



# The PlantforLife Environment Report

An insight into the UK's green credentials





**Gardening  
has a huge  
role to play in  
environmental  
sustainability**

## Foreword

PlantforLife was launched in 2004 to promote the psychological and physical benefits of plants, flowers and trees, and encourage us to get gardening.

**With environmental issues such as climate change and sustainable consumption so high on the public agenda, our fresh focus for the coming years is to raise awareness of the role gardening and gardeners can play in safeguarding the planet for future generations, and then offer green advice to gardeners.**

So how concerned are we about the planet? How much do we know about the environmental benefits of plants, flowers and trees? And just how green are Britain's gardens and gardeners? The PlantforLife Environment Report unveils the results of a nationwide study<sup>1</sup> which aimed to find this out.

It also contains simple and relevant steps from our expert gardener, Chris Collins, to help gardeners improve their green credentials.

# Climate Concern

The PlantforLife report revealed that we are all concerned about the environment.

The main concerns are:

Climate change **65%**

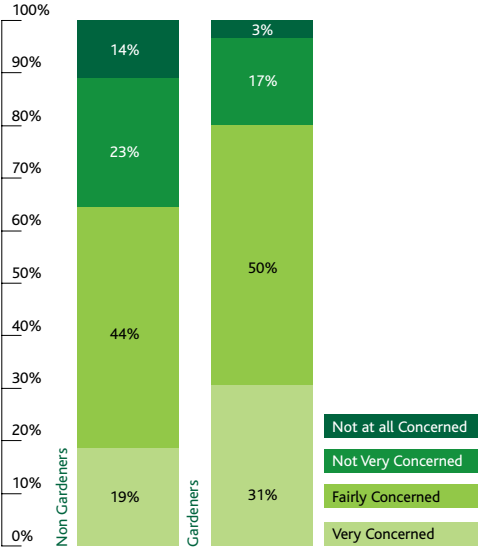
Use of pesticides, fertilisers and chemicals **44%**

The loss of green belt land **42%**

Loss of trees and hedgerows **41%**

Noise pollution **41%**

Concern for the environment by gardener vs. non-gardener



Perhaps unsurprisingly, gardeners tend to worry more about the environment than non-gardeners, suggesting that gardening makes people more attuned to the planet, and therefore more concerned for its safekeeping.



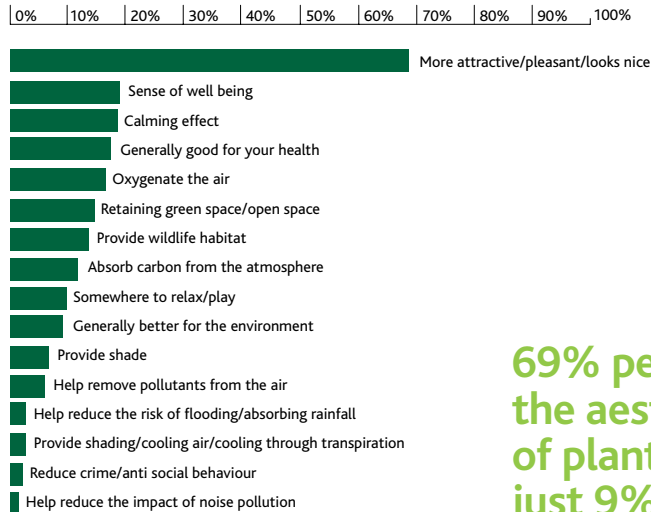
# Gardens and the Environment

Gardening has a huge role to play in environmental sustainability:

- How often we water our gardens impacts on domestic water consumption
- Gardens have the ability to oxygenate the air and help remove harmful pollutants from the atmosphere
- Composting recycles garden and kitchen waste, providing a ready source of nutrition for the soil
- Planting trees and plants helps to absorb rainfall and anchor the soil

Our gardening attitudes are heading in the right direction but there is still lots to do...

## Benefits of growing plants in the built environment



**69% people recognise the aesthetic benefit of plants compared to just 9% recognising the environmental benefits**

Those surveyed identified a wide range of both environmental and psychosocial benefits of flowers, plants and trees. Currently, however, the aesthetic benefits of a garden are more widely recognised.

Encouragingly, the report shows that we believe plants and planting have a part to play in helping combat environmental issues:

**94%**

agree that flowers, plants and trees are important for the built environment

**93%**

believe domestic gardens have a part to play in helping protect the planet

**52%**

of those with a garden feel that it has a positive impact on reducing the effects of climate change

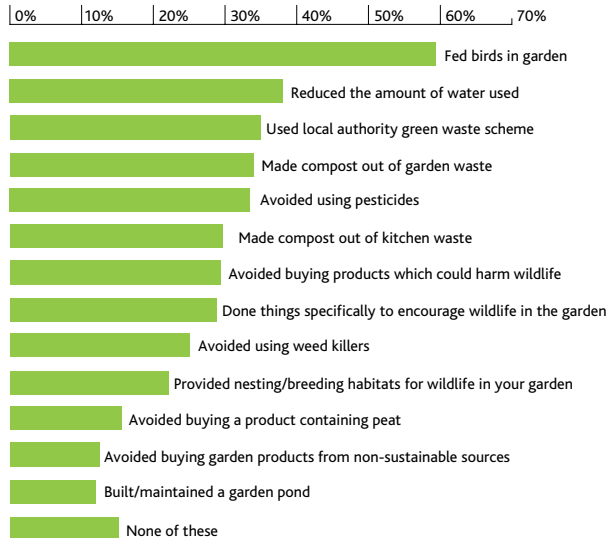


# Taking Action

PlantforLife tested respondents' green credentials by presenting them with a list of 13 different green gardening actions and asking which ones they, or another member of their household, had undertaken in the last 12 months.

Almost nine in ten garden owners (85%) undertook at least one of these green gardening activities and, on average, they undertook four.

## Green activities undertaken in the garden



**38%**  
reduced the amount of  
water used

**34%**  
made compost out of  
garden waste

**25%**  
avoided using weed killers

While this is a great start, there's always room for improvement, so what can we do in our garden sheds and flowers beds to up our green credentials? PlantforLife expert gardener, Chris Collins, offers his advice.



# 1. Buying Local

Almost 50% of the gardeners quizzed would be willing to pay more for locally produced plants and one in five said they would pay as much as 20% more for the locally grown equivalent plant.



## Chris' Advice

There are many benefits of buying local but the most important things to consider are the effects on the environment.

- If you buy locally your plants will have notched up fewer 'plant miles'
- Plus, they will have been grown by the retailer or another local business
- This means they are more likely to suit the local climate and conditions, giving them a strong start
- Finally, buying locally allows for increased levels of local employment and benefits to the local economy



## 2. Reducing Water Usage

38% of respondents have reduced their water usage over the last year. On average, they've undertaken a combination of three different actions to do so.

**51%**

Collected rainwater for watering the garden

**34%**

Recycled water from the house to water the garden

**33%**

Reduced amount of watering

**24%**

Stopped using sprinklers

**20%**

Stopped using a hosepipe

However, only 8% of those who have reduced their water usage over the last year have adopted gardening methods which reduce the need for watering e.g. purchasing drought resistant plants or using mulches to prevent soil drying out.

**So what else can gardeners do to reduce the amount of water they use in the garden, and why is this important?**



# Chris' Advice

It's easy to forget how incredibly important water is and therefore it's vital to think about how we use it – all of the time. So, here are some tips:

- Buy yourself a water butt and catch as much rainwater as you can
- Established plants can be watered from recycled domestic water
- Try to install as many collection points around the garden as possible
- Water should be carefully applied to the base of the plant and at a cool point in the day – early evening is a good time
- Also, applying a mulch of organic matter such as bark chippings or gravel will reduce water loss
- Don't water your lawn – it will survive until the next rain shower. In fact, if the lawn is cut no shorter than 2.5cm then it almost always stays green



66% of Britain's  
gardeners feed birds

# 3. Providing for Wildlife

More than half of us (58%) are concerned about the impact climate change will have on wildlife.

Of those undertaking green actions in the garden, 66% feed birds, 29% have specifically done other things to encourage wildlife into the garden and 22% have provided nesting or breeding habitats. A further 29% avoid buying products which could be harmful to wild animals.



Given the chance, most wildlife will not hesitate to enjoy your garden. Depending on the type of wildlife you want to encourage into your garden, try some of these simple steps:

- For bees and butterflies try planting a bed or border of plants such as Lavender or Hebe. These types of plants enjoy long flowering periods and will be an excellent source of nectar
- If you want to encourage small birds try putting up bird boxes in spring and leaving out bird feeders in winter
- Alternatively, a small fish-free pond full of aquatic plant life can encourage a variety of wildlife, including frogs and newts

# 4. Practicing Organic Gardening

There are various strategies which can be employed to avoid the use of pesticides, weedkillers and peat, but we are being slow to adopt these more organic methods in our gardens.

The report revealed that:

**33%**  
of gardeners avoid using pesticides

**25%**  
avoid using weedkillers

**16%**  
avoid buying products containing peat



When faced with a slug or weed invasion, one in five pesticide avoiders will use chemicals if they think it's the only way to control the problem, and one in ten weedkiller avoiders will do the same.

Research also showed awareness of the problems associated with peat use was low:

- Only a third of respondents had an understanding of the environmental issues surrounding the use of peat
- Around half didn't know that peat is an ingredient in grow bags and multi-purpose compost

The garden industry has recently launched a government-backed Growing Media Initiative which aims to accelerate the use of reduced peat and peat free products by gardeners in the UK.

# Chris' Advice

Here are a few organic practices which we could all try:

- Look out for expanding ranges of organic and environmentally friendly products available in garden centres and nurseries
- You can also try mulching – spreading organic materials onto the soil surface and around plants – helping to reduce weeds, aid water retention and prevent frost
- Always follow label instructions when using pesticides or other garden products



# 5. Composting

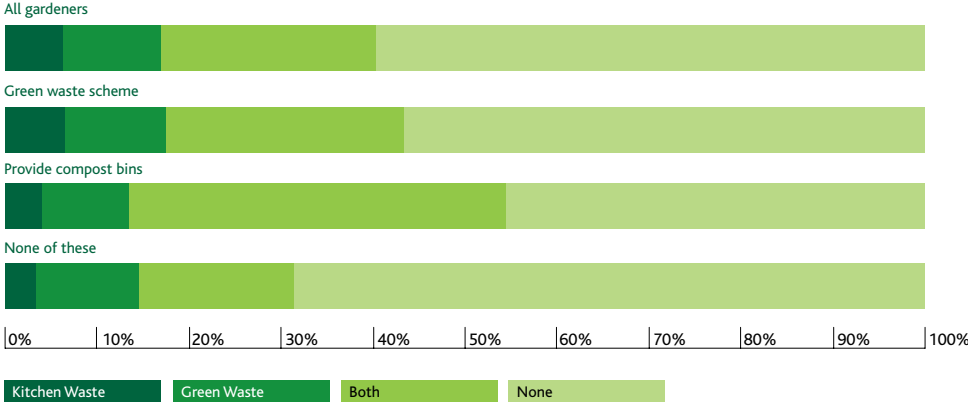
The PlantforLife report discovered that just over a third of respondents (34%) compost garden waste (with keener gardeners tending to do more), compared to 30% of respondents who compost household waste.

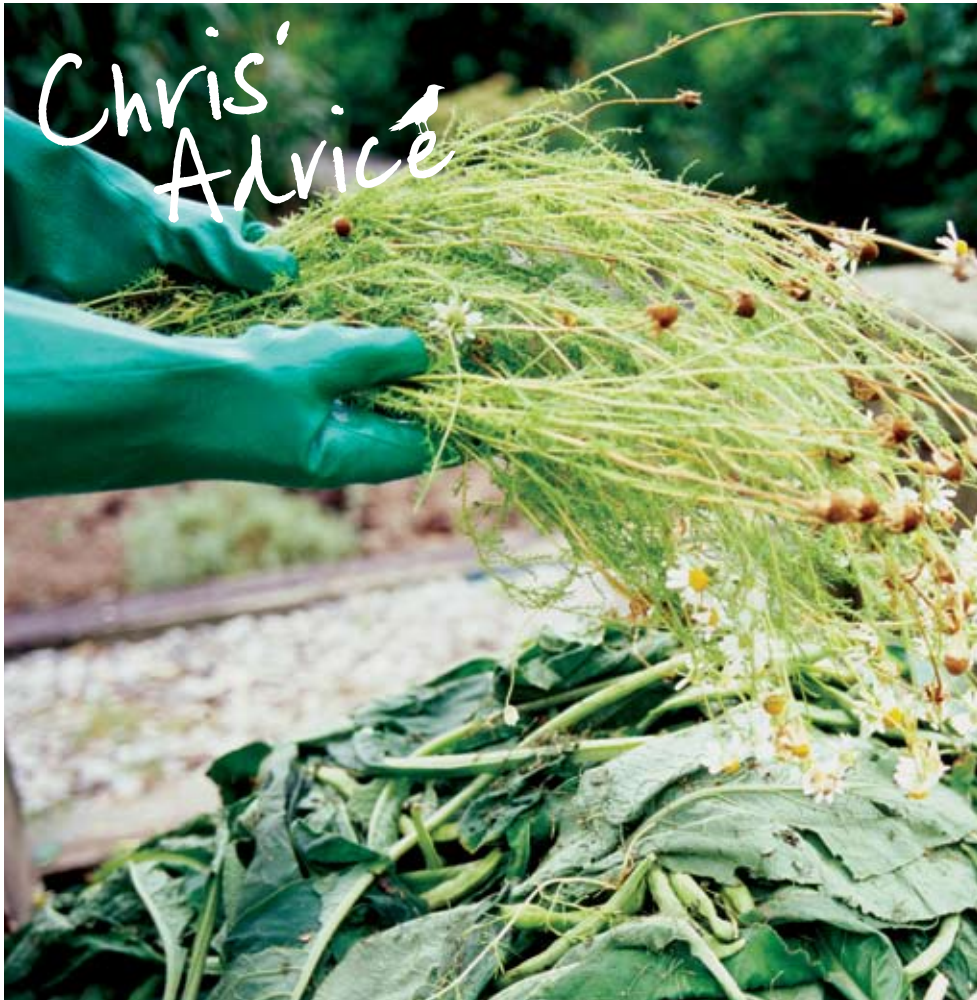
## Over a third of us compost garden waste

The provision of a local authority green waste scheme appears to have a positive impact on levels of composting. 80% of survey respondents have such a scheme and composting of both kitchen and household waste increases

significantly when this is provided. The impact is greater still when free or subsidised compost bins are made available.

Impact of local authority scheme on levels of composting





Composting is the lifeline of the garden and will guarantee success when growing plants. Here are the do's:

- All vegetative waste should go in the compost bin to rot down. No waste!
- Organic household waste such as teabags and newspapers can be added too
- In the autumn, collect fallen leaves and place them in perforated plastic bags. They make wonderful nutrient-rich organic compost
- Look out for peat-reduced and peat-free compost in your local garden centre

And the don'ts:

- Avoid putting meat, fish or dairy products on the compost heap, as vermin may be attracted
- Avoid putting on weeds that have set seed, weed roots or obviously diseased material

## Survey Methodology

<sup>1</sup>The data draws upon the results of consumer research undertaken by the HTA over the period of 1st to 7th June 2007 when a representative sample of 1014 GB adults were interviewed at home on behalf of the HTA by IPSOS-Mori as part of their Capibus Omnibus survey (<http://www.capibus.com/capiserv.asp>)

Log on to [www.plantforlife.info](http://www.plantforlife.info) for gardening advice, planting information and your nearest garden centre or nursery.



PlantforLife was launched in 2004 by the Horticultural Trades Association, with the aim of helping people to make the most of their gardens. The evidence of the benefits is collated from published scientific papers for the HTA by Reading University.



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