

# Press Release

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## **RHS Britain in Bloom celebrates 45 years with a fresh new face**



In 2009 the RHS is launching Britain in Bloom, the UK's biggest and longest-running community gardening campaign with a fresh new face. On Saturday 21st March 2009, TV gardeners Charlie Dimmock and Chris Collins will join 200 volunteers in Crawley to launch the fresh face of Britain in Bloom and dispel the myth that the campaign is the preserve of chocolate box villages.

The RHS Britain in Bloom UK Finals alone involve tens of thousands of volunteers and benefit over 2.2m residents in cities, towns and villages across the UK. Yet new research conducted on behalf of the RHS shows that 78% of us still believe it is a competition only for rural villages, while 82% think it is only about adding more plants to local areas.\*

Inga Grimsey, Director General of the RHS, said, "Britain in Bloom is a fantastically powerful campaign that is recognised for building community spirit and benefiting the environment. \*\*It involves every kind of community imaginable, from inner city estates through to coastal towns. This weekend's events are all about challenging out of date perceptions about the campaign, and encouraging many more people to get involved in community gardening projects to improve where they live.

"We understand why a lot of people still associate Britain in Bloom with bedding plants and traditional villages. It was devised in 1964 by the tourist board as a way of marketing the country, and it played on the quintessentially English rural idyll. The RHS took on the running of the national campaign seven years ago, and we've been working with the Britain in Bloom network to introduce changes that make it much more relevant to the way people live now. The fresh face of Britain in Bloom is about community involvement, a sustainable approach to your local environment, and using the power of plants to green up and clean up where you live."

Crawley typifies the new face of Britain in Bloom with its diverse population and strong sense of community. The Crawley in Bloom group started 15 years ago and since then it has attracted over 1,000 volunteers. In 2008 there were over 69 active community gardening

projects that benefited Crawley's residents – from starting an interfaith garden through to planting up run down council estates and setting up residents' gardening clubs.

Each year around 68 cities, towns and villages make it through to the UK finals of Britain in Bloom (from over 1,100 regional/home nation participants), and over 600 groups take part in the non-competitive sister campaign to Britain in Bloom, RHS Neighbourhood Awards.\*\*\* The Britain in Bloom UK finalists compete across 13 categories, of which ten are for towns, cities and urban groups. From 2009, the judges will award top points to the entries who best evidence true community involvement, achievements in horticulture and in improving the environment as a whole.

Charlie Dimmock, television gardener and supporter of RHS Britain in Bloom, said, "At this time of year, people across the UK join together to become part of the Britain in Bloom campaign. They volunteer their time, energy and enthusiasm to make where they live a better place. By holding this event in Crawley, we'll show people that Britain in Bloom is relevant to everyone."

RHS Britain in Bloom is a great way of improving community spirit, so to volunteer your time and help your local Britain in Bloom group make where you live a better place, email [britaininbloom@rhs.org.uk](mailto:britaininbloom@rhs.org.uk) or to find out more visit [www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom](http://www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom)

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

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RHS Britain in Bloom is a UK-wide campaign which involves approximately 1,100 communities over its two year cycle (regional/home nation competitions and the UK finals). The campaign recognises best practice and achievements in horticulture, environmental responsibility and community participation.

\*The RHS Survey was conducted between 13 -15<sup>th</sup> March 2009, by research company Populus. The statistics referred to in the above release and here below, come from 1,409 respondents.

\*\*59% of people surveyed said that participating in Britain in Bloom would be beneficial to their community.

66% of people surveyed said that participating in Britain in Bloom would be beneficial to the environment.

\*\*\* The RHS Neighbourhood Awards scheme is the grass-roots partner to Britain in Bloom through which small groups of people are empowered to make a difference to their immediate environment (e.g. individual streets or a block of flats). In 2008 there were over 600 registered and active Neighbourhood Awards projects in the UK, the majority of which were within towns and cities.

#### **What's happening in Crawley – National Launch Event for Britain in Bloom**

In 2008, Crawley in Bloom, the local Interfaith Network and the borough council built the Interfaith Garden at West Green Park. On 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009, the same group of volunteers (over 200 people from

10 local community groups) will be returning to the garden to replant its flower beds, prune its rose bushes and plant a dove tree, as part of the town's on-going "in Bloom" initiatives.

In 2008 Crawley in Bloom worked on 69 projects, had the help of 1,321 volunteers and worked for over 4,000 hours making their town a better place to live.

The Interfaith Garden is open to all residents in Crawley and is representative of the 40 faiths that Crawley is home to. The launch will also be attended by representatives from the RHS, Britain in Bloom judges, local firemen and school children and neighbouring South and South East in Bloom groups. Work in the garden will begin at 10am and end at 12pm.

Journalists wishing to attend the launch event or send a photographer are welcome to do so - please contact Eulina or Georgie on the above contact details.

### **Crawley in Bloom (case study)**

Untidy and overgrown communal areas forming Bolney Court on the Bewbush Estate in Crawley, have been transformed into perfect, idyllic picnic spots thanks to its residents who are part of Crawley in Bloom.

Bolney resident and "in Bloom" member Mo Gilbert, explains, "About three years ago it was really quite depressing. Communal areas were littered with sacks full of rubbish, old bikes and even an old settee at one point. We used to have a lot of anti-social behaviour going on. Drugs used to be sold right outside my door! Since all the garden improvements the thugs have just disappeared, it's as if they don't like hanging out anywhere that is looked after.

"Before they started gardening people on the estate didn't speak to each other. We knew each other by sight but since the planting begun everyone knows they can call on each other for help if needed. We have a gasman in the street who will take a look at your boiler for you, a guy who repairs televisions and I have made curtains for a number of people – the gardening has brought the community together.

"The street is now covered in lavender and lots of beautiful plants. When I look out of my window I see people walking along and 9 out of 10 people walk along with their heads fixed on the beautiful displays. All these changes make the place feel like home."

### **Further Case studies**

#### **Bedford in Bloom (2009 large town/small city 35-100k category)**

Gary Burchmore, a Street Ranger for Bedfordshire's Pilgrim's Housing Association has worked with a community group to turn disused garages into gardens as part of the town's Britain in Bloom entry. "The community is 100% behind the gardening projects. Everyone came together to plan, design and choose all the plants. About 200 people turned up for the grand opening. Most residents have little gardening knowledge so we are introducing gardening training courses."

Linked to the growing your own theme is the work of the Bedford Slow Food Group, another community project involved in the Britain in Bloom entry. Through holding demonstrations and fun days the group aims to encourage people to turn their backs on processed and fast foods and to rediscover the taste of fresh produce.

#### **London Borough of Islington in Bloom (2009 city category)**

Eight years ago, when Esther Jury moved to her estate in Camden, she thought the place looked neglected. "It was really barren," she said. "There was litter everywhere, cigarette butts in all the flower beds and the place looked really unloved. Kids used to hang around on street corners and the place felt intimidating at times."

Esther comes from a gardening family so it was natural for her to try and brighten up the area with flowers. “At first I was a bit of a guerrilla gardener planting areas at night. People soon guessed it was me and started calling me ‘Alan’.”

Esther set about contacting the neighbours to form a residents’ group to improve the appearance and feel of the estate. With funding from Islington Council, Esther and the team have replanted all the flower beds with hedges and shrubs. The group has grown and more neighbours are involved than ever. The kids that used to be intimidating now want to be involved and find out more about gardening. People often comment to the group how enjoyable it is to see the colourful displays and what a difference it makes.

For other case studies please contact Eulina or Georgie on the above details.

### **RHS Britain in Bloom Finalists 2009**

**Champion of Champions:** Earsdon, Falkland, Ravenfield

**Large City:** Edinburgh, London Borough of Croydon

**City:** London Borough of Islington, Newport, Plymouth, Stockton-on-Tees

**Urban Community:** Aldwick (Bognor Regis), Birmingham City Centre, Dulwich (London), Eston (Middlesbrough), Kippax (Leeds), Manchester City Centre, Moor (Oxmoor, Huntingdon), Port Marine & Village Quarter (Portishead), Uddingston (Glasgow)

**Large Town/Small City (35k - 100K):** Bedford, Chester, Harrogate, Londonderry, Newcastle-Under-Lyme

**Large Town/Small City (12k - 35K):** Bury, Durham, Glenrothes, Kendal, Wisbech

**Coastal (12k & above):** Bangor, Bridlington, Cleethorpes, Colwyn Bay, Herne Bay, South Shields, St. Andrews (Scotland)

**Coastal (12k & below):** Hayle, Hunstanton, Lytham, St. Brelade, Swanage

**Town:** Morpeth, Oakham, Rustington, Thornbury, Ilkley

**Small Town:** Grouville, Liphook, Pitlochry, Ramsey, Tetbury

**Large Village:** Barwick in Elmet, Broughshane, East Hagbourne, Kinneswood, Kirkby Stephen, Limpsfield, St. Andrews, Usk, Wedmore

**Village:** Appleton Wiske, Chipping, Duffus, Filby, Rosliston, Scarva

**Small Village:** Stanghow, Tarrington Village

### **About the RHS**

The RHS believes that gardening improves the quality of life and that everyone should have access to great garden experiences. As a charity we help to bring gardening into people’s lives and support gardeners of all levels and abilities; whether they are expert horticulturalists or children who are planting seeds for the very first time.

**RHS membership is for anyone with an interest in gardening. Support the RHS and secure a healthy future for gardening. For more information call: 0845 130 4646, or visit [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)**

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