

APRIL 2026

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The CREATIVE SPIRITS Issue

HOMES ■ FOOD ■ CULTURE ■ PEOPLE ■ WELLBEING ■ STYLE

“The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies” – Gertrude Jekyll. For me that seed was sown as a young child in my nan’s greenhouse and on my dad’s allotment. A keen amateur gardener, I was fortunate that the opportunity of voluntary redundancy from the tech sector allowed me to change careers. Swapping microchips for micro-organisms, I took my RHS horticultural qualifications and retrained in Garden Design to turn my passion for plants into a new career. This spring, celebrate the benefits gardening has on our physical and mental wellbeing by joining in National Gardening Week (April 27 – May 3). Started by the RHS in 2012, the campaign encourages everyone to pass on their love of gardening. Up and down the country, garden centres, schools, allotment societies, gardening clubs and community gardens will be hosting talks, workshops, tours, and events to share their delight in gardening. Family activities like making mud pies, building fairy gardens and bug hotels can cultivate a lifelong interest in nature. Inspire others by sharing photos of what you’re growing or the wildlife visiting your garden on social media using #NGW2026 (more at nationalgardeningweek.org.uk/about)

Sowing the seeds of community connections

The award-winning intergenerational activities at Brampton Manor Care Home in Newmarket demonstrate the wellbeing benefits of gardening for all ages, and its power to build connections amongst residents and with the wider community. Children from St Louis and Fairstead House schools have been invited into the home to assist residents with planting activities, seeding joy and curiosity across the generations. In return for their help, residents made up seed packets of sunflower seeds for the children to enjoy growing at home.

Part of Boutique Care Homes, the team at Brampton Manor deliver a wide range of holistic wellbeing activities as part of their Life Enrichment Programme fostering independence and active participation to create therapeutic value. It’s well documented that gardening promotes mental and physical wellbeing for all of us, but for the elderly and those living with dementia, gardening’s multi-sensory experiences present numerous health benefits and opportunities for real engagement and enjoying the outdoors. For Brampton Manor’s residents, lovingly tending the garden provides gentle exercise, builds muscle tone, maintains dexterity, improves hand-eye co-ordination and enhances cognitive function whilst reducing stress and anxiety, encouraging reminiscence and building social connection.

The garden, raised planters, greenhouse and allotment provide fresh organic produce for the home’s kitchen and baking



SEEDING JOY

To celebrate National Gardening Week, Velvet’s Melanie Taylor explores the positive impact of gardening on our wellbeing – and how, in sharing our passion for plants, we can make it more accessible for all



Laura Wood, founder of Invisible Creations

sessions. Residents recently braved the inclement weather to join team members in planting fruit trees in the garden, kindly

donated by the Newmarket Community Nature Reserve as part of their initiative to connect green spaces across the town. “We’re working to redefine what a nature reserve can be, not just a distant protected area, but woven right through our community,” says Laura Nunes from Newmarket Community Nature Reserve (see facebook.com/NewmarketCNR for more information and to get involved). “Brampton Manor’s gardens are a perfect example of a green space that serves people while supporting nature. These fruit trees will feed residents and wildlife for decades to come, and we’re proud to have them as part of our growing green corridor.”

“Creating strong links with our community is a vital part of life here at Brampton Manor,” adds Akhi Goswami, Home

GETTING INVOLVED

Garden centres:

Two of our local garden centres offer planting advice sessions and kids' gardening clubs all year round.

Perrywood Garden Centre Sudbury:

book a Garden Advice Session with a Perrywood Plant Expert for just £5 (payable when you book and redeemable against plants and garden products)

Dobbies Bury St Edmunds:

Little Seedlings kids' gardening workshops take place on the first Sunday of every month – dobbies.com/little-seedlings-activities

Fairstead pupils with a Brampton Manor resident

Manager. "Our gardens aren't just nice to look at, they're working spaces that offer calm, purpose, and real engagement for residents. This partnership takes that to another level and shows we're genuinely part of Newmarket's green future."

This summer visitors will be welcomed into

Brampton Manor's beautiful, landscaped gardens for a third year as part of the National Garden Scheme openings on June 25 (more at ngs.org.uk/gardens/brampton-manor-care-home-cb8 and boutiquecarehomes.co.uk/care-homes/suffolk/brampton-manor).

Making gardens safer with innovative aids

As a garden designer, I'm sometimes asked for solutions for elderly, disabled or vulnerable clients to make them feel safer in their gardens. An innovative range of garden mobility products combine safety with empowerment, mitigating the risk of falls and enabling people to enjoy their gardens for longer.

Inspired by Invisible Creations Founder, Laura Wood's grandmother, the team at PROCare created their garden grab rail range as part of the Royal College of Art's Pathfinder Innovation project supported by the Design Age Institute (see invisiblecreations.co.uk). Conducting user workshops and focus groups, they designed a range that integrates grab rails into everyday items like plant pots, window boxes, and path lights with the added benefit of enhancing home security by removing the often-used clinical handrails which are visible clues of vulnerability. Laura says: "Gardens are our sanctuaries, and our enjoyment shouldn't be limited or defined by circumstances outside of our control. Our Invisible Creations range at PROCare is dedicated to enhancing freedom of movement and reducing falls, empowering individuals with the confidence to navigate their homes and gardens with ease."

Whatever our age, the magic of gardening lies in its ability to improve our health and wellbeing, whether that's burning calories, improving flexibility and stamina from all the bending and stretching, or lowering the stress hormone cortisol and raising our serotonin levels to enhance our mood. However you get involved, through joining a community event, weeding your own veg patch or planting up a container for a balcony, National Gardening Week celebrates the potential we have to build a sustainable environment and healthier, inclusive communities by growing together.

Melanie runs gardening and design company Hazelwood Landscapes. To find out more, email melanie.taylor@hazelwoodlandscapes.co.uk or visit hazelwoodlandscapes.co.uk

GARDENS TO VISIT AND TALKS TO ATTEND

Visit **RHS Garden Hyde Hall at Chelmsford** throughout National Gardening Week for daily workshops and guided tours and wildlife demonstrations and family fun at the weekends.

Nearby **Writtle College** is also holding a Spring Planting workshop on April 28 – nationalgardeningweek.org.uk/events/monday-28th-april-2026/rhs-garden-spring-programme

Fullers Mill Garden Opening & Plant Sale: on May 3, this seven-acre waterside oasis in West Stow will host a special National Garden Scheme (NGS) open day from 11am to 5pm, featuring a plant stall with rare and unusual shrubs – findagarden.ngs.org.uk/garden/22031/fullers-mill-garden

Club talks:

Many local gardening clubs will host talks in early May.

Membership is usually on an annual basis but some welcome

non-members for a nominal fee. Contact individual clubs.

May 7: Fowlmere and Thriplow Gardening Club: David Hinckley 'Growing Heritage Tomatoes' – thriplow.org.uk/gardening-club

May 7: Bourn Garden Club: Kerrie Lloyd-Dawson 'How we made our garden from blank canvas to NGS in four years' – bournclub.co.uk

May 11: Hartest and District Garden Club: 'Grow your own food anywhere' – harestgardeningclub.onesuffolk.net

May 12: Histon and Impington Garden Club: Huw Richards 'Orchids' – histimgardenclub.wordpress.com

May 13: Girton Garden Society: Keith Jordan 'Managing a college garden for sustainability, biodiversity and wellbeing' – girtongardensociety.co.uk