

Pocket Garden Design Competition 2026



Competition information

Why take part?



This competition supports your journey towards becoming a sustainable learning setting, with a culture of pupil voice in the design phase, an ethos of collaboration and community in the creation of the garden, strong curricular links through the practical activity of building and growing, and a garden oasis of nature and inspiration in your campus.

Your design must show all these three elements: Wildlife Gardening, Food for People and the Annual Theme. The theme for 2026 is Fresh water. Pupils aged 3 - 18 are invited to design a garden inspired by fresh water. Fresh water is part of our environment, our daily lives and even our bodies. Your design can focus on any aspect of fresh water in its liquid, solid (ice) or gas (water vapour) state. Read more about the theme on page 5.

We are looking for exciting and unusual designs that use edible plants, plants that attract wildlife, and that reuse items which would otherwise have been thrown away. It's Pocket Garden's 10th birthday in 2026 and we'd love to see the number 10 represented in your garden.

Scotland's Chief Medical Officer recognised the health benefits of Pocket Garden in his Annual Report 2023 -2024. He said it, "connects children with their food and with nature."

The competition themes link to Eco-Schools Scotland work on food and the environment, biodiversity, school grounds, climate action, water, and health and well-being. Your participation can be part of your Green Flag application.

Winners will be invited to display their Pocket Garden in the online showcase where people across Scotland can enjoy it and vote for their favourite three. You may have seen Pocket Gardens featured on the BBC television programme, Beechgrove Garden in 2021. Previously, the Pocket Gardens have been displayed at Gardening Scotland in Edinburgh, where they have been visited by the BBC Beechgrove Garden team, and the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

All winners will also be judged for three discretionary awards:

- Interpretation of the themes*
- Wildlife friendly
- Food for people

*See page 5 for the 2026 themes.

Competition details for 2026

Categories

Nursery – P4

P5 - S2

S3 - S6

Please let us know which category you are entering.

Timescales



Friday 20 February 2026

Deadline for competition entries.



w/c 23 February 2026

Winners will be notified and can begin to grow and build their garden.



Wednesday 3 June 2026

Winning schools deadline for images and words to show finished gardens.



12 June - 9am 22 June 2026

National online showcase and public voting.



From 22 June

Maintain and enjoy your garden.

In partnership with:



All designs must be submitted electronically using the online form on this page
<https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/pocket-garden/submit-your-design> by 5pm Friday 20 February 2026.

Designs must be high resolution, photographed, saved or scanned as the largest file size possible to allow us to view it for judging.

All winners will be invited to display their gardens nationally in an online showcase.

Mentors:

We have a team of Garden for Life mentors. They are experienced volunteers who can offer advice by telephone or in person to local schools on designing, building and planting your Pocket Garden. Some Garden for Life mentors may be able to supply you with plants. Garden for Life is a partnership of organisations working in Scotland. It aims to promote wildlife-friendly gardening ideas and techniques as well as gardens that are great for well-being and healthy living.

Please email pocketgarden@keepsotlandbeautiful.org to find out more.

Guidelines and advice:

- Garden for Life Forum organisations can provide you with lots of useful information and advice to help you.
- Visit www.gardenforlife.org.uk for more information and helpful links.
- Materials used (e.g. compost etc.) should be sustainably sourced / manufactured. Please use peat free compost and locally sourced materials where possible.
- Where plant materials are being used, these should not be collected from the wild and must not contravene any laws. F1 hybrids should not be used.
- If possible, a beneficial after-use for the materials should be sought, e.g. installing as a feature in the school grounds or return of plants to original supplier.
- You can take inspiration from previous Pocket Gardens: www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/pocketgarden
- If you are not a winner, we would encourage you to build your garden in the school grounds / community so everyone can enjoy it – and do send us photos for sharing.

Design brief

Your design must be inspired by this year's theme of Fresh water, be good for wildlife, and include food for people. There is more inspiration for the annual theme on the next page. Additionally, 2026 is the Pocket Garden Design Competition's 10th birthday and we'd love you to find a way to include the number 10 somehow to help celebrate. Your design should follow the five principles below.

| Principle | Example |
|-------------------|---|
| Locally sourced | Include plants grown from seed at school or in local gardens. Use as many native plants as you can. They usually grow well in Scotland. |
| Seasonal | Your garden needs to be ready to be photographed in the week beginning 25 May 2026. Think about plants that are in flower or leaf at that time of year and are edible to something. |
| Waste reduction | Reuse containers, recycle building materials, use compost etc. |
| Organic | This is food for people and other creatures. Don't use pesticides, fungicides etc. |
| Ethically sourced | The garden should be peat free. Any composts and mulches should ideally be locally made from recycled materials and plant matter. |

- ✓ **Food for people:** There are lots of edible plants that grow very well in Scotland. Growing your own food is a great way to get local, seasonal produce. You could grow herbs, salad leaves, fruit or vegetables and some flowers are edible too! What would you like to grow and eat?
- ✓ **Wildlife Gardening:** We rely on plants and animals to help maintain healthy, fertile soils, to filter and clean freshwater, to eat the pests that eat our crops, to remove carbon from the air and provide oxygen. Choose plants that are good for wildlife e.g. provide lots of nectar. Look at the [Garden for Life plant lists](#) for inspiration.
- ✓ **Size:** Pocket Gardens must fit within a rectangular footprint of: 120cm x 100cm but can be any shape you want. You can re-use any material to create the garden. You can introduce some height through construction or plants but no higher than two metres is allowed.
- ✓ **Scale:** Your design should be to the scale of the plants used. This will help you think about how your plants and structures will fit together.
- ✓ **Plant choice:** Choose plants that you would find growing together, for example do not put pond plants next to plants that prefer somewhere drier. Choose plants that thrive in Scotland and play with colour, leaf size, shape and plant heights.
- ✓ **Anchoring:** Even in May and early June it can be wet and windy so all elements must be secure. Your design should show how you have thought about making it secure.
- ✓ **Construction:** It may be easiest to assemble your garden from component parts. Think about all the elements you will need and how they will fit together, and how you can disguise or cover the framework (base, pots or containers etc.) of your garden.



View previous years designs for inspiration: www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/pocketgarden

2026 theme: Wonderful fresh water



Fresh water is part of our environment, our daily lives and even our bodies. Your garden can focus on any aspect of fresh water from different fresh water habitats to technology and how people have found, stored, and used water for things like energy, transport, and recreation.

Here's some more inspiration for your garden design:

Most life on land needs fresh water to survive but it is a very precious resource. There is only so much water on earth. You can't make more water. Think about all the plants and animals that have ever lived, including the dinosaurs. They drank and used the same water that keeps us alive today! The water cycle is a fantastic natural system that 'recycles' water, replenishes, redistributes and cleans it.

People use water for lots of things: cooking, personal hygiene, to drink, for transport, for recreation, in agriculture to irrigate crops and give to livestock, in industry for manufacturing goods and cooling machinery, to generate electricity and to fight fires. What have you used water for today?

Some products and services use water to make them although the final product has no water in it. There is a lot of this '[invisible water](#)' in items such as paper, jeans, cars, leather shoes and even your smartphone. Have you used any of those so far today?

Most people in Scotland get water from a tap, but how does the water arrive at the tap? From ancient times, in dry places around the world, people have invented and built amazing structures to get fresh water. Have a look at the [amazing stepwells](#) in Rajasthan and Delhi in India. Explore the irrigation systems called [Qanats built 3000 years ago](#) in Iran that worked by using gravity and that are still used today! In Scotland we have bridges to cross over water. Could your design be inspired by one of these structures?

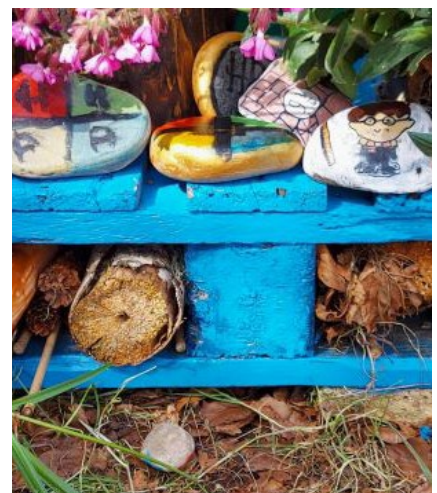
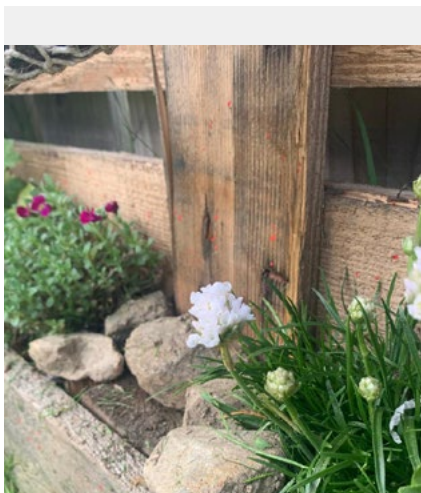
When we use water for example to wash our clothes, the water gets dirty. Remember, there is only so much water on earth, so we must clean it to make it safe to drink again. How is water cleaned in Scotland? Could your garden show that process? There are places in the world where people don't have water that is safe to drink and it can make them very unwell. Perhaps your garden could be about this inequality.

Fresh water can bring relief and risk. After a long time without rain, it is a relief when it arrives, to soften the ground, to fill up the reservoirs and to allow crops to grow. Climate change means that the pattern of rainfall is changing. We are experiencing longer periods of drought as well as more intense rainfall and the flooding that comes with it. Perhaps your garden design could be a drought tolerant garden or a garden that helps to catch hold of the rain and hold onto it to reduce the risk of flooding.

How will your Pocket Garden design be inspired by wonderful fresh water?

A decade of Pocket Garden

The Pocket Garden Design Competition is celebrating it's 10th birthday in 2026. There have been winning designs from all 32 Scottish local authorities in that time from nurseries, primary and secondary schools. Here is a small selection of images from those gardens.







Curriculum for Excellence: experiences and outcomes

Early level

| | |
|---|---|
| TCH 0-10a | I explore everyday materials in the creation of pictures/models/concepts. |
| EXA 0-05a | Inspired by a range of stimuli, I can express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through activities within art and design. |
| SCN 0-03a | I have helped to grow plants and can name their basic parts. I can talk about how they grow and what I need to do to look after them. |
| SCN 0-05a / SCN 1-05a | By investigating how water can change from one form to another, I can relate my findings to everyday experiences. |
| HWB 0-15a / HWB 1-15a / HWB 2-15a / HWB 3-15a / HWB 4-15a | I am developing my understanding of the human body and can use this knowledge to maintain and improve my wellbeing and health. |

First level

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| LIT 1-10a | I can communicate clearly when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning, using selected resources as required. |
| EXA 1-06a | I can use exploration and imagination to solve design problems related to real-life situations. |
| SCN 1-15a | Through exploring properties and sources of materials, I can choose appropriate materials to solve practical challenges. |
| TCH 1-06a | I can take appropriate action to ensure conservation of materials and resources considering the impact of my actions on the environment. |
| HWB 0-33a / HWB 1-33a | I am becoming aware of how cleanliness, hygiene and safety can affect health and wellbeing and I apply this knowledge in my everyday routines such as taking care of my teeth. |
| SOC 1-04a | I can compare aspects of people's daily lives in the past with my own by using historical evidence or the experience of recreating an historical setting. |

| Second level | |
|--------------|---|
| EXA 2-06a | I can develop and communicate my ideas, demonstrating imagination and presenting at least one possible solution to a design problem. |
| TCH 2-04c | I can extend and explore problem solving strategies to meet increasingly difficult challenges with a food or textile focus. |
| SCN-2-02a | I can use my knowledge of the interactions and energy flow between plants and animals in ecosystems, food chains and webs. I have contributed to the design or conservation of a wildlife area. |
| SCN 2-05a | I can apply my knowledge of how water changes state to help me understand the processes involved in the water cycle in nature over time. |
| SCN 2-18a | I have investigated different water samples from the environment and explored methods that can be used to clean and conserve water and I am aware of the properties and uses of water. |
| SOC 2-07a | I can describe the major characteristic features of Scotland's landscape and explain how these were formed. |

| Third level | |
|-------------|--|
| EXA 3-06a | While working through a design process in response to a design brief, I can develop and communicate imaginative design solutions. |
| TCH 3-04c | By using problem-solving strategies and showing creativity in a design challenge, I can plan, develop, make and evaluate food or textile items which meet needs at home or in the world of work. |
| SCN 3-01a | I can sample and identify living things from different habitats to compare their biodiversity and can suggest reasons for their distribution. |
| SOC 3-04a | I can explain the similarities and differences between the lifestyles, values and attitudes of people in the past by comparing Scotland with a society in Europe or elsewhere. |
| SOC 3-01a | I can use my knowledge of a historical period to interpret the evidence and present an informed view. |

| Fourth level | |
|-----------------------|---|
| LIT 3-26a / LIT 4-26a | By considering the type of text I am creating, I can independently select ideas and relevant information for different purposes, and organise essential information or ideas and any supporting detail in a logical order. I can use suitable vocabulary to communicate effectively with my audience. |
| EXA 4-06a | By working through a design process in response to a design brief, I can develop and communicate imaginative and original design solutions. |
| TCH 4-10a | I consider the material performance as well as sustainability of materials and apply these to real world tasks. |
| SOC 4-08a | I can discuss the sustainability of key natural resources and analyse the possible implications for human activity. |
| SCN 4-18a | I can monitor the environment by collecting and analysing samples. I can interpret the results to inform others about levels of pollution and express a considered opinion on how science can help to protect our environment. |



We support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is your charity for Scotland's environment. We work with you to help combat climate change, reduce litter and waste, restore nature and biodiversity and improve places. We aim to inspire changes in behaviour to improve our environment, the quality of people's lives, their wellbeing and the places that they care for.



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