

Botanic gardens are tackling public health problems

The vital role botanic gardens can play in public health will be the focus of an event to be held at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) on Monday.

Botanic Gardens for Healthy Lives will see organisations from across the UK meet to discuss and learn from programmes which enhance community wellbeing such as the RBGE's [Edible Gardening Project](#).

“Being part of the Edible Gardening Project has been an amazing experience for me. It has really helped me mentally as well as physically; for the first time since my illness I've felt useful,” says participant Sue Brown*, who is recovering from cancer.

“When I'm helping at the Garden it takes my mind off worrying about things. Being busy and useful is a great antidote to stress and worry! Physically gardening is so beneficial as for a long time after treatment I didn't do much at all. Sometimes it's hard to get up and face the world, being involved in the gardens gives a reason and discipline. I'm thankful for the opportunity to take part in something that has enhanced my life so much.”

Keynote speaker Dr Ulrik Sidenius from the University of Copenhagen will talk about the Nacadia Therapy Garden in Denmark, which offers treatment to people with mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress.

Botanic Gardens for Healthy Lives is co-hosted by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch). The event builds on a five year programme of work by the Foundation and BGCI which supported pilot programmes in botanic gardens across the UK. These pioneered the involvement of vulnerable people such as drug addicts, isolated young single mothers, and those with chronic health problems in botanic garden projects.

“I am delighted BGCI will be continuing to take this work forward,” Andrew Barnett, Director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch) says.

“We know there is a perception of botanic gardens being a place where horticulturalists tell the public to keep off the grass. The projects we have supported have shown that gardens are now inviting the public to come and sit on it and get involved.”

RBGE's Head of Public Engagement Dr Ian Edwards says the sharpened community health focus is a powerful one.

“I have witnessed an important transformation in our Botanic Garden, and botanic gardens worldwide, in recent years as we have become increasingly aware of our social responsibility and the opportunity we have to make a real difference to people's lives.

[“Our origin was as a Physic Garden](#) helping to heal physical ailments through use of herbs but nowadays we contribute to community health through our programme on growing and sharing nutritious fruit and vegetables. There is also more emphasis on mental health and the recognition that botanic gardens have an important role in helping people recover from stress-related illness by providing a tranquil, green environment.”

“Growing the social role of botanic gardens has never been more important – particularly as urban populations grow and large sections of society become disconnected from nature,” says Dr Paul Smith, Secretary General of BGCI.

“The Communities in Nature programme, generously supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, showed us how this can be done. The Botanic Gardens for Healthy Lives event offers a great opportunity to use what we have learnt and build new partnerships, projects and vision for scaling up this approach. BGCI is very excited to be part of this, and fully committed to growing a community of botanic gardens that are socially inclusive, relevant and support health and wellbeing.”

Notes to the Editor

Botanic Gardens for Healthy Lives is being held at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh from midday to 5pm on Monday 3 October. If journalists wish to attend please contact Bridget Gourlay on 07 5945 26920.

*Sue Brown is not the participant’s real name. She has been attending the Edible Gardening Project through Macmillan Cancer Support’s Move More programme. Move More is for people affected by cancer to help them to become more active. Sue’s 10 weeks with Move More has just finished and she will be volunteering with the Edible Gardening project at RBGE regularly from next week.

Her full quote is below:

“Being part of the Edible Gardening Project has been an amazing experience for me. It has really helped me mentally as well as physically; for the first time since my illness I've felt useful. I would really recommend it to anyone, the team (Jenny, Lizzie, Andy etc) are great to work with, are very supportive and I'm learning so much. When I'm helping at the gardens it takes my mind off worrying about things. Being busy and useful is a great antidote to stress and worry! Physically gardening is so beneficial as for a long time after treatment I didn't do much at all. Sometimes it's hard to get up and face the world, being involved in the gardens gives a reason and discipline. I'm thankful for the opportunity to take part in something that has enhanced my life so much.”

About the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is a leading international research organisation delivering knowledge, education and plant conservation action around the world. In Scotland its four Gardens at Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan attract nearly a million visitors each year. It operates as a Non Departmental Public Body established under the National Heritage (Scotland) Act

1985, principally funded by the Scottish Government. It is also a registered charity, managed by a Board of Trustees appointed by Ministers. Its mission is “To explore, conserve and explain the world of plants for a better future”.

Learn more: www.rbge.org.uk

About the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support national and transnational work tackling contemporary issues. The purpose of the UK Branch, based in London, is to bring about long-term improvements in wellbeing particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries (national borders, communities, disciplines and sectors) which deliver social, cultural and environmental value.

For more information you can download [How Can Botanic Gardens Grow Their Social Role?](#), a report which summarises the community wellbeing programmes piloted by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and BGCI.

About Botanic Gardens Conservation International

BGCI is a membership organisation, linking botanic gardens around the world in a shared commitment to save threatened plant species and raise awareness about the importance of plants. With approximately 500 member organisations, BGCI is the world’s largest plant conservation network. Established in 1987, its head offices are located at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; along with branches in China and the USA. BGCI’s mission is ‘To mobilise botanic gardens and engage partners in securing plant diversity for the well-being of people and the planet’.

Learn more: <https://www.bgci.org/>