

A Nation of Gardeners: Labour of Love [B2]

Condizionati o forse ispirati dal clima imprevedibile, gli inglesi amano il giardinaggio. Più che un passatempo, curare un prato, dei fiori o un orto fa parte del carattere nazionale.

Gertrude Jekyll, the British horticulturist and garden designer, wrote in 1899 that, "the love of gardening is a seed that once sown never dies." While scattered across the world, more of these seeds are sown in the UK than perhaps anywhere else. There is something quintessentially English about gardening and gardens. Around three-quarters of Britons have access to a private garden of some kind, and some twenty-seven million people use theirs to grow plants, trees and flowers. That's a lot of green fingers...

ROOT CAUSES

A combination of root causes lies behind this national obsession. As Britain is an island, and influenced by the Gulf Stream, it has a mild, temperate climate with frequent rainfall ideal for keeping gardens lush and green. The country's social, economic and imperial history has influenced the national mindset towards gardening. This includes the desire to explore: exotic plants were brought back to study from the far reaches of Britain's once vast empire.

ROYAL FLAMBOYANCE

The Romans built formal gardens across Britain, filled with some of their favourite fruits, vegetables and herbs. Medieval gardens grew the crops necessary to feed families throughout the year. Monasteries added new plants from abroad to their large kitchen gardens. Soon, instead of their mainly functional use, gardens became more flamboyant, and a show of power and good taste of royal rulers. Henry VIII created lavish and colourful gardens at his palaces. Elizabeth I inspired the nation as a lover of flowers

and gardens, creating a symbol of herself as a royal English rose. Even today, the rose remains Britain's favourite garden flower.

STATUS SYMBOL

The 16th century was the golden age of English gardens, with the first gardening guides published and Huguenot refugees from France helping to transform gardening and farming. Plants became [collectible](#), and gardens a status symbol for the wealthy. The architecture of the following century's grand houses incorporated ornamental gardens in the Italian and French style. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) was founded in 1804 and actively promoted gardening in the era of the English Landscape Movement. Designers like Lancelot 'Capability' Brown worked to produce visions of Arcadia, still seen today in Stourhead gardens in Wiltshire and Studley Royal Park in Yorkshire.

BENEFITS

As industrialisation transformed both cities and countryside alike, the Victorians recognised the health benefits of gardens and green spaces. The first public parks created much-needed urban breathing spaces for the less [well-off](#), [boasting](#) fresh air and space to exercise and hold meetings and public events. New planning rules encouraged gardens to be placed at the front and back of urban and suburban housing. A cultural preference for houses with gardens, however small, continues. The average UK garden size today is 188 square-metres.

GROW YOUR OWN

During both World Wars, the British population was encouraged to '[Dig](#) for Victory' by growing fruit and vegetables in domestic gardens to help overcome food [shortages](#). Today's 'grow your own' trend, in [allotments](#), community gardens or home growing, continues this tradition. Around 28 per cent of the UK population has a vegetable [patch](#) in their garden. Studies show that spending time in a garden is strongly linked to reducing stress and

improving physical and mental health. This was certainly demonstrated during the recent Covid crisis. It's not only health benefits, either: the RHS says the UK gardening industry contributes £45 billion annually to [GDP](#).

NEW TECHNOLOGY

New technology provides a virtual gardening galaxy of websites, blogs, vlogs, and social media providing inspiration and advice on how best to garden and grow. Every year, the UK's National Garden [Scheme](#) makes more than 3,300 private gardens accessible to the public, while the RHS, National Trust and Gardens Trust manage more than six hundred beautiful [heritage](#) gardens for over six million members. Everyone has their favourite. For centuries, British people have expressed their identity through their gardens. It is a process of constant change. As Peter Hughes, [chairman](#) of the Gardens Trust, says: "No garden is ever finished. Always, it is evolving."

Glossary

- **lush** = rigoglioso, fiorito
- **the far reaches** = i confini
- **flamboyant** = stravagante
- **well-off** = benestante
- **boasting** = vantarsi di
- **seed** = seme
- **Gulf Stream** = corrente del Golfo
- **Dig** = scavare
- **crops** = coltivazioni
- **collectible** = pezzo da collezione
- **shortages** = carenze
- **Scheme** = piano
- **heritage** = patrimonio
- **allotments** = orti
- **patch** = appezzamento
- **sown** = seminare
- **scattered** = sparsi
- **root causes** = origini
- **mild** = mite, temperato
- **rulers** = governanti
- **lavish** = lussuosi
- **GDP** = PIL (gross domestic product)
- **chairman** = presidente