

# Our Work in 2018



Protecting our  
seed heritage

Striving for an  
organic future

Inspiring the  
next generation



## Welcome to our review of activities in 2018, the charity's Diamond Jubilee year.

This review contains a brief summary of our work supporting more people to embrace organic growing.

2018 saw the Board of Trustees focus on the potential sale of Ryton Gardens, to put the charity in the best position for a long and fruitful future, whilst also preparing the charity's five year Strategic Plan to take us forward to 2023.

In our Strategic Plan we have outlined the organisation's five priorities to continue to achieve our mission; that of promoting and advancing the use of organic growing with its benefits to plants, people and communities. A full copy of our strategic plan can be found on our website ([gardenorganic.org.uk/charity-information](http://gardenorganic.org.uk/charity-information)) or by request to 024 7630 8210, however they are summarised below:

1. We will extend access to organic horticultural knowledge across the whole country, as widely as possible. We know there is increasing interest in greater sustainability and we need to be preaching to the unconverted, to help and support people moving towards an organic approach to gardening.
2. We will protect our unique plant genetic resources and biodiversity. Our Heritage Seed Library is a wonderful example of how to achieve this in practice.

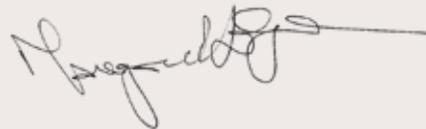
3. We will contribute to ongoing research - principally through our members' experiments - enhancing these, increasing participation and sharing results more widely.

4. We must influence policy at national level, making sure the definition of organic is not dumbed down, and campaigning for what we know to be right.

5. We will manage the charity as efficiently and effectively as possible - the better managed we are, the more we all will be able to achieve.

Whilst the Board of Trustees has been planning for the future, our staff have, as ever, continued to work hard for your charity. Supported by our invaluable volunteers, we have been inspiring and teaching people about our passion - organic and sustainable growing - in settings as diverse as care homes, schools and waste disposal facilities.

I remain immensely proud of the work of the charity that we, as members, support, and hope you are too. Together we are improving our precious planet, one garden at a time.



Margaret Eyre  
Chair of Trustees

## Garden Organic - Annual Review 2018

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## SUPPORT US

**Garden Organic members play a vital role in supporting our charity's work. You could get even more involved in helping us to spread the word about the many benefits of organic gardening by:**

- joining our Heritage Seed Library
- making a donation
- volunteering

To find out more – or for any other enquiry  
**T:** 024 7630 3517  
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**W:** [gardenorganic.org.uk](http://gardenorganic.org.uk)



A selection of images from our Diamond Jubilee celebration in May

# Protecting our seed heritage

Pea Jackson Grey Back

**O**ur Heritage Seed Library, founded in the 1970s, continues to remain as vibrant and relevant as it has ever been through a number of different initiatives.

## Managing the collection

Following background research and growing trials we added 9 new varieties to the collection in 2018 which will now be conserved and seed stores 'bulked up' for future distribution.

10 varieties were removed from the collection as they are now widely available, or were discovered to be synonymous with a commercial variety. This means that we can redirect our resources to assessing new donations to the collection, of which we have around 40 seed samples waiting to be trialled.

## Heritage across the UK

In 2018 we continued working with partners and display gardens to showcase our heritage varieties, with particular emphasis on local and historical varieties. In 2018 these included Highgrove (Gloucestershire), Dumfries House (East Ayrshire), St Fagans National Museum of History (Cardiff), Ordsall Hall

(Manchester) and Belmont Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons (Oxfordshire). These partnerships highlight the important conservation work we do to a wider audience and support our ambition to see HSL varieties growing in display gardens across the UK.

## Members' seed distribution

155 varieties were shared with HSL members, including 11 new and 50 organically certified. In total, 3,179 orders were processed, equating to approximately 19,000 seed packets - all hand packed and dispatched by the team and volunteers. French bean proved the most popular vegetable, with on average, one packet included in every order!

## Seed Guardians and Variety Champions

Our volunteer Seed Guardians and Variety Champions remain invaluable in their role as seed savers for the library. In 2018 - a difficult year for many growers - our Seed Guardians returned seed equivalent to 24,600 packets. Overheating in our polytunnels resulted in

a poor year for runner beans and broad beans, so we will be experimenting with more external isolation cages in 2019 to protect against extreme temperatures.

Despite these challenges, we produced the equivalent of over 24,000 packets of seed!

## Organic seed networks

In 2018 we supported 37 seed swaps around the UK, including Seedy Sunday in Brighton, helping to raise the profile of our work, attract new members and support these fantastic initiatives. As well as sharing seed and information, we also delivered talks to local gardening groups and events throughout the year.

## Oak Tree Project

We delivered our first two acorn sowing workshops in collaboration with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. This Heritage Lottery Funded project with Princethorpe Woodlands Living Landscape scheme supports the ancient oak trees at Coombe Country Park by collecting and sowing acorns from these ancient woodlands. This project will continue over the next two years.

# Furthering organic research

**A**lthough we have been researching organic growing methods for 60 years, there is always more to discover.

## Members' Experiments

In 2018 we undertook three members' experiments; a survey of comfrey use, a trial of growing edible lupins, and a test to identify the most effective drink for trapping slugs. A total of 450 members took part from across the country.

The survey of comfrey use highlighted that people have been growing comfrey for a long period of time; 64% had grown it for more than 10 years, and 37% for more than 30 years. 44% originally obtained their comfrey from Garden Organic or the Organic Gardening Catalogue. The top two uses of comfrey were to improve soil fertility (97%) and to attract bees (74%).

We have frequently revisited the theme of 'home grown protein' and in 2018 focussed on growing sweet lupins. It was a tough growing season, contributing to low yields and, we think, unusually tough beans. This wasn't a popular crop amongst growers, but it may be worth trying them again when it's not so dry, and perhaps eating at a younger stage. We remain concerned about their susceptibility to slugs though.

The weather also impacted the slug trapping experiment with the very dry season resulting in far fewer slugs. Participants compared water, bitter, lager and other drinks of their choice in a 'beer trap'. Overall, lager and

bitter attracted similar numbers of slugs, so choice of beer isn't important to these gastropods!

## Review of 60 years of Members' Experiments

The long-term review of Garden Organic's Members' Experiments continued throughout the year. The main focus was to capture the views, thoughts and ideas of participants, staff and volunteers who have contributed over the years. These interviews will be added to the written report due to be made available in 2019.

## Heritage variety trials

The Heritage Seed Library continued to collaborate with Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) and is participating in an EU funded project to increase sustainable legume cultivation and consumption across Europe

(TRUE Legumes project). In 2018 CAWR conducted a second year trial of several HSL broad bean varieties alongside commercial varieties, as part of a project comparing nutritional content and attractiveness to pollinators.

CAWR also conducted a first year trial of HSL climbing French bean varieties with dry bean culinary uses for assessment against comparable commercial varieties. This trial remains ongoing.

## Growing Health

This project, in partnership with Sustain, has compiled a series of case studies to show how community food growing groups have engaged with public health commissioners and how community food growing delivers health outcomes, with the hope that growing can be integrated into routine health care services.





# Striving for an organic future

**T**hroughout the year we were involved in a number of activities and campaigns to make the organic voice heard.

## Representing our members and supporters

Unsurprisingly, 2018 was dominated by Brexit. We campaigned both individually and as part of wider organic networks, such as the English Organic Forum, in an attempt to secure appropriate standards and frameworks for organic practice after the UK leaves the EU. There has been pressure on the UK Government and devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to amend these current regulations, on the one hand to lower standards to allow for equivalence in any future bilateral trade deals, and on the other hand to enhance standards to create a world-leading food environment, with an emphasis on national health and wellbeing.

This has involved the charity representing members and supporters to Government

through DEFRA, to Parliament through All Party Parliamentary Groups, and to local and regional agencies. We were pleased to report that DEFRA Ministers confirmed that UK food standards will not be lowered in a post-Brexit environment. We will continue to follow this closely.

We have further campaigned on a range of issues of specific interest to members, including around the continuation of the EU ban on neonicotinoids post-Brexit. We have raised awareness about issues surrounding heritage and heirloom seeds and the impact of artificial herbicides and pesticides. We also lent our support to aligned organisations, including PAN UK.

We also contributed to a number of consultations and responded to white papers, including the London Food Strategy and the 25 Year Environment Action Plan.

## Glyphosate in the news

We welcomed news that the licence for glyphosate would be restricted, whilst continuing to raise awareness of the risks

of looking at one chemical in isolation, rather than exploring the long-term effects of the cocktail of chemicals used in products such as Roundup.

Unfortunately we know that manufacturers have already developed alternative and equally destructive pesticides, but each time an issue such as this appears in the news we know that more people turn towards the organic way.

## Protecting UK genetic resources

We have continued to promote the conservation and use of plant genetic resources in the UK, and are a member of the UK Plant Genetic Resources Group and the Plant Heritage Conservation Board

The Heritage Seed Library also has a Community Seed Bank advisory role in the EU-funded H2020 DYNiversity project, developing seed networks for managing in situ and ex situ European diversity. We attended the first project conference and Brussels and our involvement will continue until 2020.

# Lifelong learning

**M**any come to gardening later in life and learn outside of a formal classroom setting. We continue to be there when people need support, to help them on their organic journey.

## Booklets and publications

We added to our suite of advice booklets with the First Steps in Organic Growing - a short booklet for beginner growers or those new to organic methods. Following our Principles of Organic Gardening, the First Steps booklet provides the practical advice to accompany the theory. During the year this booklet was warmly received by members, volunteers and general growers, who gave good feedback on how useful it was.

We provided advice and articles for a number of gardening and consumer magazines, including a monthly organic growing article

in the popular Grow Your Own magazine.

## Ryton Organic Gardens

In 2018, we continued to welcome visitors to our organic demonstration gardens, including school groups, horticultural clubs, members and the general public. The GO Discover educational trail remained popular, introducing young visitors to organic growing and the creatures that can be found within the garden.

We ran a programme of courses at Ryton, delivering 18 practical courses covering a wide range of organic gardening topics from composting and planning your organic garden, to making a wormery and growing exotic veg.

## Online advice

In 2018 nearly half a million users visited our website. We continued to review and add

to the advice provided online and were pleased to see this accessed by new visitors each month. This was supported by our email newsletter providing a taster of our seasonal organic growing advice, and information on the current topics relevant to organic growers.

During 2018 our social media channels grew in audience, allowing us to reach, in a cost effective way, new growers and those not previously aware of the work of Garden Organic. We also added to the suite of practical organic growing videos available online, providing quick and simple advice to the digitally-minded growers.

## Members' advice and factsheets

Our Advice team responded to just over 700 organic growing queries. Popular topics included weeds, fruit problems, composting, and growing challenges caused by heat and drought. We have reviewed and made revisions to 23 factsheets and continue to review the topics covered.

## National events

Despite an ever-expanding range of online channels, nothing beats a face to face conversation. We attended a large number of national events throughout the year, from Harrogate Spring Flower Show to the GO Organic Festival in Battersea, giving talks to packed-out audiences at each. Our local project volunteers also attended over 150 local and national events to talk to people about the benefits of growing organically.



Chris Collins talking with Jim Buttress at Gardeners World Live

# Growing healthy communities

**O**ur community growing and composting projects continue to thrive, providing grassroots support at local level via our 520 dedicated volunteers.

## Growing Communities

In 2018, we launched a new three year project, Growing Communities, working in partnership with Family Action in Breckland and West Norfolk. The project is funded by Reaching Communities (Big Lottery Fund) and brings together volunteers and participants from the local community to undertake therapeutic gardening activities and learn new organic horticultural and life skills. It encourages improved physical and mental health and promotes healthy eating and social interaction. The project is delivered at an established community allotment site and through outreach work across the rural area, engaging with

hard to reach or vulnerable people who may have mental or physical health problems, be socially isolated, elderly, unemployed, ex-offenders, children, etc.

## Master Composters and Master Gardeners

In 2018 we continued delivery of our two flagship Master Composter Programmes in Norfolk and Cumbria, coupled with six smaller contracts in Cambridgeshire, Coventry, Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, Shropshire and Suffolk.

As well as commissioned projects we have also delivered multiple training courses for a wide range of audiences including a series of commissioned workshops in Cambridge and Essex.

We began the delivery of the Let's Waste Less volunteer programme in Worcestershire – a wider holistic waste management project commissioned as a step up from

our successful Master Composter Programme in the county.

Our Master Gardener Programmes in Leicestershire and Southwark, and Growing Buddies in Maidstone have continued to grow and make a big impact in their communities.

In 2018 our outreach project staff and volunteers delivered horticultural training sessions for over 1,000 beneficiaries, represented Garden Organic at over 150 public events and communicated our messages and encouraged people to grow more organically and sustainably through over 8,000 tracked conversations.

At the end of the year we were delighted that member donations through a fundraising appeal has meant that our London Food Poverty: Southwark project could be extended for a further 12 months. This Master Gardener and Food Buddies project is having a life-changing impact on residents of the Borough by improving resilience to food security in the community and teaching residents how to grow and cook organic food. Thank you to all who supported this work.

## Orchard Champions

Delivered in partnership with the Malvern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Trust in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire trained volunteers were busy raising awareness of the importance of traditional orchards and how to maintain them.



Norfolk Master Composters talk composting with Chris Collins

# Inspiring the next generation

**E**ach generation we work with seems more environmentally-minded than the last. Supporting schools and education professionals to be able to inspire these budding organic growers is a sound investment in the future.

## Move More Eat Well

Move More Eat Well is a partnership project between Garden Organic, Sport Birmingham, eco-Birmingham, the Health for Education Service and Sustrans. This project provides free events, activities and opportunities to support residents of the Birmingham wards of Longbridge, Cofton, Northfield and Rubery feel healthier.

During 2018 we delivered healthy living assemblies, pupil/parent workshops, growing and cooking training for teachers, school professionals and parents, horticultural visits, and allotment support/clearance.

## Project Learning Garden

Project Learning Garden (PLG) continued in 2018, bringing together Garden Organic and USA-based Captain Planet. PLG is a garden 'start-up' programme set up to encourage schools to use a garden as an extension of the indoor classroom. Following the success of this programme in the US, Captain Planet approached us to support the roll out in the UK.

Following a successful launch, 32 schools have now become involved, with initial training days delivered in the London Boroughs of Merton, Bexley and Southwark. We delivered PLG



growing, cooking and curriculum kits to schools, developed and shared a number of curriculum resources, provided twilight teaching sessions and visited several schools within the area.

## Food Growing Schools: London

Additional funding secured in 2016 meant we were able to continue our flagship Food Growing Schools: London project throughout 2018. In partnership with six other organisations, the project has proven highly effective in supporting schools to embed food growing in the heart of their culture.

During the year the team attended numerous events, including school assemblies and networking events, and delivered multiple training and activity sessions. The project has now reached an end and we are working on making our resources and learning from it more widely available, as well as seeking opportunities to deliver similar projects elsewhere.

## Supplying schools with 'Get Growing' kits

Garden Organic continues to be included in Learning Through Landscapes' 'Nature Grants' programme. We supply 'Get Growing' kits which include term-time growing information on the principles of organic growing, a selection of seeds, useful growing cards and more! The Local Schools Nature Grants Scheme allows infant, primary and secondary schools in England, Scotland & Wales to apply for £500 worth of outdoor resources, and a two hour training session thanks to the players of the People's Postcode Lottery.

## Training for education school professionals

Garden Organic continues to run a number of training courses aimed at teachers and other adults working with schools. In 2018 we delivered these as part of our role as a national partner in the Food for Life project (FFL).

# Improving wellbeing

**T**ending to green space brings both instant and long-lasting benefits to physical and mental health, but many people are not fortunate enough to have access to this type of activity without the support of organisations like Garden Organic.

## Directly providing organic social and therapeutic horticulture (STH)

In 2018 we continued to deliver our organic STH projects for adults with learning disabilities, young carers and disadvantaged young people, as part of our Growth, Children in Need, Thyme to Be and Growing Enterprise projects. Across these four pioneering initiatives we delivered a total of 155 sessions around the Midlands.

## Knowledge transfer and sharing

We continued our involvement in the European knowledge-sharing programme, Towards Mutual Understanding with Nature. This project facilitates

meetings and visits with organisations using nature for therapeutic purposes, providing the opportunity to learn from peers across a number of European countries.

## Prisons and tackling re-offenders

We continue to support a team of prisoners at HMP Rye Hill enrolled on the prison's Drug and Alcohol Recovery Programme. The garden is an integral part of their recovery and all the prisoners working on the programme are learning how to garden organically as they build up their own portfolio of achievement.

## Gardening in care settings

We launched a new programme in a residential care home, working with Friends of Acorn Lodge, Attend and Avery. The project supports residents to experience meaningful and purposeful gardening activity and maximise their outdoor environment and resources. We delivered 15 sessions designed to engage residents and 'train' volunteers to establish a sustainable gardening project.

We also worked with a local hospice delivering a 12 week block of sessions for patients. The benefits of organic growing and getting outdoors within these types of care settings are immediate and clear to see. We would love to expand this work in the future.



**Left to right:**  
Flowers on display at HMP Rye Hill; Gardening at Acorn Lodge

# By the numbers

**We finished 2018 with an unrestricted deficit of £299,226 (2017 – deficit of £61,237) before actuarial movements on the defined benefit pension scheme.**

This deficit includes a one-off charge for additional depreciation charged against the charity's land and buildings as part of the ongoing review of the future of the Ryton site.

The charity has a variety of funding sources, which offers some resilience against economic instability. In particular, our membership give us unrestricted income which we are able to spend across our charitable activities, whilst also funding some of the charity's support costs. However, fundraising within the charitable sector is becoming increasingly difficult and this has contributed to a significant fall in our income since last year.

## Unrestricted Reserves

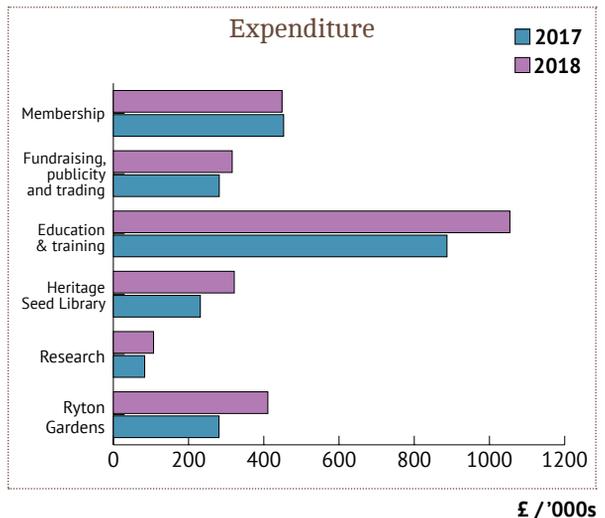
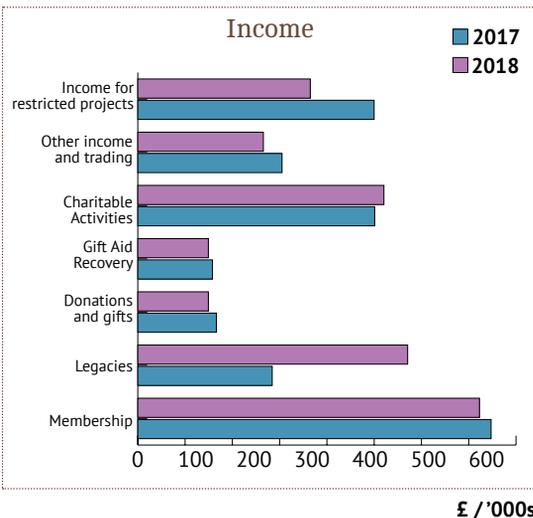
Reserves are needed to bridge the gap between the spending and receiving of resources and to enable the charity to cover unplanned emergency expenditure. The Trustees annually review the charity's reserves policy and agree that a general reserve of £500,000 is required, which is approximately equal to three months unrestricted, non-trading expenditure.

At 31 December 2018, the charity had unrestricted funds of £194,262 (2017 - £493,103). After making allowances for commitments and working capital requirements, our unrestricted reserves were £26,581 (2017 £211,782). The Trustees are aware that current reserve levels are not in line with the policy and accept that due to the increasing uncertainty in charity finances there will inevitably be peaks and troughs in annual budgets.

Nonetheless they seek the achievement and maintenance of this target as a key objective and set their annual budgets accordingly. The increasing running costs of the Ryton site has been a significant factor in the Trustees' decision to sell the site, in order to strengthen the charity's future financial position.

## Restricted Reserves

Restricted income remains central to the work of Garden Organic. At the end of the year we held restricted reserves of £180,996 (2017 - £308,372), which are not available for general use, but are put aside for specific projects. During the year, we continued to run our restricted activities to further the charity's work in a variety of projects whilst developing opportunities for new funding. The award of these restricted funds will enable Garden Organic to do more work than we would otherwise be able to do.





# Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have made 2018 such a fruitful year for Garden Organic, including our staff, members, donors, funders, project participants, ambassadors and many others.

We would also like to extend a special thank you to all the fantastic volunteers who help us in a wide variety of ways. Without this support none of our achievements through the year would have been possible.

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## Organisations recently funding our work

- Amey
- Anglian Water
- The Anson Charitable Trust
- Big Lottery Fund
- Birmingham City Council
- Cambridge City Council
- Captain Planet Foundation
- CH Robinson
- Children in Need
- Coventry University
- Cumbria County Council
- Defra
- Delfland Nurseries Ltd
- Diversifood
- DM & J Wood Trust
- Eco Sustainable Solutions
- Ecotricity
- EU – Erasmus +
- EU H2020
- The Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund
- Fisherbeck Charitable Trust
- G4S
- Global Diversity Foundation
- Global Generation
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Golding Homes
- Good News Trust
- The Heritage Lottery Fund
- The Hirschmann Foundation
- John Hughes Haulage
- Learning Through Landscapes
- Leicestershire County Council
- Naturally Good Food
- Norfolk County Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- The Phone Co-op
- Riverford Organic
- Salvia Foundation
- Seed swap events around the UK
- Seeds of Change
- Shropshire County Council
- Smiths Concrete
- Soil Association
- Suffolk County Council
- Suttons Consumer Products Ltd
- Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project
- Triodos Bank
- The Tudor Trust
- Twitten Charitable Trust
- Veolia Environmental Services
- Viridian Nutrition
- Vitamix
- Vinceremos
- W.W. & J.A. McCurdie of Bondon Farm
- Warwickshire County Council
- Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
- Weleda
- Worcestershire County Council

**Thank you to the many organisations which have supported Garden Organic in other ways.**