

Green Fingers [C1]

Per capire meglio le radici della passione britannica per il giardinaggio, abbiamo parlato con la Dr. ssa. Twigs Way, specialista di giardini e paesaggi.

The United Kingdom is home to more gardeners per capita, with more gardens open to the public, than any other nation in the world. What lies behind this national passion for plants and green spaces? What do people get out of gardening? To find out, we contacted Dr. Twigs Way, a researcher and writer in garden history and designed landscapes, and course director for the [MA](#) in Garden History at the University of Buckingham. Way is fascinated by the past: she studies the role of flowers, gardens and landscapes in art and culture of all kinds. As Way explains, every garden [is grown](#) by people, in a particular time and place. We began by asking her if there is any such thing as a British or English garden. **Dr. Twigs Way (English accent):** The English garden, as people often '[shorthand](#)' think about it, is that [cottage](#) garden with mixed flowers or what becomes the Gertrude Jekyll-style garden in the late 19th, early 20th century with a sort of wilder component. And I think that's what people are often [short-cutting](#) to when they think about the English gardens. I think we have to be quite careful in saying that the English garden is something very specific and different. There is no difference between an English mediaeval [peasant](#) garden and a French mediaeval [peasant](#) garden, basically. If we are growing [parsnips](#), we are growing [parsnips](#). [There is no two ways about it](#). But if we're [narrowing it down](#) to the decorative garden of the late 19th century, then that's something very specific.

SOFT FOCUS

One plant that features prominently in many British gardens, and has grown into a national obsession, is [grass](#). [Lawns](#) give gardens a [soft focus](#) with a [hard-wearing, utilitarian edge](#). [Lawns](#) also provide one of the favourite of all British aromas: freshly-cut [grass](#). [Pleasing on the eye](#), these small [patches](#) of lawn are a reminder of [timeless](#) pastoral English landscapes, as

Way explains. **Dr. Twigs Way:** Because of the climate, there is something specific, as there are in all countries, about what we can and cannot successfully do. It has always been said that we are brilliant with grass. And we are brilliant with grass. We have fantastic grass. You cannot beat us to the grass. The grass is occasionally muddy, but it is grass. We have much better grass than Italy has, or Morocco or anywhere like that. Grass is us. We are good at grass. And in a way that has defined what we do. So when we had what we call the parterres à l'angloise, those are just plots of grass, basically, as opposed to the ones in France, which didn't have so many grass. They were a similar style, but they didn't have the grass.

SEASONALITY

The British climate offers something that many other countries can't: seasonality. Although climate change is now blurring the edges of the seasons for all flora and fauna, the UK gardening calendar still has very clear divisions, says Way. **Dr. Twigs Way:** Our climate is very different. It also encourages perhaps more than other countries the idea of the extreme seasonality, whereby in winter we have very, very little, and in summer we have an awful lot. So we have those extremes of things. That's one of the reasons why in the Tudor period there was quite a lot of use of artificial colour and painted materials and also, brick dust and chalk dust and shells because there really was very, very little in the way of things growing in winter in England. You do not come to England to look at winter gardens [at least] until very recently! And of course, all our wonderful winter gardens that we have are primarily made with things from abroad.

WILDFLOWERS

Fashions change, which is as true for gardening as any other pastime. So what are today's main preoccupations in the UK, and how does climate change affect those trends? **Dr. Twigs Way:** I think the major trends at the moment are very much looking at the way in which the environment, and particularly wildflowers, but also of course insects and fauna, can be reintroduced into the garden. Depending on whether you're in the urban or

the rural areas, a garden is an oasis in amongst really what is a **barren** desert for the environment. So a lot of major designers at the moment will be concentrating on reintegrating the wildflowers into the garden and also very much looking to provide sources for food and for **shelter** for insects.

COMMON GROUND

Anyone can garden, and through the centuries, gardening has become a British national passion. Around 87 per cent of British **households** currently have a garden. We asked Way, given that gardening is so **widespread**, whether it could bring social classes or cultures together. **Dr. Twigs Way:** By **background** I'm an archaeologist and particularly interested in environmental and landscape archaeology and the way people interact with their **surroundings** and their landscapes, and how that expresses power and relationships through social context. So all design is cultural. And cultural relationships are **played out** through design in all sorts of ways and manner, organisation of living space and everything. I think it's always true to say that gardening is one of those topics, a bit like the weather (though the weather can be a little bit divisive nowadays, depending on which side of the climate **argument** you fall on), I think a conversation about horticulture, anyway, can be a great opener, fits well with polite society, so to speak. You can talk to nearly anyone about the garden and find a common ground.

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Glossary

- **Pleasing on the eye** = piacevole alla vista
- **timeless** = senza tempo
- **widespread** = diffuso
- **background** = per formazione
- **hard-wearing** = resistente
- **played out** = evolversi
- **an awful lot** = un sacco di
- **patches** = appezzamenti
- **narrowing it down** = ridurre
- **soft focus** = aspetto morbido
- **utilitarian edge** = approccio utilitaristico
- **muddy** = fangoso
- **plots** = terreni
- **households** = case
- **surroundings** = ambiente
- **There is no two ways about it** = è l'unico modo
- **Lawns** = prati
- **is grown** = coltivare
- **barren** = sterile
- **shelter** = rifugio
- **shells** = conchiglie
- **shorthand** = in modo abbreviato
- **short-cutting** = usare scorciatoie
- **peasant** = contadino
- **parsnips** = pastinache
- **grass** = erba
- **brick dust** = polvere di mattoni
- **MA** = laurea magistrale (Master of Arts)
- **blurring the edges** = sfumare i confini
- **chalk dust** = polvere di gesso
- **argument** = controversia
- **cottage** = casetta di campagna