

Special feature: what will we do for the pallet garden? Wendy Suttar from Cove in Bloom shares their experiences and offers some practical advice.

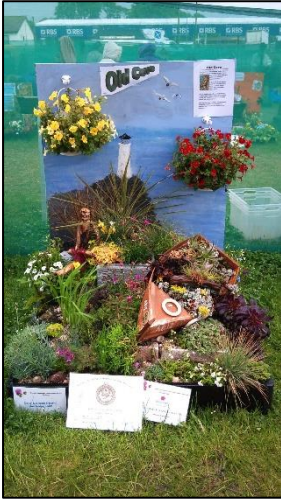
Putting together a pallet garden is a real challenge, and great fun. With dimensions restricted to one metre by one metre, and no higher than two metres allowed, the main problem is to get your garden to tell the story you want within such a limited space. Some 'hard landscaping' may be included, but the garden must be mainly plant material.



If you want your pallet garden to stand out it has to have a strong theme. An explanatory piece can be included, but the story should be able to be seen in the display. So challenge number one is to pick a theme and a title that can be expressed in planting. A title such as 'Five a Day' can be expressed in vegetable plants in flower early in the season or harvestable later on in the year, but the title 'Credit Crunch Blues' takes a lot more thought to be able to express it in flowers, so think carefully about your theme and make sure you can see how to translate it into a garden (we have used both these titles in the past). One final point, think very carefully before you use a really well know phrase or saying, e.g. 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle' has been used over and over again, but though you may find competitors with the same title, if your idea is *really* different yours can still stand out.

Once you have chosen your theme you need to choose your plants. Do you grow your own from seed or plug plants, or do you buy from your local nurseryman? We've found that a combination works best, as does planting the garden in transportable sections. Your local fishmonger can probably supply you with polystyrene fish boxes, these make light containers, and can be planted up in advance and the plants allowed to grow into the shape you want. Taking everything in individual pots and planting the whole thing up on the day is not only time consuming, but can lead to unforeseen problems at the last minute. By pre-planting you can also reduce the weight you have to transport by part filling deeper boxes with polystyrene. Always carry spare plants with you, we have rarely gone home without using at least some of the spares, and, to state the obvious, choose plants that will be ready when your display is to go on show!





Remember that height adds to the display, so think of ways to add height. You can stack boxes to raise part of the display, but hide them with other plants - you will lose points if these are visible unless they are part of the story, but you can use equipment that adds height, so long as it is limited. Our last pallet used a set of household folding steps to give height, with some old car springs with plants growing through, a title of 'Put a spring in your step' allowed us to play with height in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. 'The garden shed' or a similar title allows you to attach shelves to the backboard and put plants on them, and I've seen a 'Pallet Garden' built out of pallets with plants growing through them.

And finally, learn from your mistakes. One year we built a 'volcano', making a pyramid without using a backboard. It was a brilliant display but the effect was spoiled by the camouflage netting used as a windbreak behind the displays by the organisers. At that show we will always use a backboard now.

All it takes is a little imagination, and a little practical gardening - and learning from your mistakes!