



Part of RHS **BRITAIN IN BLOOM**



## Heart of England in Bloom Newsletter May 2022

### Greetings

There is lots of activity now in gardens and Spring really has sprung - although sometimes the temperature is not as high as we might like. As you will see, at the Heart of England in Bloom we are seriously preparing for our visits in the Summer and have been making sure we are up to date with all that the RHS requires. We have a healthy number of entries in all categories and it will be wonderful to get back to visiting you all again. Judges will be getting in touch soon to arrange dates and times. We are really looking forward to seeing you.

**Carol**

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## Developing Judges

On 28 April a group of Heart of England in Bloom judges gathered in Leamington Spa Town Hall for a training session. We were also joined by four new recruits to the team, who have all been members of Bloom groups so know what it is like to be assessed. The main aim of the session was to refresh ourselves on procedures for judging and to learn about the latest developments in the RHS Britain in Bloom criteria for assessment.

We were very pleased to welcome Ann Holland, one of the Britain in Bloom National Judges, who talked through the new ideas. Ann said that during judging, whether for 'in-Bloom' or 'It's Your Neighbourhood' it is very important for a group to 'tell their story'. How has the group developed and how does it fit into the local context? Also, where is the group going? What are the plans for further development? The judges will be trying to 'tease out the back story'.

We discussed how the RHS philosophy is changing and embracing ideas about climate change and sustainability. Although we can't change all our planting overnight, a mix of perennials and annuals will be acceptable and there will be an increasing emphasis on working towards more perennial planting.



There were questions about weeds and it was interesting to note that weeds can be acceptable in appropriate places. The important thing is to explain why plants are where they are. It's the 'right plant in the right place' idea.

Similarly we know that we must eventually stop using peat but this might not be immediately possible and again, 'working towards' being peat-free is the message.



Where a portfolio is required (for Bloom groups) Ann noted that 'punchy portfolios' are good. Judges like to see Bullet points, linked with the judging criteria.



After Ann's very informal presentation, groups of judges went out to look at the gardens in Leamington, talking about how they might score them and discussing their observations. Meanwhile the four new recruits went through an induction and they will go out this summer with more experienced judges usually to It's Your Neighbourhood assessments. We will introduce the new judges in another Newsletter.

The pictures, by Helen Betts, show Jepherson Gardens in Leamington Spa.

### **Dates for your diary - Awards!**

The Awards Ceremony for in-Bloom entries will be on Thursday 15 September from 10-1pm in Sutton Coldfield.

The Awards Ceremony for It's Your Neighbourhood entries will be on Thursday 22 September at the Tally Ho Centre, Birmingham

Watch out for further information later.



## Creating a Wildlife Haven for your Garden

One of the most rewarding additions we ever made to our garden was to add a pond. It attracts so much interesting wildlife that I wouldn't want to be without it! A pond can not only be an attractive feature that adds colour, light and movement, but it can be a full ecosystem where amphibians can breed and a variety of pond life can make their homes.

There are various ways to construct a formal, informal or mini pond and it's best to choose the right size and method to suit your garden, environment and situation. Here are a few easy steps to create a pond, using a flexible liner:



*(Photos courtesy of Getty Images).*

1. Lay out shape: The easiest way to determine the size and shape of your pond is to lay out the shape on the ground using a length of rope or hosepipe.

Try to position the pond so it is sheltered from cold prevailing winds and receives sunlight for at least half the day. Where possible avoid overhanging deciduous trees as their leaves and blossom will fall into the

pond. Also, avoid areas where surface water tends to collect, or areas with a high water table as this could push up under the pond liner and create problems.

2. Level off: Dig the pond or water garden to the desired shape, taking care to ensure the sides are sloping rather than vertical, the shape is down to personal preference but it's always best to create a shape that allows a natural flow of water.

Avoid complex shapes, as this can lead to construction difficulties. To create areas for marginal plants, leave steps from 20cm to 40cm deep. For a perfect finish ensure that the top edge of the pond is level.



3. Lay down the underlay and pond liner: Once the pond is dug and all sharp stones have been removed, place underlay on the base and sides of the excavation and place the liner in position. Should you need to tread on the liner, be sure to remove shoes to avoid piercing. Anchor liner in position with bricks around the edge of the liner, not the excavation.



4. Add water: Fill the pond with water, preferably use collected rainwater and run it into the pond gradually, at the same time pulling and tucking the liner into shape to ensure a neat finish.

Fill the pond completely and leave overnight to ensure proper settlement. Trim off excess pond liner and underlay, leaving a minimum of 30cm overlap for anchorage.

5. Finish with edging: Complete your pond by adding edging in stone or paving as desired. Make sure you allow a small overhang to protect any exposed liner from direct sunlight. If you prefer, you can use grass turf, which may overhang and touch the water.

6. Add equipment: Your pond is now ready. It's time to add your pump, filter and lighting. Plants can be introduced to your pond approximately 1-2 weeks after the initial filling with water. Carefully selected native species will support your local wildlife. Once the pond is planted, wait about a month for the plants to settle in before adding any fish.

For more helpful information about how to make a pond for your garden, follow the Royal Horticultural Society link at:

[https://www.rhsplants.co.uk/features/\\_/articles-and-advice/how-to-garden/how-to-make-a-garden-pond/articleid.981/](https://www.rhsplants.co.uk/features/_/articles-and-advice/how-to-garden/how-to-make-a-garden-pond/articleid.981/)

Good Luck! Donna Loasby



