural passions on a big scale. The notion of being able to grow vegetables, cut flowers and achieve a long-lasting, beautiful display in a domestic situation is for most people the stuff of public gardens or large country houses.

That said, the 'Grazing Principal' – of harmonising plants in an opulent, jungle-like mixture of edibles and flowering treats – doesn't have to be confined to spacious, grand gardens. With the right mix of cut-and-come-again vegetables and bedding plants, we can all enjoy armfuls of food and flowers throughout the summer and autumn. A relatively small piece of ground (say 3m x 3m) of good quality garden soil, a large container in a sunny position, or even a balcony, combined with a careful selection of productive plants (think cosmos, chard, zinnias, courgettes), and your kitchen table could be groaning beneath a bounteous harvest.

If your appetite is whetted by this concept, let's go through the process of making it a reality in *your* garden.

All the annuals and vegetables suggested below can be easily grown from seed and produced on a sunny windowsill from March onwards at a reasonable cost. Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, prick them out into modules or small pots and keep them frost-free until planting out time at the end of May or when the risk of frost has passed. Whilst these seedlings are growing, this gives you a window of opportunity to prepare your ground by incorporating some well-rotted manure or compost. This added goodness will help with moisture retention and feed your plants during their productive summer.

With all annuals, it's better to plant compact green plants which root in no time. If you give in to temptation too early and prematurely sow your seeds, there is a danger of producing leggy plants which are far more difficult to establish – remember that good things come to those who wait! For those of us without the time or inclination to raise our own specimens, most of the plants suggested can be bought, ready to plant, from good garden centres.

With a fine selection of homegrown or purchased plants and your space ready for planting out, you can now start to build this garden symphony.

To begin, any good display needs height to offset the other plantings, so why not try some bamboo canes or pea sticks and create a centrepiece for onion squash or climbing French beans to grow up. Add a splash of colour by mixing in Ipomea (Morning Glory) between your veggies. Next, we need to inject some serious flower power. Classic cut flower contenders include cosmos, zinnia, antirrhinum, sunflowers, Amaranthus, scabious and statice. Disperse these plants around your plot (as a rule of thumb 30cm or 12 in apart), leaving room for your vegetables. The desired effect is a profusion of tasty foliage and texture coupled with a bright bouquet of florists' favourites.

Regarding the veggie candidates, your line-up should include stalwarts with a steady supply of fruit or foliage as a happy trade-off for a well-worked and fed plot or container. These ever generous often overlooked edibles, include kale (red and black), rainbow chard, bush courgettes (try mixing green and yellow fruiting types, giving these plants a little more room, say 50cm), winter squash and finally dwarf French beans.

Have a ball setting out your cornucopia of food and flowers and remember to include one or more structures to support your beans and climbing squash. Be sure to give your plants plenty of water to establish them for the first two weeks. I always find that a handful of Growmore per square metre helps give them a well-deserved boost at planting time. Keep an eye on your display, stepping in with spare bamboo canes or pea sticks to support those plants that require a little extra help. If you are using this principle in a pot or container then a weekly dose of tomato food will ensure that you get the most from your living greengrocer-cum-florist-shop!

Can we help you meet the challenges of summer 2020?

Patience Atkinson-Gregory of Amberol *anticipates some different challenges for Britain in Bloom groups during the summer and autumn seasons in 2020.*

With businesses, public places and the leisure industry slowly opening up, eager In Bloomers are getting out and about again. And what a positive difference it makes to our high streets, parks, and open spaces.

However, many of you are facing the double challenge of keeping plants and flowers blooming during summer 2020 alongside the demands of social distancing. And who knows what the unpredictable British weather will throw at us this year after one of the driest springtime on record?

At Amberol we believe very firmly in the importance of the work that In Bloomers do: green spaces, flowers and gardening are all proven to have significant mental and physical health benefits, both for those involved in the planting and those who observe the amazing results of your hard work. In fact, the value of gardening has been recognised by the NHS and is part of their social prescribing programme, designed to raise awareness around the benefits of integrating within communities.

Britain needs In Bloom now more than ever

In the current crisis, we all need and appreciate public places and spaces more than ever, particularly those who do not have access to their own outdoor space. With everyone going through difficult times, seeing plants and flowers in bloom when out and about is such a welcome mood-booster.

That is why we enjoy supporting organisations such as South and South East in Bloom so much, as well as other regions across the UK. And this summer, in particular, there are ways that we can help.

1. Because they are self-watering, Amberol's planters offer a way making it easier to observe social distancing by reducing the need for watering trips to once or twice a week, even in hot, dry spells. Because each planter has a water reservoir under the soil, the water doesn't evaporate, meaning that plants can access water as needed, conserving water and ensuring optimal growth.

2. We are increasingly being contacted by organisations looking to use different ranges of our floor standing planters to create walkways and funnelling in areas with high footfall as an alternative to traditional fencing. These floral barriers certainly make an effective and attractive alternative to bollards and railings. Parade, Promenade and Oval planters have proved particularly popular choices.

3. Whether you use our products or not, you may find some inspiration in our newly published 'Inspired Plant Ups' guide. Free to download on our website, the booklet contains examples of different displays planted up by In Bloom groups across Britain as well as displays from Belgium. There are some great examples and colourful photos of stunning displays. So why not take a look and see if it gets your creativity flowing?

4. And finally, Britain in Bloom is all about community; getting to know new people, supporting each other and sharing ideas. That's why we have set up our Buzz in Bloom Facebook group. It's a members-only site where people can exchange advice, tips and news. It's a useful way of keeping in touch with like-minded people who share a passion for enhancing their environment and their community. Just search for Buzz in Bloom on Facebook or connect via our website.

And of course, we are always happy to offer advice and support where we can, so if you have any questions about how we can help during these difficult times, please get in touch by emailing sales@amberol.co.uk, calling 01773 830 930 or visiting us at www.amberol.co.uk.

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