



Even small areas can be made into wonderful green spaces, like this tiny garden in the Berkshire village of Bray

This year's Bloom launch will form part of a new 3 year campaign **Greener Streets: Better Lives**. We hope that Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood groups, RHS Affiliated Societies, schools, community and youth groups will get involved in transforming grey spaces into green places for people and wildlife.

What's the idea?

We all know that gardens and green spaces can cheer us up. They also boost our health and wellbeing and provide important environmental benefits.

But we are losing green spaces in the competition for space: gardens are being paved over to make room for an increasing number of cars; high density housing is replacing lower density housing in many areas and parks face a funding crisis and are at risk of deterioration and future loss.

The trend for grey replacing green can be linked to mental and physical health problems: depression, heart disease and obesity have all been shown to be lower amongst those with access to quality green spaces. It also has dire consequences for wildlife, and degrades the living environment, increasing flood risk and reducing air quality.

This is why the RHS has launched a 3 year campaign to tackle the growing number of grey spaces spreading across the country and turn them into beautiful green places. By the end of 2017, we want to work together with Bloomers, community groups, schools, councils and homeowners to see 9,000 grey spaces transformed into great green places for people and wildlife.

You could do anything from putting a pot on a balcony to taking on a larger project, for example turning a grot spot into a community garden. Whatever works for your neighbourhood and follows the three Greener Streets: Better Lives principles on the opposite page.

What support is available?

There's lots of information available on the RHS website to help you. And to kick-start your project we are offering all groups taking part free nasturtium seeds. You might use these on their own in a small space, or add them to a larger selection of plants to create a bigger display. Groups are encouraged to launch their transformation projects during National Gardening Week, 13 – 19 April 2015, as part of the nationwide launch of Bloom and Greener Streets: Better Lives.

Spread the word

Once you've transformed your space, pass on the challenge to others on Twitter with the hashtag **#GreenerStreets** and share your photos at: [facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening](https://www.facebook.com/rhscommunitygardening). We'd like as many people as possible to get involved.

NEXT STEPS

1/ Bloom and IYN groups will automatically be sent free nasturtium seeds in early April - so there's no need to fill in a form this year.

Schools, affiliated societies and other groups that would like to receive seeds should complete the form at: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](https://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom) (for those without internet access please call 020 7821 3122).

2/ Identify a suitable spot to transform (and ensure you have permission from the landowner!). Please also consider the existing flora or fauna that may be found in a site, and whether this should be protected. If you are unsure, consult your local Wildlife Trust for advice.

3/ Download ideas and online resources: [rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](https://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)

Greener Streets: Better Lives guiding principles

Any transformation will make a difference, but bear these three principles in mind as you plan your project.

1/ Green is better than Grey

When it comes to offering environmental and health benefits for people and wildlife, plants are better than paving.

Plants cool the air through shading and transpiration, which keeps temperatures down in summer (and provides wind breaks which keep houses warmer in winter). They also decrease surface-water run off which reduces flash flooding. Without plants to absorb pollutants, areas with lots of hard surfaces (i.e. pavements, roads, driveways, walls) suffer from worse air quality than greener areas. And for wildlife, hard surfaces are a barren desert without the food or shelter it needs to survive.

Always try to keep as much of your space as possible green and consider the permeability to rain water of any hardstanding you create. Where an area is already paved, are there options for improving it with plants - could raised beds or planters be added to grow fruit and vegetables, climbers added to cover a wall or a green roof installed to capture rainfall and create wildlife habitat?

2/ More is more! (and bigger is better!)

Choose as wide a diversity of plants as you can for your projects. Wildlife will benefit from year-round food sources, with different

plants in flower at different times of the year, and trees, shrubs and perennials all offer different kinds of habitat.

Bigger trees (and bigger green spaces) also provide more environmental benefits than smaller ones, so where you can - upsize! Large tree canopies help to reduce flooding by intercepting rainfall before it heads down the drains. They also provide bigger wildlife habitat as well as psychological benefits for people. Ultimately green spaces are about quality *and* quantity.

3/ Connectivity is important

Think about how the green spaces in your neighbourhood connect to each other - and where there might be the biggest grey gaps to breach! Connecting green spaces provides the habitat, food and shelter needed by wildlife. It's also important for people to have access to public green spaces across different areas.

If there's a built up area near you, could you create a new greening project in the middle of it to help link together two adjacent green areas? For wildlife, green spaces can include railway lines and gardens as well as public parks and community sites such as allotments. As always, green is better than grey and more is more when it comes to diversity and size!

Eight Greener Streets: Better Lives ideas

1. Green is better than grey
Create a raised-bed vegetable garden in a paved area. You could use recycled pallets, donated wood or builders' rubble sacks filled with soil.



2. More is more!
Plant up old oil tins, coffee pots, boots, yoghurt pots, whatever you have to hand, to add a bit of colour to an unloved spot.



3. Green is better than grey
Add a green roof to your community shed or storage unit (above). For advice about how to do this: [rhs.org.uk/advice](https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice)

4. Connectivity is important
Invite local businesses to get involved by greening their premises.



5. Connectivity is important
Cover a wall with a climber, or create a vertical planting system for trailing plants - for example with a recycled pallet lined and filled with soil as Eaglely Infants school in Bolton did (below)



6. Connectivity is important
Railway lines are great for connecting greens space for wildlife. Could you help to make these spaces better by working with Network Rail to plant wildflowers in appropriate areas of trackside land?

7. More is more!
Help your local school to transform an unloved corner of its grounds into a green oasis full of flowers (below).



8. More is more!
Keep pollinators in mind with everything you do and try to keep the diversity of planting as wide as possible - use the RHS Perfect for Pollinators list for inspiration: [rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators](https://www.rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators)

Greener Streets: Better Lives

Ideas & Inspiration

Hundreds of groups around the country are already making green transformations that bring benefits for people and wildlife, following the principles of Greener Streets: Better Lives. Here are just a few examples to help inspire your own projects.



Wildflowers and a planted boat now grace the bottom of the park, previously home to concrete hardstanding, patchy grass and rusty railings (indent, shows the site from the opposite side)



Transformation of unwanted concrete bollards into new garden

When: 2011 - 2014

Funding: £100 grant from a local councillor plus small donations from residents

After several unsuccessful attempts to get four unsightly concrete bollards removed from an area between their houses, neighbours in Wroxham took matters into their own hands. The group sought permission to remove the bollards independently, but was refused by the housing association on health and safety grounds and due to there being insufficient funds to provide a skip for the rubble.

"Nine of the residents then agreed we had no alternative but to disguise the structures," says lead coordinator of the group, Eileen Mann. "So my husband Jeff designed and built planters for positioning on and around them."

Each of the nine residents donated a small amount of money towards plants and a local councillor provided a grant to cover the cost of materials.

The group has now taken on caring for more areas of the communal space, planting a mimosa tree, installing a birdbath, dovecot and insect shelter and planting up mixed flower beds. Cowslips, primroses, buttercups and knapweed have been added to the lawn and honeysuckle and wild flowers are grown to attract pollinators. "We were always a friendly group of neighbours,"

says Eileen. "Working on this project has brought us even closer together. What more could anyone wish for."

Top tips:

The group installed a large water butt near the garden to help them keep on top of the summer watering. This is used communally to care for the many pots.

Eileen also recommends planning and implementing one area at a time. "Don't be afraid to adapt your plan if the original one doesn't work or costs too much," she says.

"Talk to your friends about what you hope to achieve, you'll be surprised how many offer cuttings of plants or unwanted decorative plots. And try to incorporate something for all age groups too, leave a space for the very young.

Volunteers create a horticultural haven in Ross-on-Wye

When: 2010 - 2014

Funding: £1000 funding from the government's Active at 60 programme; £150 grant from the town council; plus support in kind from the local garden centre

In 2010 a group of volunteers approached Herefordshire County Council with a view to improving a small public garden that had gone unloved for a number of years. Blake Memorial Garden links the Wye riverside to the town centre at the top of the hill. Volunteers saw the potential for something

better than its tired shrub beds and rusty railings. They set themselves the challenge of improving the space in time for the 2012 Diamond Jubilee.

With permissions in place, the group started work at the bottom of the site. The concrete foundation of a long-gone cottage was removed to make way for a flower garden.

Volunteers planted wildflowers in an old boat and created a pathway around it. Seating was improved throughout the garden and a mural painted on the wall. Overgrown shrubs were cut back to make way for new herbaceous planting.

Today Blake Memorial Garden is a well-loved entrance route to the town. Five volunteers still work in the garden every Sunday to keep it looking its best. "It's really lifted the area," says group co-ordinator Caroline Utting. "People are quite amazed when they come down and see what's there."

Blake Memorial Garden is an RHS It's Your Neighbourhood group (Level 5, Outstanding).

Key challenges

Watering was a challenge before the group's rainwater butt was installed, with watering cans needing to be carried a great distance. The group has also established additional access to a nearby resident's outside tap.

Edible Campus at Lancaster University

When: 2012 onwards

Funding: £130,000 in total from two NUS funding schemes

The 'Edible Campus' project at Lancaster University aims to inspire a culture for sustainable food through practical volunteering and awareness-raising events. Co-ordinated by Green Lancaster - the student union's environmental campaign - over 100 students and staff regularly volunteer in a range of growing sites across the campus. The 'Ecohub' is the centre of operations, transformed since 2012 from a little-used area of grass into a productive growing area with raised beds, chickens, a pond, polytunnel and pizza oven. Maintaining the gardens throughout holiday periods has been possible thanks to the support of university staff. In 2014 the group achieved a Level 5 (Outstanding) RHS It's Your Neighbourhood award.

Niyati Burde, LUSU Student-Staff Team Member, says one of the main challenges has been engaging people in food sustainability issues. "Most people are living on a budget here, so it's been a challenge talking about where they are sourcing their food from while they're so focused on the cost," she says.



However the project offers a solution: volunteer gardeners take home free fruit and vegetables from the plots and the growers are also helping on-campus businesses get involved. "We've planted a Mediterranean herb garden



The 'Edible Hub' before and after its transformation by students and staff. Left: eggs are another benefit of the scheme

next to one of the cafes on campus, so the chef takes care of the garden and uses the herbs in his cooking," says Niyati.

Top tips:

To help spread the word and attract new volunteers the group has set up a Vimeo channel to publish weekly vlogs documenting their progress:

vimeo.com/channels/greenlancaster

Shevington Parish Council car park transformed with re-cycled materials

When: 2012 and continually maintained
Funding: £80 to lay the re-cycled flagstones.

The flower beds around Shevington Parish Council's car park had previously suffered from heavy footfall and as a result, plants did not survive long. "The photo to the right shows the bed a few days after the parish



Volunteers re-create park's central flowerbed

When: 2009 - 2014
Funding: £4750 (for planting)

Whitworth Park is the closest sizable green space to Manchester City Centre and is well used by local workers and residents. Following cuts in the 1980s the park had fallen into decline and the Friends of Whitworth Park (FOWP) was set up in 2005 to reverse this trend. Together with the council the group drew up a management plan for the space, helping to secure funding to repair pathways and re-build the central flowerbed.

With allocated funds restricted to infrastructure, FOWP successfully applied for a second grant to plant up the central bed. A Piet Oudolf-inspired design by one of the members was chosen, which provides strong form and texture and year-round interest. Several FOWP volunteers work throughout the year to maintain the

council paid £400 to plant some bushes there," said Margaret Carter, Shevington in Bloom Co-ordinator. "As you can see this did not work as members of the public trampled over them without even noticing they were there."

Shevington in Bloom approached the council to suggest putting small flagstones as passing points for pedestrians close to the driver and passenger sides of parked cars. They re-used old stones supplied by the council and replanted the beds with plants re-cycled from council planters before they could be thrown away. The only cost for the project was laying the flagstones; planting was carried out by volunteers from Shevington in Bloom.

"We are very proud of the fact that every plant in this area is re-cycled," says Margaret. "We've kept costs down while providing a simple and effective solution that looks fantastic."

2014 RHS Britain in Bloom Judges said, "The effective, cost-efficient new landscaping at the parish council car park, with the use of slabs between grasses and fragrant herbs, solved a major area of heavy foot traffic damage, showing a thought process that is refreshing."

display, weeding, pruning and dividing the perennials when needed.

With these efforts, the once-neglected spot has become a favourite for many park users. Dr Carolyn Jones, who works in the nearby hospital, said, "Occasionally I take



The Bloom group's low cost transformation of the flower bed has provided an attractive feature while solving the problem of people stepping on the beds and compacting the soil

Top tips:

Margaret advises groups to do their homework before approaching the council. "I got the quote for the flagging before I approached them," she said. "I also took the before photograph and a drawing that I did of what I thought it would look like afterwards. It was also a very 'common sense' approach to the solution."

time to stroll through the park on my way to work, and this morning I was struck once again by the beauty of the island on the central walkway, blooming with purple flowers and grasses which were humming with bees and other insects."

The group now wants to establish secondary walks around the park through the wilder sections where the grass is left long, enhancing these areas with sensitive meadow planting. It is working with neighbouring Whitworth Art Gallery on a joint scheme for a community garden and continues to search for funding.



Roadside shrub bed re-born as Dunstable's community veg growing hub

When: 2013 - 2014
Funding: Almost everything required for the project was donated – materials and labour.

Led by local resident and gardener Sahira Ward, Incredible Edible Dunstable transformed a non-descript shrub bed close to a neighbourhood shopping parade into a community vegetable, fruit and herb garden.

With the council's support the group successfully applied to the Highway Authority for permission to develop the site. A fellow voluntary group, Promoting Dunstable purchased public liability insurance for the project and 2013's Britain in Bloom vegetable and herb seeds were shared out for people to start growing in greenhouses and on windowsills.

To generate further interest Sahira invited local residents to a drop-in session at a local restaurant, where they could learn more about the project and pledge their support. She also encouraged shops in the area to display posters and set up an Incredible Edible Dunstable Facebook page to let people know what was going on.

The town council kick started work by providing funding for five raised beds and clearing half the site of top growth and roots. Between them, local businesses donated funds to install two water butts and cover the cost of volunteer workers' lunches. With the help of multiple vehicles, eight tonnes of topsoil and 40 bags of manure were delivered to the site.

Work was completed in summer 2013 and the garden now hosts regular community growing days,

as well as school groups who come to learn about food growing. The growers follow an organic, no dig approach, to help the soil's natural structure develop. They also seek to be as low impact as possible, gathering rainwater in butts and using locally sourced, recycled materials. In 2014 the garden won Best Community Project in Anglia in Bloom.



Sahira says, "When you find your team and you work together on a common goal, no matter what that may be, there is a companionship that will never be broken, and this is where the amazing feeling of pride and happiness overflows into other people's lives."

Top tips:

Sahira's advice for other groups wanting to do something similar is to look at Incredible Edible Todmorden. "See what they have achieved in their town and then find their template for success on the Incredible Edible Network," she says. "Every single thing is there to help anyone to do this. Their motto is: Don't talk about it, just do it. Grow food, cook food, share food and do it in public spaces."



My Bloom: Alice Alexander, Waveney Court Gardening Group

Why do you volunteer with Bloom?

I originally became involved in the local 'Bloom' project to meet like-minded people with a shared passion for gardening. I enjoy the many challenges gardening can bring and volunteering seemed a natural thing to do.

What's the best thing that happened in 2014?

At 64-years-old, I had been single for many years and never thought I'd ever meet anyone new until Steve from the neighbouring housing scheme came along to help with our gardening project. We immediately became friends and soon found that we had lots in common.

We worked tirelessly to develop a new pond area and prepare the garden in readiness for the 'Bloom' campaign. Being the younger members, we soon became the driving force of the group and our friendship became stronger.

Steve proposed in April 2014 and as you can imagine I was over the moon. We married in August 2014 at the local registry office and held a reception at Waveney Court for our family and friends. It truly was the happiest day of our lives.

What are you planning for this year's Bloom?

The group hopes to repeat its success of last year and has already started making plans to update the pond area and develop a silver-themed garden to mark the anniversary of Newcastle-under-Lyme's 25th year of participating in Britain in Bloom.

I thoroughly recommend volunteering as it's a chance to give something back to the community and provides a real sense of pride and belonging. It has turned my life around, giving me the opportunity to meet Steve and make my life complete.

If you'd like to share your volunteering news in the new My Bloom column, please contact: 020 7821 3118/ sophiedawson@rhs.org.uk