





John Muir Award

Question: How can an ordinary outdoor space become a place of discovery, sustainability and belonging?

Discover • Explore • Conserve • Share



Lesson Aim & Objectives

- Explore the John Muir Award framework
- Support scrapbook assignment development
- Promote sustainability, wellbeing, inclusion and Cynefin
- Connect theory to practice

Retrieval & Recap

(John Muir Trust, 2025

What are the four challenges of the John Muir Award?

What does sustainability mean?





Who is John Muir?



John Muir's mission and environmental stewardship

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."(Muir, 1911).

John Muir: The Father of National Parks

- Born in **Dunbar, Scotland** in **1838**
- Moved to **Wisconsin, USA** when he was 11 years old
- Naturalist, explorer, writer, and environmental campaigner
- Explored and studied forests, mountains, and wildlife
- Helped protect **Yosemite National Park** and other wilderness areas
- Co-founded the **Sierra Club** in 1892
- Inspired people to value and protect nature
- (Worster, 2008)

The John Muir Award

- An environmental award that encourages people to connect with, enjoy, and care for nature.
- Open to people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Involves four challenges:
  - **Discover** a wild place
  - **Explore** its nature and history
  - **Conserve** it through practical action
  - **Share** experiences with others
- Helps develop environmental awareness, confidence, and teamwork.
- Encourages people to become responsible stewards of the natural world.

Why it is important:

The John Muir Award inspires people to value nature, take action to protect the environment, and build a lifelong connection with the outdoors. (John Muir Trust, 2025)







Why Nature-Based Learning Matters

Froebel – Nature as a teacher *(Froebel, 1887)*
Montessori – Hands-on learning *(Montessori, 1912)*
Dewey – Learning through experience *(Dewey, 1938)*
Malaguzzi – Environment as the third teacher *(Edwards, Gandini and Forman, 2012)*

Inclusion & Multisensory Learning

Outdoor and experiential learning reflects the theories of Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, and Malaguzzi by providing diverse learning opportunities, multiple ways to engage with learning, and inclusive environments that support neurodiverse learners and identified ALN through inclusive practice principles. *(Froebel, 1887; Montessori, 1912; Dewey, 1938; Edwards, Gandini and Forman, 2012)*.

Treasure Chest Activity



Discover – What do you notice?

Explore – What memories does it evoke?

Conserve – How could it be protected?

Share – Discuss with a partner

Curriculum for Wales

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales

•Ethical, Informed Citizens

Developed an understanding of environmental issues and the importance of protecting natural spaces.

•Healthy, Confident Individuals

Improved wellbeing, resilience, and confidence through outdoor activities and teamwork.

•Ambitious, Capable Learners

Gained new knowledge and skills through exploring and learning about nature.

•Enterprising, Creative Contributors

Used creativity to solve problems, complete conservation tasks, and share experiences with others.

Link to the John Muir Award:

The award supports all four purposes by encouraging learners to explore, conserve, and reflect on their relationship with the natural environment.

Cynefin

A Welsh concept meaning a sense of belonging and connection to place.

Helps children understand their identity, community, and environment.

Encourages respect for local culture, heritage, and nature.

Developed through meaningful experiences in local environments.

Link to the John Muir Award:

Exploring and caring for local natural spaces helps children develop a strong sense of Cynefin and responsibility for their environment.

John Muir Award and the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings in Wales

Belonging

•Developing a sense of connection to nature, place, and community.

Communication

•Talking about experiences, asking questions, and sharing discoveries.

Exploration

•Investigating the natural world through hands-on outdoor learning.

Physical Development

•Developing coordination, confidence, and resilience through outdoor activities.

Well-being

•Supporting emotional wellbeing, independence, and positive relationships.

Key Link

The John Muir Award promotes active, child-centred learning through outdoor experiences that support all five developmental pathways and encourage children to care for the natural environment.

(Welsh Government, 2022)

John Muir Award Digital Scrapbook Part 1

Plenary & Feedback

How can an ordinary outdoor space become a place of discovery, sustainability and belonging?

One thing I discovered today...

Post-it note feedback

Questi

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ECEY6005 Regaining Paradise? Sustainability in the Early Years Part 1 (0652449)

Discover

Discovering the Wild Heart of Our Family Garden – Natures Bouquet

I've chosen to explore our family garden as part of the John Muir Award because it's a space that holds the essence of our lives it's where wildness meets wonder, and where my daughter has grown, laughed, and learned alongside nature's rhythms. To the outside world, it might seem like an ordinary garden, but for us, it's a sanctuary brimming with memory, meaning, and life.

Some of my most cherished moments have unfolded here: watching my daughter toddle through the lavender as bees danced around her, her delight at pulling up her first crooked carrot, or the giggle that escaped when a frog leapt from under the calendula. We've spent afternoons lying beneath the apple tree, reading stories while sunlight filtered through leaves, and evenings counting stars from the compost path. This garden has been her first classroom, her playground, and her refuge a place where curiosity flourished and every season brought a new adventure.

We've let nature lead the way. Native wildflowers seed themselves in joyful rebellion. Nettles grow tall, left for butterflies to feast. Fallen logs become homes for beetles and centipedes. Together, as part of completing this award, we've added insect hotels, hung bird feeders, and created secret "no-mow" zones that transform into meadows for ground-nesting pollinators.

As she's grown, so too has her awareness of the delicate balance we share with the creatures around us.

Of late, it's been a source of healing. In difficult times, stepping into this space calms the mind and uplifts the spirit. I've begun, ,more than ever to appreciate the soundscape, the hum of bees, the call of blackbirds, the rustle of leaves that is a gentle symphony that I now value.

As part of the John Muir Award, I'll continue enhancing the space: adding a bird bath to draw more visitors from the skies, planting new native species for year-round pollination, and expanding our connection to local hedgerows and green corridors. The garden may be tucked into our village, but it feels like its own world a sacred place where nature's quiet wisdom speaks, and where our family's story is rooted.

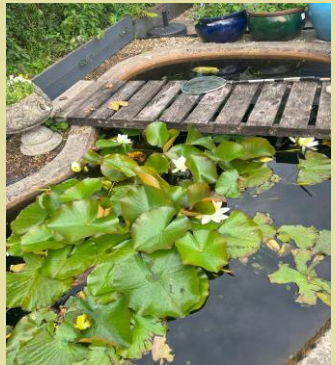

















Natures Bouquet

A Fragrant Embrace

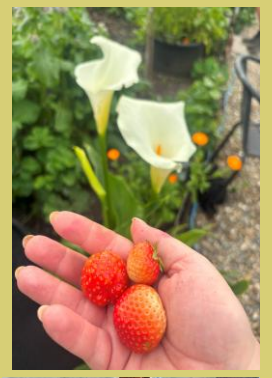
The air is perfumed with the sweetness of roses, the sharpness of mint, and the earthy scent of rain-soaked soil. Lavender calms, calendula warms, and the scent of ripening tomatoes brings a smile of anticipation.

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." — **John Muir**











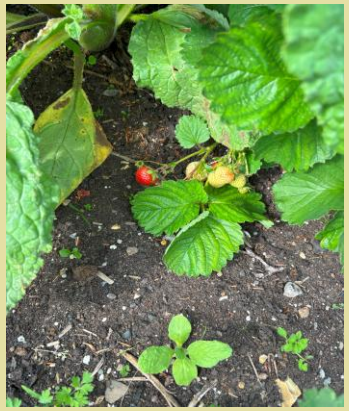
I've chosen our family garden as the focus for the John Muir Award because it's where our lives and nature have grown side by side. It's a practical, wild space that supports biodiversity while feeding us too, we grow salad leaves, split peas, tomatoes, cucumbers, herbs, raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries. My daughter has spent her childhood exploring here, from planting seeds to spotting wildlife. We' embraced seasonal change and used what we grow to make food and healing products. It's a place filled with everyday learning and shared memories a quiet sanctuary that reflects both sustainability and connection.





Natures Gifts

Completing this award, has taught me that our garden gives us far more than food, it fills our lives with beauty, care, and lasting memories. Edible flowers brighten our plates, and freshly picked blooms, lavender, calendula, wild roses regularly grace our table, turning everyday mealtimes into cherished moments. Their colours and perfume create a sense of occasion, even on ordinary days. From these gifts, we craft soothing calendula creams, infused ointments and lavender soaps that extend the garden's gentleness into our routines. It's a space that nurtures body and soul, quietly generous in all it offers.



Strawberries



Lettuce



Herbs



Calendula Cream



Handmade Soaps infused with Lavender and Rose petals from the garden



Handpicked flowers from our garden for the dinner table.



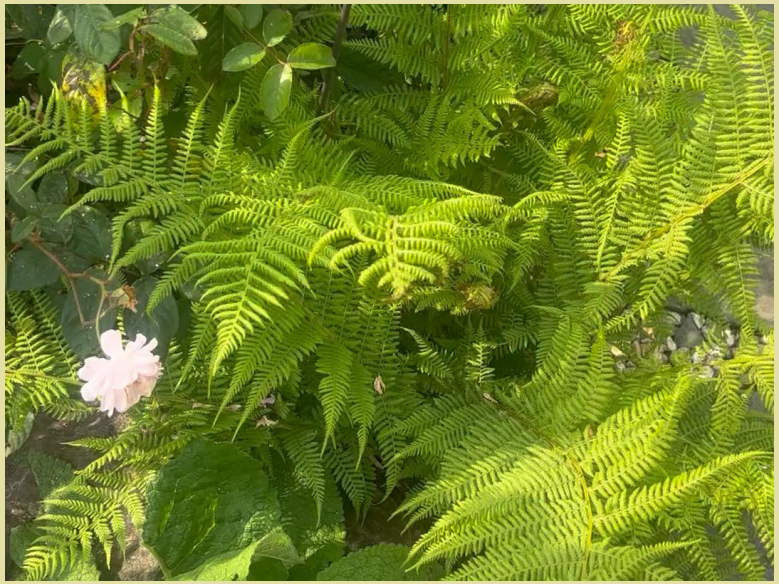
Handmade healing oils infused with garden plants/flowers.

Click to play video





Click to play video



Embracing Stillness Through the John Muir Award

Taking on the John Muir Award as part of my assignment has offered me something rare and precious: the chance to slow down. In a world that often rushes by, filled with work, responsibilities, and constant motion, this experience has invited me to pause, breathe, and reconnect.

It has encouraged me to truly engage with nature, not just as a backdrop to life, but as a living presence. I've come to appreciate the quiet magic of my family garden the way it changes with the seasons, the wildlife it welcomes, and the peace it offers. I've learned to relax in its embrace, to observe more closely, and to marvel at the beauty that surrounds us every day.

More than that, it has inspired me to take action: to protect what I love, to nurture the wildness in my own backyard, and to share this journey with others. Whether through conversations with family, moments with friends, or reflections shared with colleagues, I've found joy in passing on the wonder and wisdom that nature offers so freely.

Immersed in a Living Sanctuary: My Garden Through the Senses

"In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks." — **John Muir**

In the spirit of John Muir, I don't just visit my garden, I live within it. It is a sanctuary where I am fully immersed, where nature is not something to be observed from the outside but experienced with every fibre of my being.

A Visual Symphony

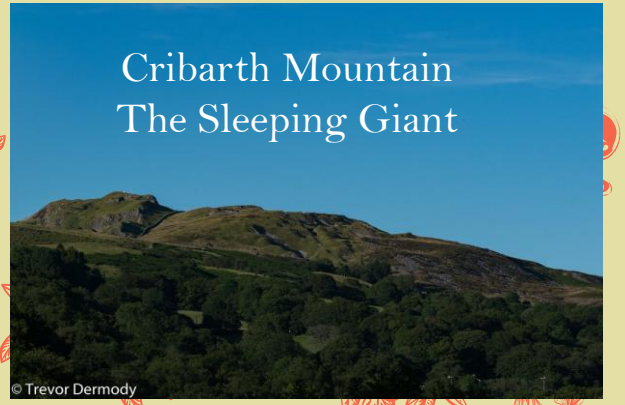
The garden is a living canvas. Colours shift with the seasons, lavender purples, calendula golds, the deep green of kale, and the ruby blush of ripening apples. Bees hover like tiny sunbeams, and butterflies drift like petals on the breeze. *"The sun shines not on us but in us."* — **John Muir**

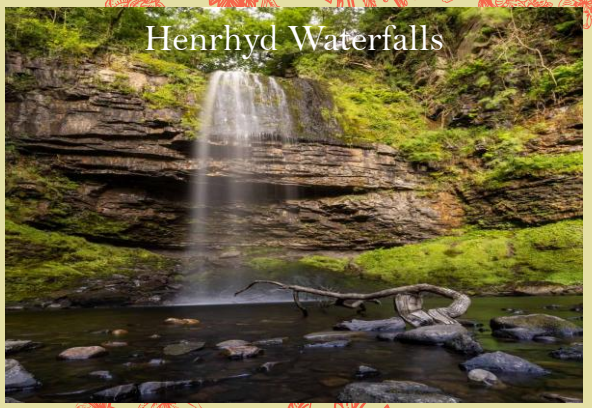
Smell: A Fragrant Embrace

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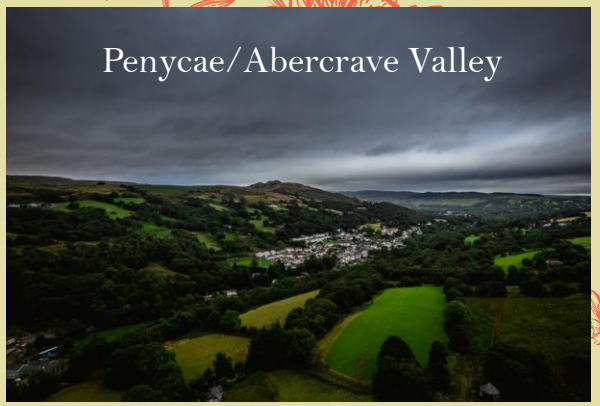
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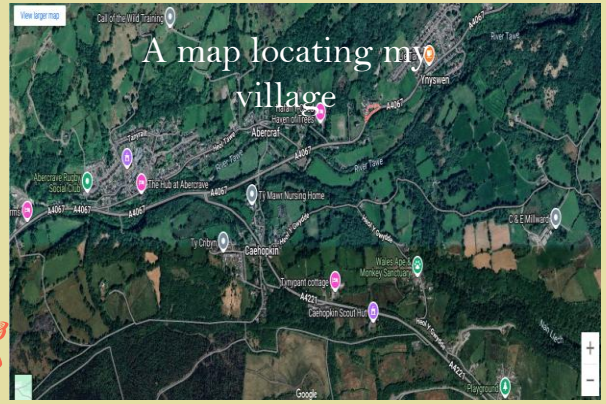












Discover My Area

Living in Abercrave and Penycae, I feel incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by some of the most breathtaking natural landscapes in Wales. These neighbouring villages, nestled on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park, are steeped in wild beauty and rich in opportunities for discovery.

Natural Features and Landscapes

Mountains and Hills: The iconic Cribarth (The Sleeping Giant) looms above the valley, offering panoramic views and a sense of ancient presence. The surrounding hills and limestone escarpments are perfect for walking, wildlife spotting, and quiet reflection.

Waterfalls: Just beyond Penycae lies Henrhyd Falls, the tallest waterfall in South Wales. Its thunderous cascade and mossy gorge feel like stepping into a fairytale. The nearby Nant Llech stream winds through woodland, creating a lush, shaded habitat for birds, insects, and amphibians.

Woodlands and Trails: My villages are surrounded by ancient oak woods, wildflower meadows, and hedgerows alive with birdsong. Trails lead through dappled light and open fields, inviting exploration and quiet moments of awe.

Craig-y-Nos Country Park: A short walk from Penycae, this historic estate offers gardens, woodland walks, and access to the upper Tawe Valley. It's a haven for wildlife and a place where history and nature intertwine.

A Place of Awe and Wonder

By looking closely, listening deeply, and exploring slowly, I've come to see this landscape not just as where I live but as a living, breathing world of its own. Every walk reveals something new: a buzzard circling overhead, a foxglove blooming in a forgotten corner, the call of a tawny owl at dusk.

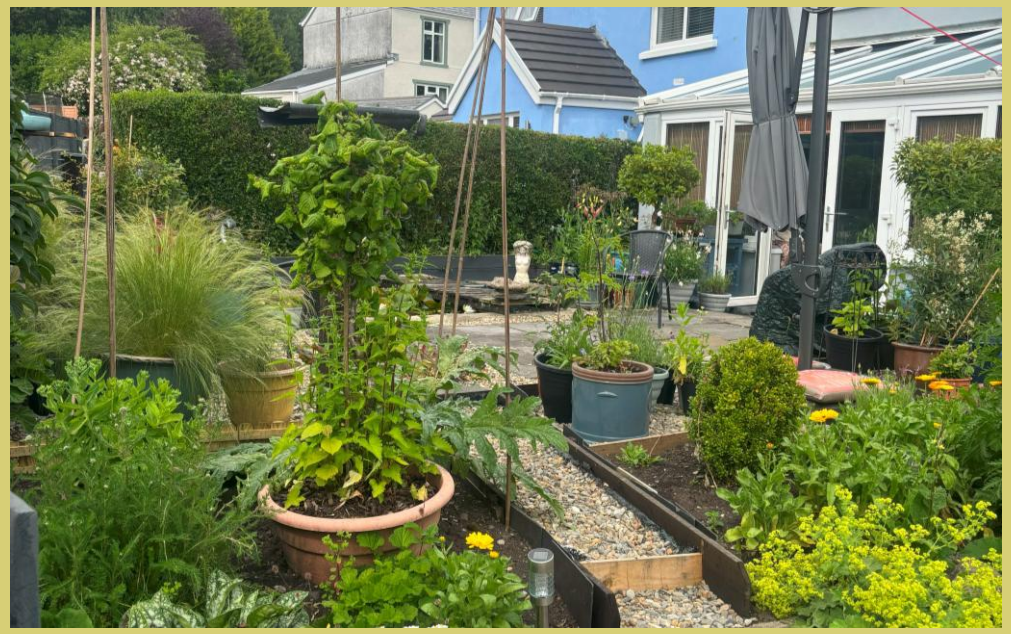
This connection has sparked a deep curiosity in me. I want to learn everything I can about the habitats, wildlife, and natural processes that shape this place. From the fungi that thrive in damp woodland to the kestrels that hover over the fields, every detail fills me with a sense of wonder.

Why It's Special

This landscape is more than beautiful it's alive with meaning. It's where I've found peace, inspiration, and a renewed sense of purpose. It's where I've shared moments of discovery with my daughter, where we've watched tadpoles wriggle in the stream and picked wildflowers for the kitchen table.

Through the John Muir Award, I've learned to see this place with new eyes. It has encouraged me to slow down, to notice, to care and to share that sense of wonder we are surrounded by.





The Legend of Crown Cottage – Nant Caerfail (Poem)

In the Upper Swansea Valley, where the hills breathe stories and the stream hums softly to the stones, there once stood a forge called Caerefail the Smith's Fort. They say the blacksmith there didn't just shape iron; he laced magic into every blade and buckle, pulling strength from the stream beside his hearth.

When the hammering stopped and the smith slipped into legend, the land began to heal. Wildflowers grew over the old anvil. Birds nested in the chimney. And where the forge had stood, a stone cottage quietly emerged modest, warm, and crowned in ivy and roses. Locals called it Crown Cottage; a gem nestled in the valley's green embrace. But the magic held on.

They say the garden Infront of Crown Cottage blooms when it shouldn't. Herbs are sweeter there. Bees hum in perfect tune. Nant Caerefail the same stream still runs pure and cold, singing ancient songs to those who care to listen. Foxes linger near the trees, and owls keep vigil from the eaves.

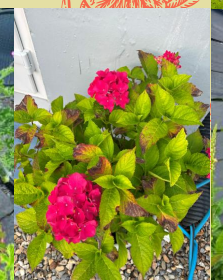
Some believe the smith's spirit remains not through fire and metal, but in leaf and blossom. His forge, reborn as a garden, offers a gentler kind of power now: The quiet wonder of nature, The magic of wild things, And the peace of a place that remembers.










Explore



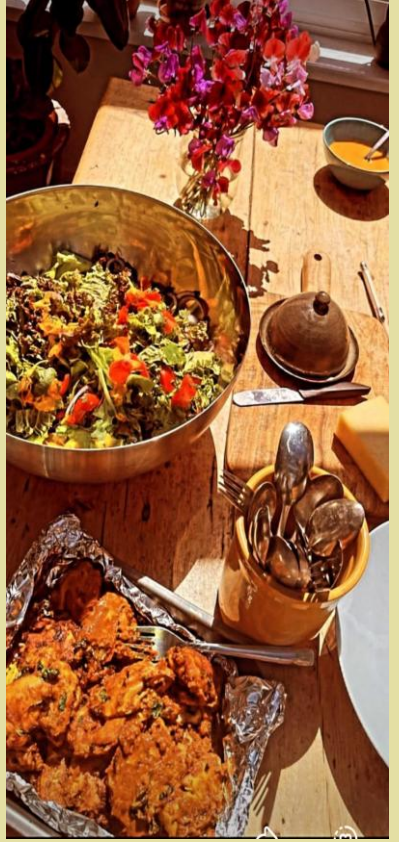




Taking time to explore my family garden has opened a world of adventure, learning, and connection right at my doorstep. Guided by the spirit of the John Muir Award, I've come to see it not just as a place to grow food and flowers, but as a living ecosystem where every small detail contributes to something larger. With a curious mind and a notebook in hand, I've discovered hedgehog trails through the undergrowth, spider webs shimmering with dew, and the transformation of ladybird larvae on nettles. Fungi quietly break down old wood, enriching the soil, and pollinators such as bees, hoverflies, and butterflies bring life to flowering herbs and fruit trees. Birds nest in hedges, amphibians shelter in damp corners, and the soil thrives through composting and low disturbance. As the garden grows, so do we finding calm, nourishment, and inspiration in its wild beauty. It's a space that supports both nature and wellbeing, offering shared moments and creative sparks. But I've learned that its wildness is fragile too, threatened by over-management, invasive species, pollution, and climate shifts. To protect it means observing carefully, acting gently, and always remembering that, as Muir believed, everything in nature is connected and that we are part of it.





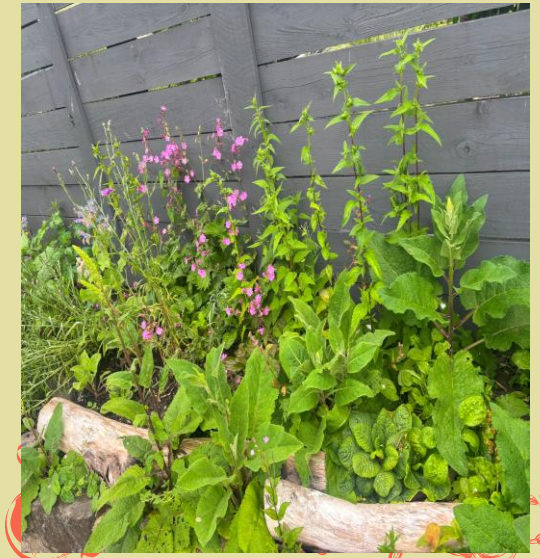


My garden is good for nature because it offers a patchwork of habitats from nectar-rich flowers for pollinators to damp corners and log piles for amphibians and insects. Composting and minimal digging support healthy soil life, while native planting helps local ecosystems thrive. It's also good for humans. Here, my family and I find calm, joy, and nourishment, whether we're picking herbs for homemade creams, listening to birdsong, or watching my daughter marvel at a frog beside the pond. But its wildness is fragile. Over-tidying, invasive species, pollution, and climate shifts could disrupt the delicate balance we've nurtured. To protect it, I've chosen to guide rather than control: planting native species, avoiding pesticides, allowing wild corners to flourish, and tracking seasonal changes. Practical steps like keeping a garden journal, mapping insect sightings, and observing soil health have helped me deepen my understanding. Inspired by the John Muir Award, I continue to explore, conserve, and share honouring the quiet connections that make this space not just a garden, but part of the wild.









Exploring my family garden with a sense of adventure has deepened my connection to nature and revealed a rich world of wildlife, microhabitats, and seasonal change. I've taken practical steps to protect and restore it adding bird feeders, a bird bath, and natural insect hotels to support biodiversity. By spending time observing, journaling, and learning about the plants and creatures that live here, I've come to appreciate how the garden benefits both nature and human wellbeing. It offers peace, beauty, and nourishment, while also providing vital habitats. To keep it wild, I'm committed to gentle management, avoiding chemicals, and staying curious about how to care for this living sanctuary.













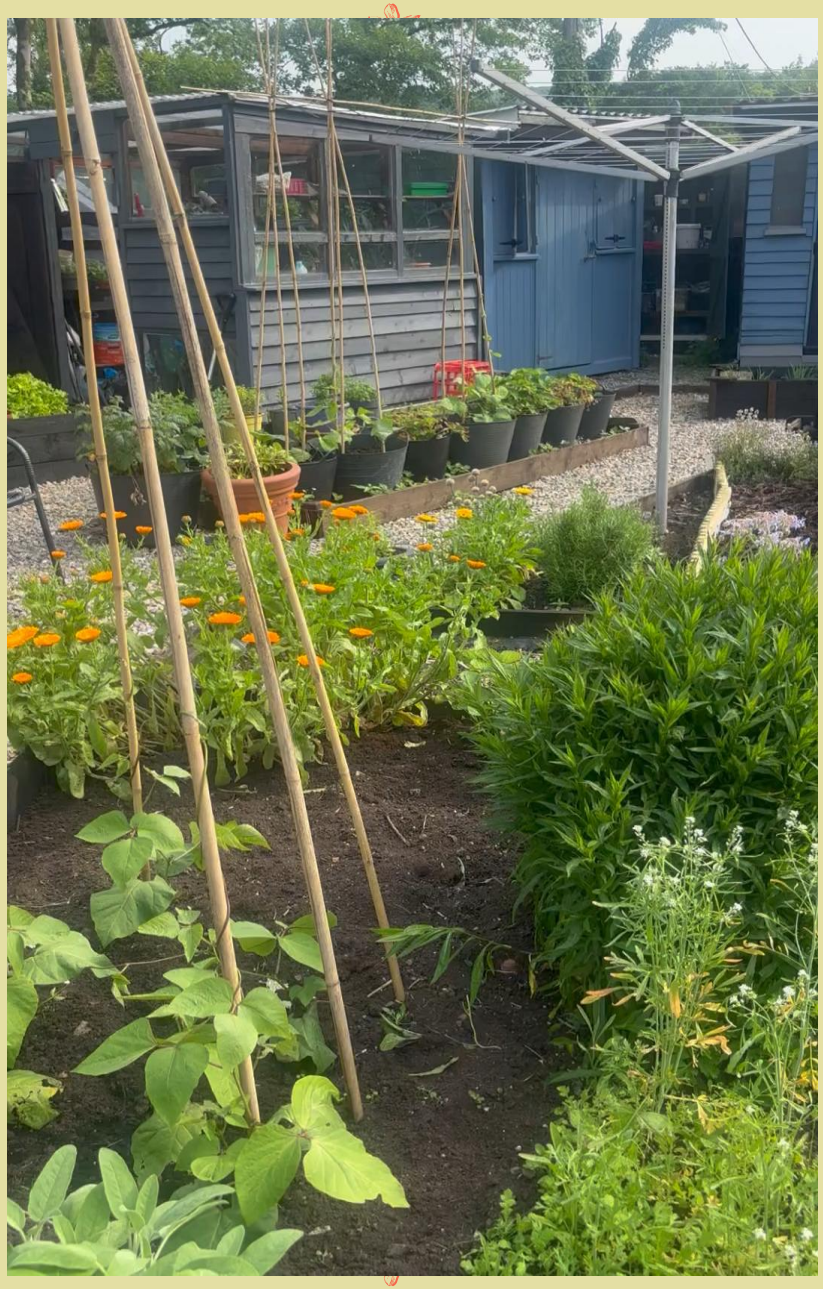


Over the seasons, my garden pond supports a variety of wildlife. In spring, frogs and toads return to spawn, newts begin to lay eggs among the pond flowers, and insects like dragonflies and damselflies start emerging. As summer progresses, the pond becomes busier, fish swim beneath the lily pads, water beetles and boatmen move across the surface, and birds visit to drink or bathe. Pollinators such as bees and butterflies are drawn to blooming plants like my marsh marigold and water mint. In autumn, hedgehogs may come for a drink, and the pond gradually quietens as temperatures drop. Even in winter, life continues below the surface, with oxygenating plants sheltering tiny creatures like copepods and water fleas. Observing these changes has helped me connect more deeply with the environment, and I've come to appreciate the importance of creating and protecting spaces where nature can thrive, a key part of what the John Muir Award represents.

Since starting the John Muir Award, I've seen my garden come alive. With flowers, herbs, veggies, fruit trees, a pond and greenhouses, it's become a patchwork of habitats. I've watched bees, butterflies and hoverflies buzz between blooms, while ladybirds and ground beetles tackle pests naturally. Around the pond, dragonflies skim the surface and decomposers work quietly in the soil. Even inside the greenhouse, helpful insects like predatory mites have made themselves useful.

At our family garden, Crown Cottage in Abercrave, our garden's grown into a proper haven for wildlife, shaped by the local land and our care. Nestled beneath Cribarth, it echoes the Brecon Beacons with native plants, spring water, and spaces for creatures to thrive. What started as a simple garden now supports rich biodiversity. I've learned that even small changes can invite life in and keep things balanced. This award's helped me slow down, notice more, and share the story of nature's quiet strength.

Click to play video



Explore my family garden





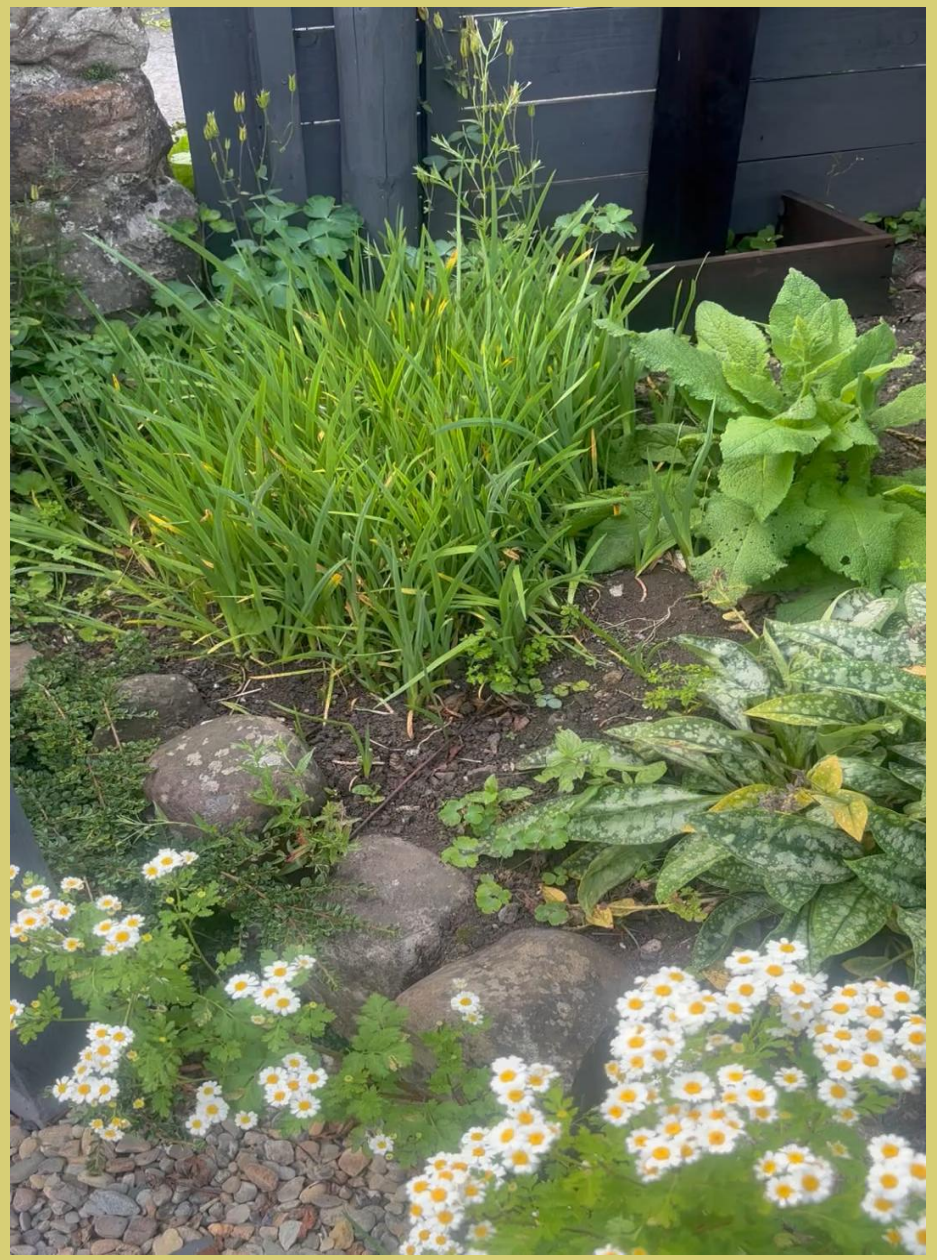








Click to play video





My Garden Rose

The John Muir Award has reignited my creativity, encouraging me to return to drawing and painting with fresh inspiration.



House Sparrow



My Scarlet Beebalm
Garden Flowers









Conserve

By adding bird feeders, a bird bath, bug hotels made from natural materials, and letting wildflowers grow freely, I've seen my garden transform into a place where wildlife genuinely thrives. Birds now visit daily to feed, drink, and bathe; insects like bees, butterflies, and beetles have safe places to nest and forage; and the presence of native wildflowers has brought colour and biodiversity back to areas that once felt bare. These changes have restored natural cycles encouraging pollination, seed dispersal, and healthy soil systems. It's made me more aware of what's at stake, too. I've started sharing my garden's story with others, hoping to inspire similar efforts, and I've pledged to support the John Muir Trust in protecting our wild places. I know that this balance is fragile threatened by climate change, pollution, invasive species, and our own habits. So, I keep learning, observing, and adapting. I journal my garden's changes, notice what insects and birds come and go, and reflect on the impact of my choices. This garden has taught me that conservation begins at home and that even small actions can support nature's deeper resilience.







By adding features like the bird feeders, a bird bath, bug hotels made from natural materials, and encouraging wildflowers to grow, I've taken gentle but meaningful steps to help my wild part of the garden thrive. These elements invite birds, pollinators, and insects to return, bringing natural processes with them like seed dispersal, pollination, decomposition, and pest control without the need for high maintenance or interference. By choosing low-level interventions and letting nature lead, I've seen life re-establish itself in quieter corners: moss creeping across old stone, bees nesting in hollow logs, and birds bathing between feeder visits. These choices allow the land to heal and regenerate on its own terms, restoring balance and increasing biodiversity.

Over time, these actions will support the long-term protection and conservation of my garden's wild spaces. Future generations will benefit not just from a healthy ecosystem, but from the knowledge that care, patience, and observation can shape a meaningful legacy. I hope my daughter will grow up understanding that small acts like leaving a flower to seed or welcoming a hedgehog trail are powerful. In sharing this journey through the John Muir Award, I'm not only learning to live alongside nature, but helping others see the potential in doing the same.

Share

These photos were taken during my recent visit to a preschool setting in Ystradgynlais, where staff have creatively used their PDG grant to champion Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC). The children are actively involved in cultivating wild land and growing their own fruit and vegetables which they joyfully eat, share with families, and even sell within the local community. I've encouraged the setting to take their commitment further by working towards the John Muir Award, and I'm thrilled to say they're keen to embrace the challenge. It's inspiring to see how a nurturing environment like this can empower children to connect with nature, care for their surroundings, and develop a deeper sense of responsibility and belonging.







The more I engage with the John Muir Award, the more I recognise its potential to transform how we nurture our youngest learners particularly those with Additional Learning Needs. I've seen firsthand how nature invites them in gently, encouraging exploration, calming anxieties, and awakening curiosity. It's become clear to me that wild spaces are not just backdrops for play they are essential learning environments filled with possibility.

Inspired by this, I've made it my mission to share the magic of the John Muir Award across all the preschool settings I support. Whether it's guiding staff to embrace outdoor experiences, helping them adapt activities for different needs, or simply igniting excitement about conservation, I'll keep spreading the word. I want every child to have the chance to listen to birdsong, touch the soil, and feel the wind on their cheeks all while developing confidence, connection, and joy. John Muir's words stay with me: *"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."* I believe every setting that takes on this journey will discover far more than they expected about nature, about their children, and about the power of inclusion.

Consent has been granted for the photographs taken at Dechrau Disglair Preschool in Ystradgynlais.



























Consent has been granted for the photographs taken at Dechrau Disglair Preschool in Ystradgynlais.









I've taken pride in sharing the values of the John Muir Award with the preschool settings I visit, showing how even the smallest wild spaces can spark curiosity and care. By introducing the idea of nurturing nature, I've inspired staff to explore their outdoor areas more thoughtfully creating bug hotels, planting wildflowers, and encouraging children to notice the wildlife around them. It's been rewarding to see how these conversations have planted seeds of change, helping others discover that looking after wild things isn't just important it's joyful.







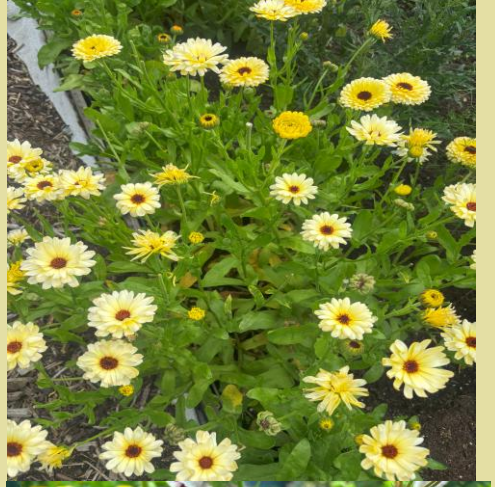
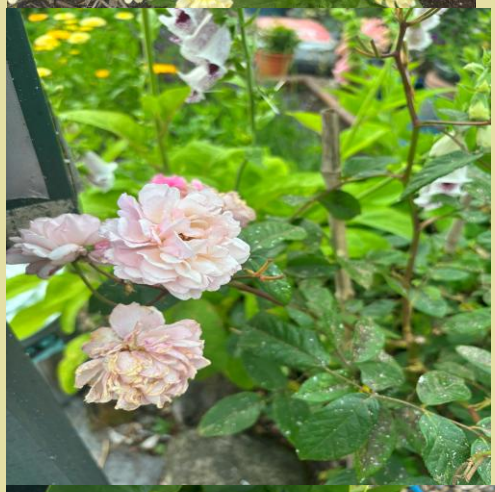
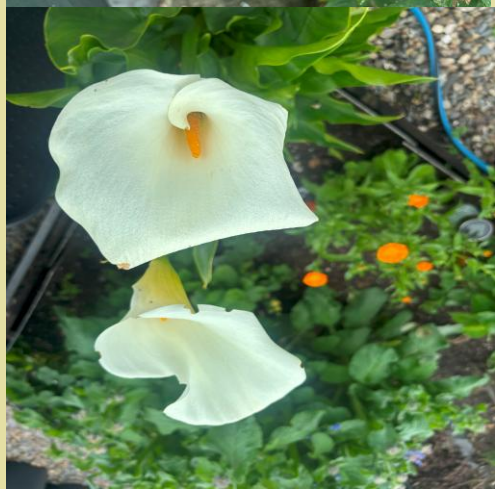

As part of my journey with the John Muir Award, I will share the magic of my garden and the deep interconnectivity between nature and our wider world through storytelling, sensory exploration, and advocacy. With preschool settings, I will recommend activities such as nature discovery packs and playful “Mini-Muir Missions” that nurture awe and care in young children.

During the summer holidays I intend to invite family and friends to garden gatherings where we will reflect, sip garden-infused teas, craft with herbs, and celebrate nature’s offerings.

Through social media and my digital portfolio, I’ll bring my garden’s evolving story to life showcasing the bees, birds, scented blooms, through photos, poems, and narrated clips.

Moving forward, I will craft eco-legends to highlight our connection with wild spaces, design sensory garden toolkits to inspire others, and share reflections grounded in Muir’s principles that encourage us to tread lightly and feel deeply.

My hope is that by sharing, I will kindle wonder, belonging, and responsibility across future generations.

Reflection

John Muir's story really stuck with me throughout this journey. He was born in Dunbar and went on to become one of the most powerful voices for protecting nature. What I love is how he saw the wild not just as something useful, but something sacred a source of healing, joy, and connection. He believed everything in nature is linked, and that people are part of that bigger web too. His passion and writing helped kickstart the conservation movement, and I've felt inspired by that as I've explored, cared for, and shared my garden. In many ways, this award has helped me see the wild through his eyes full of wonder and worth saving.

Undertaking the John Muir Award has opened my eyes in ways I never expected. Before this journey, I didn't fully realise how alive and intricate my garden truly was. By adding a bird bath, feeding stations, and insect hotels made from natural materials, I've watched the space transform, now it welcomes woodpeckers, nuthatches, sparrows, doves, wood pigeons, and jays. Each visit from them feels like a gift, and I've come to understand how small actions can invite life in.

I've learned that biodiversity isn't just a word it's a living tapestry of habitats and ecosystems, many of which I simply hadn't noticed before. This award encouraged me to slow down, breathe deeply, and let myself observe and connect. I've discovered not only species but rhythms, and relationships happening all around me. Sharing these moments with my child, friends, family has made them even more meaningful. I feel more grounded, more grateful, and more aware. I've created real opportunities for wildlife and experienced a deeper sense of wonder and belonging. Wild spaces matter not just for nature, but for us too. This journey has helped me see my garden as a sanctuary for many lives, including my own.