



# Green Health – using church space for therapeutic gardening

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## An introduction from the Bishop of Carlisle, the Rt Revd James Newcome

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Gardening has a long and honourable link with both spirituality and healing. It can be a truly therapeutic activity which contributes to mental and physical wellbeing – it is no coincidence gardens, whether of Eden or Gethsemane, feature so prominently in scripture.

We all know gardening is good exercise for the body, but it can also provide excellent therapy for the mind. It's about shalom – the wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

As the Church of England's lead bishop on health I'm delighted this enterprising Green Health initiative has attracted such widespread interest and support.

All of the projects shortlisted for last year's Green Health Awards have much to teach us about the benefits of first-hand engagement with God's creation. They ranged from Edinburgh to Penzance and covered everything from bee-keeping to multi-sensory reflection. Choosing a winning initiative was far from easy – we wanted to applaud everyone involved for their commitment to such imaginative forms of mission. Every one of them is devoted to promoting wholeness and wellbeing, and every one of them is making a difference to the lives of people in their communities.

I hope you and your church community will be inspired to follow in their footsteps.



# The theological basis of gardens for health

*Professor Jim McManus, director of public health for Hertfordshire County Council*



The Green Health Awards are an intervention in public theology. They saw us speaking theologically to the world about something the church can do. More than ever, our society needs us to witness to the enduring importance of the gospel and Christian message. That's why I was so pleased to be a part of this important project.

You could start a theology of gardens by looking at beauty and aesthetics. One could wax lyrical about the ugliness of weeds — especially in my garden — but I'm not going to. Instead, I want to start with Byzantine-era mosaics in Ravenna and Rome, and Romanesque Frescos in Catalonia. What you see in those area's churches are rich portrayals where life and the Church are set in a lush garden. Even the carved pillars of these churches portray richly the metaphor of gardens and vegetation.

In an age of imposing medieval gothic cathedrals, we often miss the fact the early metaphor for the church — to which much Byzantine and Romanesque art was faithful — was as a garden. The early Christians were

attempting something quite different to the grey stone we are used to — they wanted their churches to recreate what the garden meant through scripture and did this in rich, coloured imagery.

So let's turn to this garden. The Biblical garden is ontological — it tells us about who we are, people born to be in relationship with God. But it is also eschatological — it tells us what we will become, what God is calling us to be. I don't do my job because I like doing it, I do it because I believe it is my vocation. Because I actually believe that participation in health is a participation in the ministry of Christ. I believe that taking part in ecology and gardening is modelling what God is calling us to do: tending, respecting and sustaining life.

“Because I actually believe that participation in health is a participation in the ministry of Christ.”

Gardening is therefore a rich metaphor for the lifelong pilgrimage. It was Cardinal Newman who said the only evidence of life is growth and when you stop having growth, you stop having life. The four gardens of scripture are metaphors for what we should be on our Christian journey and in the life of the church. The Garden of Eden: a foretaste of what will be. The Garden of Gethsemane: a place of suffering and pain, decision and commitment. The Garden of Golgotha: the garden of victory. And the Garden of Paradise: the place of our final rest.

Gardens are shot through so much of the church's theological tradition. In the writings of St Thomas Aquinas, he speaks of how humans are on an exodus from God yet created to return to him. During our time of earthly life the work of the church is about sanctifying. That's not just about the sacraments, but the public role of the church, its role in social justice. And what is the metaphor he uses? A garden.

Our time in the Garden of Eden gives us the Fall, of course, but also a message of hope. In the Jewish tradition Eden is much more about hope and a foretaste of what we will go back to than it is about our failing. The word “paradise” (as in the Garden of) literally means a walled garden — a concept familiar to Islamic ears as well as Christian. So we can see how there are rich scriptural metaphors for why we should see the garden as a place that calls us to acknowledge our journeying through the earth and our stewardship of it.

According to the World Health Organisation, health is a complete state of physical and mental wellbeing, not just the absence of disease. That said, I do not know anyone who has actually got there at any point in

their life! Rather than a vision of health which is actually achievable, this WHO definition is an unavoidably and resolutely eschatological vision. We know, biologically and psychologically, that good health comes when we maintain balance in response to the stresses of life, when we can find a satisfactory response to what challenges and limits us. This idea spans many disciplines, but in biology it is called homeostasis. The concept of adjustment sits well alongside the Garden as metaphor for our life of faith. Growth, disease, decline, regrowth and adaptation to obstacles and challenges are well known to the seasoned gardener, alongside taking what the seasons throw at you. Applying this our health can give us some insight into the value of adjustment, resilience and balance in the face of change.

For instance, I recently sponsored a project called Positive Faith, funded by Public Health England, about people living with HIV and the role of faith. One of the most fascinating things which came across during this is most of these people who have learned to live well with the virus are healthier than average, because they have adjusted satisfactorily. They have found balance with God, each other, their bodies, their health and their world. A scientific vision of health as balance chimes strongly with what we as Christians believe about human beings — we are called to be in good relationship with ourselves, our neighbours and with God. The model of balance and right relationship for health is a rich theological vein we should explore more and more. This is something our world needs today, particular in an age of increasing mental health problems. We need more than ever the ability to balance ourselves psychologically and physically. We have

something important here as Christians to offer which we must recover.

The garden provides a metaphor for the continual work of reaching balance, and it also adds to that space for balance with the environment. This is particularly important; we will never have true human health unless humanity has a sustainable footprint on the earth. In Acts 1 to 5, we read what looks like the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem. But actually if you read as a unit it becomes a metaphor for the church as a garden. One theologian I enjoy talks about the church being called to recreate the Garden of Eden, and foretaste the Garden of Paradise.

So how are you in the work you are doing as Churches or people of faith aspiring to that balance, modelling that balance?

As a Catholic I feel my church is very out of kilter at the moment because of the abuse crisis. We will never solve that until we approach it theologically. You cannot just copy secular wisdom, you have to incarnate it as Christians. And the same is true when it comes to gardens and health also; we as Christians have to say 'We were here first.' Christians have been doing gardens all the way back to scripture. And we need to use them to help people find balance in all aspects of life.

This is a great goal, but how do we achieve it? I think it is all about nurturing — nurturing our gardens, our lives and our relationships. Balance has to be with God, with environment, and with ourselves and neighbours. Balance needs to be both physical and spiritual. It's a life-course effort. It lives the Beatitudes, the gospel and Christ's calling to participate in his ministry. The

stewardship of all these relationships and talents — you always need good stewardship in gardening — calls us to model that garden in the life of the church.

The Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila uses the metaphor of watering a garden for the spiritual life. At first you are doing an awful lot of work, having to draw the water up. But by the end, the rain falls on you, and God does the work while you bask in it. Imagine standing in a cooling gentle rain on an otherwise hot, parched day. I think we need to learn how to appreciate these different types of watering. It starts with hard work but ends with letting God's Spirit rain on us, bringing us to a peaceful understanding of what we can do in this world and encouraging us to find balance and joy in the gardens of our living. Teresa has much to teach us about how we will never have balance until we find an equilibrium between the active life and the spiritual life. We will never have balance until you stop telling God what to do and just let God do. This is another insight. There is no health without balance. There is balance when we find friendship with God.

Finally, Teresa calls theologians — and everyone else too — to be faithful to Christ. Theologians — and all Christians — should be gardeners — getting their hands dirty, stuck into the earth, nurturing all of creation. She calls us, just as Acts 1 to 5 does, to model this great calling of the church to be the garden; the setting for balance and relationship.

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*Professor Jim McManus is the director of public health for Hertfordshire County Council and the president of the Guild of Health and St Raphael.*

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## The benefits of plants to health and wellbeing

*Dr Alistair Griffiths, director of science and collections at the Royal Horticultural Society*

I am a scientist, but when I finished studying and left the scientific rigour of university I found out something surprising. That contrary to what I had thought, science is actually all about people, and working with them to make a difference. So as a plant scientist, rather than get lost in the technicalities too much, I try to spend my time thinking about what plants give us, as people. And as I began to explore this I quickly become aware the list is almost endless: we eat plants, wear them, and even heal ourselves with them.

There are about 30,000 edible plants, but interestingly we get 95% of our needs from just 30 of them. Four — rice, wheat, maize and potato — provide us with an astonishing 60% of our food. There is a wealth of food out there and we're only using very little of it.

The same is true of clothing: We obviously mostly use cotton, but we're starting to explore other plants for clothing, such as bamboo, sweetcorn, nettle or even cannabis.

Focusing in on healthcare, we currently utilise about 28,000 plants in medicine and drugs daily. Many of the drugs which are so incredibly beneficial are actually a double-edged sword; they have a "kill or cure effect". Heroin, which ultimately comes from the opium poppy, is extraordinarily important in controlling pain. But when taken to excess it can cause huge damage and even kill. Cannabis is increasingly linked to schizophrenia and yet also has significant medicinal uses as well. Scientists have even managed to use the tobacco plant to grow antibodies for the Ebola virus. The key is in how we as humans appropriate these plants

and how we manage their use to heal not hurt.

Even when not literally taking a drug derived from plants to get better, the links between health and the natural world are widespread. The evidence connecting plants and wellbeing continues to get stronger and stronger. Whether it's showing how gardening improves recovery from anxiety or depression, or how plants can boost self-esteem, there about 8,000 papers now published on this important theme.

But we often overlook how plants help us in less obvious ways. Obesity killed 15 million people worldwide in 2015 and costs the British public purse about £2.5 billion a year. Obviously the causes of these deadly conditions are complex, but a big part of the epidemic is how we have moved away from eating plants towards diets full of foods which are not only unhealthy but also harder to eat in moderation.

More prosaically, gardening can simply be good exercise. A study in 2015 found weeding, mixing soil and raking were as good physical activity as moderate cycling. Digging burned even more calories and was comparable with swimming. Some papers have shown those who take part in gardening not only see their BMI drop but benefit from switching to a healthier diet thanks to increased knowledge of fruit and vegetables and the seasons. Gardeners also spend their time outdoors. They're not only more connected with nature, they are also soaking up the vitamin D from the sunshine. Other research has found elderly gardeners were better able to get back up from falls than their more housebound peers. At that age

most of us are not able to move significant distances so your garden becomes even more vital: the only place where you can still be active. It can also tackle social isolation and foster better community links, particularly with allotments.

Plants also help us address social challenges. A lack of greenspace and vegetation is associated with higher levels of crime, according to one 2001 study, and gardens are also essential weapons in the battle against climate change. Paving over grass makes communities more at risk of flooding, whereas vegetation captures rainfall and reduces surface run-off, removing excess water as well as filtering out pollutants. It's not a golden bullet but it has to be part of the answer.

The same is true for air pollution, which is linked to 40,000 excess deaths a year in the UK. The government's own estimates show plants remove about 1.4 million tonnes of pollution from the air, saving us all around £1 billion in health costs. Research funded by the Royal Horticultural Society is currently underway to look at how planting more hedgerows could help tackle noise pollution, trying to establish which particular species are best at filtering out what kind of sounds. So far, it looks like photinia works well at high frequencies (such as from electrical equipment) while cedar trees are ideal for lower frequencies, such as traffic noise. And of course, both are great habitats for birds and wildlife, as well as scrubbing the air of pollution.

Plants are there for a purpose and we need to make sure we look after them. I cannot stress enough the social and health benefits

## "I cannot stress enough the social and health benefits of gardening"

of gardening; this is powerful stuff. But we have a significant challenge. I have always been a plant geek, but there are not many like me. About half the population in the UK love gardening, but there is also an epidemic of plant blindness. Most of us will walk past a tree in the street and just see a green blob: we will have no idea of all the amazing things that tree is doing. This means we feel disconnected with plants and see no reason to protect and conserve them.

There are 7.6 billion people on Earth at the moment and by 2055 that will become 10 billion. Almost eight in ten of those people are expected to live in urban environments; environments which tend not to have much vegetation in them. Add to this three-quarters of children spend less time on average outdoors than those in prison. A 2008 survey found three times as many kids could identify a Dalek than could pick out a magpie. And as phones and tablets continue to grow in popularity this challenge is only going to increase. Those aged 11 to 15 spend on average seven and a half hours a day in front of a screen of one sort or another.

I outlined earlier the panoply of evidence linking gardening to better mental and physical health. But the flip side of this is research which shows the more you are deprived of nature the more likely you are to experience a range of diseases — everything from diabetes to depression.

Some cultures are way ahead of us on this. In Japan there has for decades been a movement called *shinrin-yoku* — literally "forest bathing". This is the practice of simply going to the woods to feel better. A 2013 experiment found spending two days in a forest created measurable increases in helpful antibodies which strengthen the immune system in the forest bathers' blood, an effect which persisted for about 30 days. Another study could even replicate this effect simply by pumping terpenes — the root organic compounds found in tree resins — into the air of a hotel room where people were staying. This is early days, but these findings are really exciting.

The bottom line is that we are animals too. We spend a huge amount of effort trying to save the panda, yet never think about saving ourselves. Yet are just as dependent on the right habitat as any other creature, after all. And our natural habitat, since time immemorial, has been to be surrounded by plants. Given all we now know about the damage inflicted on us when we stop eating, wearing, consuming and living among plants, how can we be nudging our society back in the right direction?

*Dr Alistair Griffiths is the director of science and collections at the Royal Horticultural Society and used to be the head scientist at the Eden Project.*



## ‘It keeps me sane’: psychology and gardening

*Professor Harriet Gross, University of Lincoln*

There has been a huge blossoming of research into gardening recently, exploring the advantages of not just gardening but simply being in gardens themselves. These findings confirm people benefit from gardening: it clearly makes people feel good and can help them get through difficult periods of their lives. From this starting point the entire movement of therapeutic horticulture has developed. But I am fascinated by taking a step back and looking into exactly why gardens are so beneficial? And why does gardening mean so much to the those who take part in it?

Social and therapeutic horticulture has a long history: the Victorians are known to have used gardening in asylums. Then in the 1980s a key concept was proposed by psychologists: attention restoration theory. This suggests the natural world is intrinsically restorative and allows people to recover from the demands of work. But it is important to note as well as improving mental and physical health, gardening delivers other, less tangible, benefits.

To try and understand these better, I have interviewed a lot of gardeners and built up

a rich amount of material on what gardening means to those who do it most. There are three consistent themes coming out of this which illuminate the personal benefits for both longstanding and novice gardeners: identity, relationships and escape. They encapsulate why gardening is attractive and how it may just keep people sane.

Identity in psychological terms means a combination of people’s personality, their beliefs and their behaviours. When people feel threatened by change – whether through parenthood, illness, death or even just moving house – they seek to maintain their identity. The garden is a way individuals express their identity and gardening develops this sense of self. Everybody’s garden is different which allows gardeners to develop a sense of personal worth. Ownership is very important here: most people do not begin gardening until they have a place of their own to begin. Many people also tell me how important it is to start from scratch when it comes to building their own gardens, even tearing down trees to create that blank slate. The process of actually gardening also creates opportunities to demonstrate expertise and control. Think about the mechanisms of sowing seeds, staking the trusses and finally harvesting your crop: it shows you are able to do your bit, to achieve what you set out to do.

Looking after our small patch of a shared allotment also allows us to feel part of a larger community. Whether discussing with a neighbour how to tame a rampant vine, sharing seeds with a friend or joining a gardening club, working together in a group brings further psychological benefits. Gardeners often say their relationship with nature helps

them cherish their relationships with others. You can commemorate people important to you with plants, allowing the garden to serve as a kind of living physical connection with the past. This is why it can be so difficult to leave a garden, whether through illness or moving house, as for many they are also leaving behind significant memories.

But most notably, people speak of how fulfilling and even emotional their relationship with nature itself can be. They use phrases such as “gardening took hold of me” and explain how they are “hooked” on the natural world. It is seen as a real partnership: the garden continues working even when they are not there. Winter frost breaks up the soil, for instance, and some plants deliver that magical moment of becoming transformed literally overnight. Of course, nature can sometimes be a wayward partner. Ask anyone whose lettuces have been ravaged by slugs or a currant bushes choked by bindweed. Despite their relish in the partnership, every gardener I have spoken to agrees you cannot beat nature. You must step into its own rhythm and allow its timing to dictate what happens.

We tend to talk about escaping *from* something, but equally we can escape to somewhere. For many of us, gardens provide separation from the stresses and demands of the day-to-day routine. The garden offers a positive distraction from the anxieties of 21st-century life. It allows us time and space to maintain our identity in the face of threat. To revisit both the present and the past connected to the garden, and enjoy the restorative qualities of the natural world. This is what gardeners mean they say their garden is their “salvation” or it “keeps them sane”.



Physically relocating yourself to a garden slows the pace of life and the feeling of hands in soil helps reinforce the sense you are in a totally different place. As well as enjoying active gardening itself, many people say they benefit as well from just wandering through their gardens, seeing how things are getting on in a quiet moment of reflection and peace. Some use gardens as a form of active reflection on the challenges facing them in the “outside” world, whereas others simply use gardening to switch off and think of nothing, absorbed in their task.

So why does gardening appeal to people? These themes of identity, escape and relationship fit well with concepts coming out of psychological theory and other research. Ultimately, gardening is an occupation: it involves hard work, learning new things and keeps you busy. But occupation has other meanings too. It reflects a sense of both taking over and being taken over. People occupy spaces when they garden, imposing a sense of order simply by being there. But the garden also occupies, or invades, the gardener. It takes them over. Gardening is clearly not for everyone, but for those who do get hooked and enjoy being occupied in and occupied by the garden, it becomes almost literally a part of who they are.

*Professor Harriet Gross is a psychologist at the University of Lincoln, the author of *The Psychology of Gardening* and the creator of a gold-medal winning design at the Chelsea Flower Show.*



## People, places and health: come into the garden...

*David Buck, senior fellow for public health and inequalities at The King's Fund*

I first started looking into the relationship between the natural world and health when the National Garden Scheme approached The King's Fund to see if we could help tell their story. I had heard of them before, of course, but as we began to scratch beneath the surface I realised they were in many ways a health charity masquerading as a garden charity. Intrigued, I started examining what the evidence said and this ultimately led to a lengthier research project on gardens and health which we published in 2016.

To be completely honest, I came to this as a cynic actually — I thought if you live near a really high quality green space you would tend to be wealthier. And we already know

wealthy people tend to be healthier people overall. So the relationship between gardens and health, is actually about wealth.

But as our research progressed, it became clear beyond this link with wealth there is also a correlation between access to green space and ameliorating health inequalities. Our report “Gardens and health” came out only three years ago but at the time people, both inside and outside our organisation, thought it was really odd a well-established health organisation like The King's Fund would examine this topic. And just three years later it is no longer seen as weird to the health and care system. That is an amazing thing. This did not happen because of our

work; it just caught the wave which was already sweeping across the sector.

When you actually stop to think about it, gardens are a surprisingly hard concept to pin down. They can be both private and public, or something in between. They can be tiny back yards, or huge estates. They can be free to enter or require a fee, or even have some other entrance requirement such as membership. They can be owned, maintained and stewarded by an individual or a group. Defining what a garden actually is is not easy.

Gardens also have a dizzying array of uses and purposes. They might be purely personal and private, but others are designed for a community and wider access. Some are instrumental and exist to generate income, protect a landscape or species, or create beauty. Others are specifically made to promote healing in all its forms, while still more might be for just growing food. Some are attached to an institution or building, others are just public space in their own right.

I recently flew out of London City Airport and it was astonishing looking down at how much of the city is green. What is interesting is half of the average city's green space is actually private gardens. We know about 50% of British adults garden in their spare time, but of course that means the other half do not. Why? Is it lack of interest, or more concerningly, lack of access? This is why opening spaces to those who do not have them is so important.

Gardening is important throughout life but particularly as we age. Not just because it is a great way to keep physically active, but research shows it becomes more and more central to our sense of identity and self as we

get older. My mother loved her garden but as she got older it actually became a bit of a burden. She could no longer get out there and her kids were scattered across the country. She would have benefitted wonderfully from some kind of reciprocity scheme, where younger people who don't have access to a garden help look after hers for her. It's a win-win because you build intergenerational community as well.

But gardens are not just for the elderly but all ages. What struck me doing this research was the impact of gardens across the course of life. It's not just a particular group or specific time in life, it's across the range. School gardens have been shown in trials to increase intake of fruit and vegetables and improve a sense of achievement, particularly for children with behavioural problems. Those who use allotments have been shown to have improved mental health on a number of measures. And for those who in their later years gardening not only becomes more important to the sense of self, it prevents falls and cognitive decline.

Alongside these rigorous scientific studies are other kinds of evidence, including anecdotes. One I particularly like is the Lambeth GP Food Co-op. One GP recognised his practice had a bit of spare outdoor space and lots of patients who were socially isolated, had substance-abuse problems or mental health difficulties. So he set up a little gardening group for them and it has just grown out of all proportions. But the critical thing was the GPs themselves were also isolated. They too were imprisoned inside the walls of the surgery and didn't use the space either. So now the practice staff come out to garden together and the wonderful virtuous circle

is they sell their food produce into King's College Hospital. So you have NHS patients growing food to sell to other NHS patients. There are now nine practices across Lambeth involved, and similar projects are spreading around the country as well.

There are plenty of other stories to tell, including one garden set up in memory of a child who tragically died which is now used to help people with spinal injuries get a bit more mobile, and fantastic hospices which have created gardens for their patients. What's fascinating about this is that the evidence seems to say it is not the prettiest gardens which tend to be most helpful, but those where dementia patients can get their hands dirty. The messy gardens where they can engage with the plants – which might not be the most ordered – are the most calming. What a garden looks like is not necessarily the key thing, it is how you interact with it.

Another thing which really made me stop and think while putting together this report was a conversation I had with a former colleague, Sarah Waller, who now works on dementia at the University of Worcester. She reflected how prisoners have a right to a certain amount of time in the open air every day, yet we have not as the NHS ensured our patients have the same privileges. "I remember meeting a service user who had not left a mental health ward for over six months until the day we opened a garden in Sussex," she said. Prisoners have rights, as they should do, but should not our patients have the same?

When we concluded our report some of our recommendations were at a strategic level: making sure plans by the government departments for health, the environment,

and communities actually join up rather than going off in different directions. But in truth most of this will happen locally. We have local health and wellbeing boards in every area which are supposed to be looking across all local institutions at how we are doing health. They are really crucial for bringing in this new thinking about green space and gardening.

The final thing to say is about the evidence. Yes, randomised controlled trials are the gold standard but the weight of the qualitative evidence is such that there is really no reason to wait. Our message to the health and care system is simple: we have more than enough evidence to know this works, there is more than enough to be going on with.

Our report came out in 2016 and what we have seen since is really encouraging. There has been a flood of more evidence and signs it is bleeding into the mainstream. The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology has picked up on this and even more importantly social prescribing – where doctors use non-medical interventions including gardening to address patients' needs holistically – is being rolled out with the Mayor of London's support across the capital. This is no longer thought as being a bit left-field. I am really optimistic about the future. There is an opportunity here for us – doors, or even gates, are opening.

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*David Buck is a senior fellow at The King's Fund specialising in public health and inequalities. He previously worked at Department for Health as deputy director for health inequalities.*

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## Shortlisted projects

### Green Health Awards Winner

#### St Paul's Church, Old St Pancras

St Paul's, set in the heart of central London, created a woodland garden which acts as both a wildlife space and a place where congregants and patients from the nearby St Pancras hospital can grow food. The hospital specialises in geriatric and psychiatric care and many of their patients spend weeks on end cooped up inside the wards. The garden therefore not only improves the environment in this crowded corner of the city but also helps those experiencing social exclusion and mental health difficulties access a safe and welcoming green space. Surrounded by mature trees, the garden features soft fruit hedges, plants designed to provide a habitat for nesting birds, ferns and wild flowers, and a set of accessible raised beds for growing fruit and vegetables. The weekly gardening session is timed to coincide with a new Wednesday Holy Communion service and coffee morning St Paul's has also recently launched to open up new relationships with their parish.

#### St Paul's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Do not be afraid to start with only a small number of users and build up, which is a more realistic approach and also makes it easier to adapt the scheme to the actual needs of your community as you go.
- Take time to study your site and figure out what already grows well there across all the seasons and at different times of year, and then try to build upon that.
- Do not let the scale of the task overwhelm your team or congregation – even a small church with limited expertise or time to spare can still deliver an excellent project if you work partnership with experts and leaders outside the congregation.
- Look beyond the keen gardeners in your church to ensure you include a range of people, skills and backgrounds. Otherwise, there is a risk a church garden can be taken over and turned simply into an allotment, rather than conserving biodiversity and fostering participation but more vulnerable and less experienced people.

*“St Paul's is a unique project: it encourages people, some of whom have spent most of their adult lives in hospital, to venture out into the community to try a new activity, perhaps for the first time in many years.”*

– Tilly Williams, psychology lead for rehabilitation at St Pancras Hospital

### Growing Calm Award Winner

### Sponsored by The Mind and Soul Foundation

#### St John the Evangelist Church, Upper Norwood

The project began in 2013 when the vicar of St John's appealed to the community to help manage an overgrown area of land adjacent to the church, which had been derelict for 30 years. A team was gathered to toil away for months gradually turning the space into an urban meadow garden, with beds for growing food, an edible hedgerow, benches and seats made from recycled pallets and even a swing and hammock. The space has evolved over the years into a community haven: up to 100 locals are regularly fed there with surplus food from nearby restaurants, it hosts a programme of workshops to teach people how to grow their own food, a community bee-keeping scheme has sprung up, and the garden has even been used for outdoor meditation. The meadow garden is also closely connected with a local association for pastoral care in mental health and receives referrals from two GP surgeries and a pupil referral unit for children excluded from mainstream education.

#### St John's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Have a clear understanding at the start of what you want your garden to be for, but then leave space to be flexible so the garden can be shaped by its users.
- Speak to your community – doctors' surgeries, mental health services, local charities, the council – to find out what the needs of the parish are and how your garden can meet them.
- Conduct regular outreach and publicity to expand your core team of volunteers and open up the garden to new people.
- Do not forget to keep records of everything which takes place at the garden and who uses it – this is vital for funding applications but also creates a valuable history of the project.

*“I'm not a churchgoer but I love coming here: it's a beautiful space, a community of people, and it's therapeutic and fun. Here there's no prejudice and people from all backgrounds: from the homeless to those living in mansions.”*

– Millie, meadow garden regular

## Community Nurture Award Winner Sponsored by the AllChurches Trust

### Wharton and Cleggs Lane Church, Salford

The church sits in the one of the most deprived parts of the country but has over a decade developed multi-purpose gardens on land at the rear of the church building. Starting with some community allotments, over time the project has evolved to include a small orchard, a nature walk and two greenhouses. With the food grown in the allotments, Wharton and Cleggs Lane Church began a community café, and later gave away some of the leftover produce through their own foodbank too. Close connections have been developed with the local health improvement team and a nearby NHS mental health facility, which regularly refers patients to the garden. A consultant psychiatrist is also now advising the church how best to use their facilities to help people recovering from mental health crises.

#### Wharton and Cleggs Lane Church's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Ensure you have all the necessary policies and procedures in place at the start of the project.
- Keep the broader church well-informed of what the project is all about and how progress is coming along.

*“One recent referral was a young qualified account who just ‘couldn’t cope with life’ and had spent two years stuck in his bedroom, totally isolated. Within three months of joining us, he now volunteers with our gardeners’ group and is the treasurer on the committee. We are helping to change our community one life at a time.” – the garden project team*

### St Giles Parish Church, Lincoln

Partnering with a local green charity, St Giles's have renovated a derelict and overgrown area next to its church hall which most recently had been a car park into a shared community garden. Working with people across the parish, the congregation came up with a layout and design for the garden and then cleared the site to begin planting and building. They secured donations of plants and equipment from grants and local charities, and utilised volunteers from the National Citizen Service and even a team of Vodafone employees to create the garden from scratch. Today, the garden is regularly used by children from the nearby Sure Start centre and nursery school. Scouts groups also visit, as do people using the adjacent church hall for community events and meetings. As well as a small greenhouse, picnic tables, and planters made from old tractor tires, the garden also has a wild flower area to encourage insects.

#### St Giles's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Look around for local partners who are experienced in community development or delivering these kind of projects – our garden would never have got off the drawing board without the support of the Green Synergy charity and a grant from the Bishop of Lincoln's social justice fund.

*“My psychiatrist is over the moon that I am volunteering here. I've been going to them for 20-odd years and it is the first they have said anything about maybe even signing me off.” – one volunteer in the community garden team*

## St Pol de Leon Church, Cornwall

Starting in 2014, St Pol's have turned part of their historic churchyard into a multi-sensory haven of peace. Their quiet garden has been deliberately designed to be ideal for everything from reflective Christian worship to a secular dementia group, or maybe just an individual looking for a moment of peace. Churches in their team ministry use the garden for a monthly afternoon worship session during the summer months and a sunrise Easter morning communion as well. Children from nearby Penzance who struggle to access green space enjoy the calm surroundings at the annual holiday club, as do adults with learning disabilities who have a Monday gardening club each week. The Sensory Trust also use the garden for both their monthly dementia support groups and as a place where carers can find respite and refreshment. The garden features flower borders, a reconciliation sculpture crafted by veterans with PTSD to mark the centenary of World War One, a labyrinth and a series of display boards and interactive prayer stations telling the stories of Cornish Celtic saints.

### St Pol's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Consider if the project could be better led by a lay member in the congregation rather than a probably busy and distracted priest.
- Make sure the team in charge features people from a variety of backgrounds.
- Invite local community groups to come and see what is happening as the project progresses.
- Do not try to do too much, too quickly.

*"The real strength of the garden for the dementia support group is that it is multi-sensory. There is visual interest in the near, middle and long range so clients with sight impairments can all take something from it, along with the birdsong and distant countryside sounds from farms."*

— Ellie, the Sensory Trust

## ACCEPT, Leicestershire

The charity ACCEPT bought a 1,500 sq m plot of land in a deprived part of Leicestershire called Barwell in 2015. The area was wildly overgrown and had lain unused for decades. The creation of the garden, known as "Job's Well", came about in part as a tribute to the legacy of two longstanding supporters of ACCEPT who died that same year and had previously owned the site. It was named in the hope new life would well up out of their sense of loss, and an actual well was then discovered underneath the mounds of brambles. Over time, ACCEPT's volunteers have transformed Job's Well into a versatile outdoor church space, where various groups come to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables, connect with the healing power of nature, and develop the allotment spaces together. Locals who have experienced mental health issues, domestic abuse and isolation are regularly referred to the garden, where they are taught gardening skills, enjoy companionship and learn something of God's love. Community celebrations on New Year's Eve, Bonfire Night and Easter are also hosted at Job's Well, and local school children are invited during holidays to learn gardening as well.

### ACCEPT'S advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Ensure you have enough volunteers to spend quality time with everyone referred to your garden to build therapeutic relationships.
- Interview project beneficiaries before they begin coming so you can track their progress and measure what changes occur while they are involved.
- Create a culture of equality between staff, volunteers and clients, so there is no sense of "them and us".
- Focus not on mental health problems but on the gifts and abilities, drawing on the skills and expertise of everyone who takes part.

*"I feel more at home down Job's Well than I do in my own home and deeply value the peace, belonging and love that I experience there." — one beneficiary of the project*

## St Mary the Virgin Church, Lewisham

St Mary's is located on a busy, polluted high street in south London, but out of a previously underused corner of their churchyard they have built a therapeutic garden. The area is close to a major hospital and fire station and the noise of sirens and traffic are constant reminders of the hectic pace of modern urban life. Lewisham also has some of the worst social deprivation and health inequality indicators in the country. The therapeutic garden was originally just a few standing tombs, shrubs and empty flowerbeds, but from 2017 it has been changed beyond recognition thanks to new raised vegetable beds, an orchard, pergolas, sympathetic seating, new paths and interpretive signs explaining the garden. Today it is a haven of tranquillity and natural beauty. The next door Ladywell Mental Health Unit frequently refers its users to enjoy the peace of the garden, as do the 1,500 people who each day walk along the public footpath across the churchyard. Weekly gardening classes encourage even more local participation.

### St Mary's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Pray and ask God if this is really something he wants you to do.
- Do your research to check the project is sustainable in the long term.
- Apply for funding – even though the paperwork can be lengthy there is plenty of money out there.
- Be flexible with your volunteers as they may not want to commit as much time as you would ideally like.

*“St Mary's has for many years had a vision for reaching out and supporting people with poor mental health in their recovery. The enhancement of the churchyard feeds directly into this and a broader vision to benefit the whole community by creating a place of natural beauty.”*  
– therapeutic garden project team

## St John's Church, Old Trafford

Starting five years ago, St John's has partnered with local charities to set up a gardening project. It began in response to a need in the community and aimed to show people struggling with austerity and low incomes how to grow their own food. But over time the project has organically grown into something much broader. Now, the garden is used as a base for those in the area to combat social isolation, learn gardening tips and work together. To better develop the fruit, vegetable and herb growing the volunteers have sourced a water butt and polytunnel. Those who enjoy the garden come from all ethnic and religious backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of Old Trafford. One volunteer even shares plants grown in the garden with the local mosque and also teaches gardening there too. They will soon expand the project to asylum seekers and refugees who already come to St John's for English lessons and say they miss working with the soil.

### St John's advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Find someone with gardening experience and knowledge of plants and seasons to be a leader in the project.
- Do not wait to have everything sorted, just get started and see what happens.

*“Our project has been really organic and so we have adapted as we have gone along over the years. It's all about health, wellbeing and community.”* – gardening project team

## Polwarth Parish Church, Edinburgh

Polwarth Parish Church is the only place of worship which sits directly on the Union Canal which runs between Edinburgh and Falkirk, and in 2012 they “adopted” a stretch of land by the waterway to connect the church with the canal-side plot to create a garden. Funding was secured to lay down patio and decking, and now the garden has become a calming oasis of greenery and still blue waters for anyone to enjoy. Veterans from the armed forces have taken over one corner to turn it into a “Tranquillity Garden” to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War and a bench has been laid, inscribed with words by the war poet Wilfrid Owen. Gardening work to make the land accessible and attractive was led by church members as well as ex-servicemen and women. Locals in the community who struggle with mental health problems who were already working with the church have begun enjoying tending to the garden, and there are longer term plans to secure a narrowboat as a future base for even more ministry on the waters.

### Polwarth Parish Church’s advice for churches planning a similar project:

- Pray a lot — the people we needed seemed to come along at just the right time.

*“The aim of the project is to promote Polwarth as a place of wholeness and wellbeing, focusing on the canal with its many users both on the water and the towpath.” — project team*

## Volition Beekeeping Project, Manchester Cathedral

A happy set of coincidences in 2012 saw the chapter of Manchester Cathedral decide to install beehives on the roof of the 15th-century building. At just the same time, Volition, a separate cathedral initiative to create job opportunities for local unemployed people, was also starting to take off. Connecting the two, the cathedral now organises 10-week placements for those out of work to learn beekeeping, develop their self-confidence, acquire new skills and even begin to take on the responsibility of mentoring less experienced volunteers. What started with just one hive has now grown to eight in the cathedral and 12 in total across the city, including in Salford’s Roman Catholic cathedral. The “Heavenly Honey” produced by the bees is sold across Manchester and some volunteers have begun to explore creating their own artwork inspired by the bees. Soon the cathedral will collaborate with the local council to combine its gardens with the beekeeping, which they hope will have an even greater therapeutic impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of the volunteers.

### Manchester Cathedral’s advice for churches planning a similar project:

- No matter how many books you read on beekeeping, the bees will do what they will do, so remember to only assist them, not try to control them.
- Find experienced beekeepers to join the team early on so they can lead on planning the activities.
- Make sure there is a good balance between professional beekeeping activity and volunteer involvement.

*“The growth of one volunteer during the ten weeks was extraordinary, and the initiative she took with jewellery-making reaches the very heart of what we want to achieve through this project.” — beekeeping team*

# Resources

The Conservation Foundation was launched in 1982 to promote positive environmental action in 1982. Since then it has created and managed a wide range of environmental schemes and projects.

It created *Gardening Against the Odds* in memory of Elspeth Thompson the writer who believed that social and personal issues can be improved, not just because the environment looks better, but because it shows someone cares.

The *Gardening Against the Odds Awards* have publicised individuals and organisations throughout the country and put the spotlight on projects which have turned the most unlikely places into gardens showing how disabilities are no barrier to creating a better and more productive environment.

Many of the projects have shown that the benefits are not just physical, but also spiritual and therefore the Foundation has been delighted to work with the Church of England, the Church Times and the Guild of Health and St Raphael to create the Green Health Awards and the Green Health Live events.

The Foundation has just completed a project to improve the environment at Wandsworth Prison. Much of the site has been unchanged for over 160 years, but now plants and flowers grow and bees thrive. Men have learnt new skills including gardening, communicating and caring and both men and staff have a better environment in which to spend their time.

[www.conservationfoundation.co.uk](http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk)

## Allchurches Trust

<https://www.allchurches.co.uk/blog-posts/cut-your-costs-and-help-the-climate>

## The Psychology of Gardening — Harriet Gross

<https://www.routledge.com/The-Psychology-of-Gardening-1st-Edition/Gross/p/book/9781138207882>

## Green space and health — Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/POST-PN-0538>

## Sharing Eden: Green teachings from Jews, Christians and Muslims — David Shreeve, Natan Levy & Harfiyah Haleem

<https://www.kubepublishing.com/shop/sharing-eden-green-teachings-from-jews-christians-and-muslims/>

## Designing outdoor spaces for people with dementia

— Mary Marshall & Annie Pollock <https://www.rias.org.uk/bookshop/books/designing-outdoor-spaces-for-people-with-dementia/>

## Digging for Victory: Horticultural therapy with veterans for post-traumatic growth — Joanna Wise

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780429898518>

## Horticulture as Therapy: Principles and practice

— Sharon Simson, Martha Straus <https://www.crcpress.com/Horticulture-as-Therapy-Principles-and-Practice/Simson-Straus/p/book/9781560222798>

## Therapeutic Landscapes: An evidence-based approach to designing healing gardens and restorative outdoor spaces — Clare Cooper Marcus, Naomi Sachs

<https://www.wiley.com/en-gb/Therapeutic+Landscapes:+An+Evidence+Based+Approach+to+Designing+Healing+Gardens+and+Restorative+Outdoor+Spaces-p-9781118231913>

## Gardens and health: Implications for policy and practice — David Buck, The King's Fund

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/gardens-and-health>

## Healing Garden at Persley Castle Nursing Home — Aileen Barclay, Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability at Aberdeen University

[https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/documents/Persley\\_Garden\\_Project.pdf](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/documents/Persley_Garden_Project.pdf)

## Video of Persley Garden Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK-RerpGywM>

## Fruit and vegetables for health lesson plan — Royal Horticultural Society

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Lesson-Plan/Fruit-vegetables-for-health-lesson-plan?returnUrl=%2FResources%2FFind-a-resource%3Fso%3D0%26pi%3D0%26ps%3D10%26f%3D1%2C7%3A%26page%3D1>

## Hints and tips for gardening with special educational needs students — Royal Horticultural Society

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Info-Sheet/Hints-tips-for-gardening-with-SEN-students?returnUrl=%2FResources%2FFind-a-resource%3Fso%3D0%26pi%3D40%26ps%3D10%26f%3D1%2C6%3A%26page%3D5>

## The Healthy Healing Hub Project

[www.healthyhealinghubs.org.uk](http://www.healthyhealinghubs.org.uk)

## The healing power of plants — Royal Horticultural Society

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Info-Sheet/the-healing-power-of-plants?returnUrl=%2FResources%2FFind-a-resource%3Fso%3D0%26pi%3D70%26ps%3D10%26f%3D1%2C6%3A%26page%3D8>

## Gardening with a disability — Royal Horticultural Society

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=812>

## “How to set up a therapeutic garden” — Katherine Purvis, The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/18/how-to-set-up-therapeutic-garden-project>

## “The healing power of gardens and green space” — Gillian Straine, Church Times

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/4-may/features/features/the-healing-powers-of-gardens-and-green-space>

## “A green church is a just church” — Naomi Osinnowo, Evangelical Alliance

<https://www.eauk.org/news-and-views/a-green-church-is-a-just-church>

## Podcasts of talks by David Buck, Harriet Gross, Jim McManus and Alistair Griffiths at Green Health Live 2018 — Guild of Health and St Raphael

<https://gohealth.org.uk/resources/>

