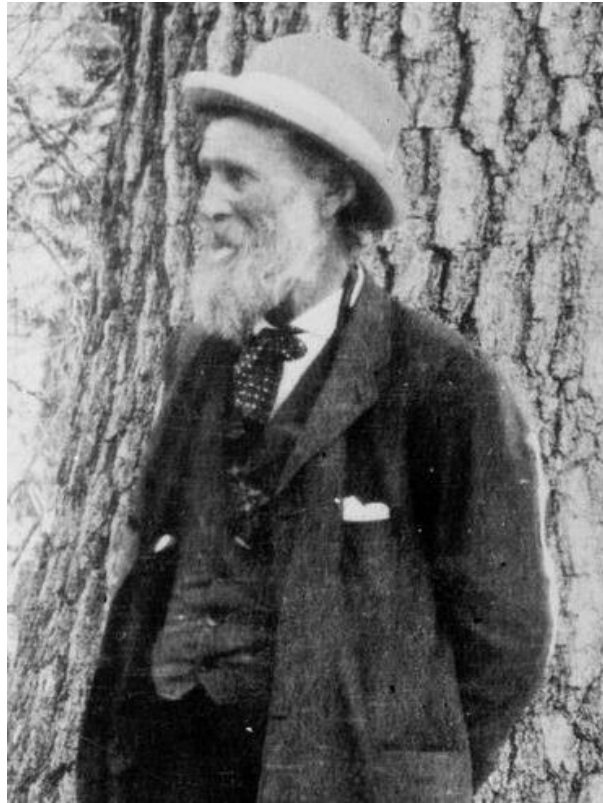
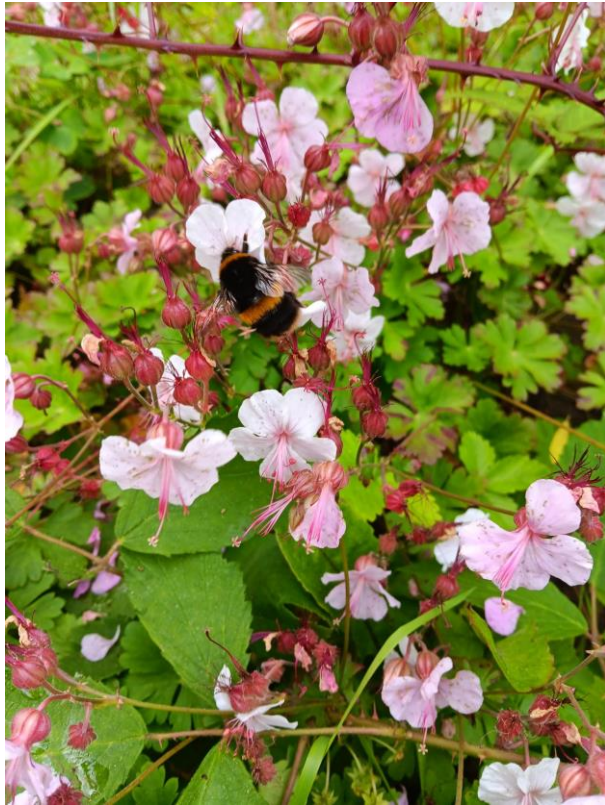




My journey on the John Muir Award

John Muir was a Scottish naturalist who lived most of his life in America discovering, exploring and campaigning for the conservation and long-term care of the Earth and its wild places. He believed that humans should stop striving for dominion over mother nature and all her resources and instead, learn to co-exist in harmony with nature. The John Muir Trust encourages people to engage with our planet's wild places and take time to explore, appreciate, conserve and share with others what makes those places special to us all.





1 - Our garden





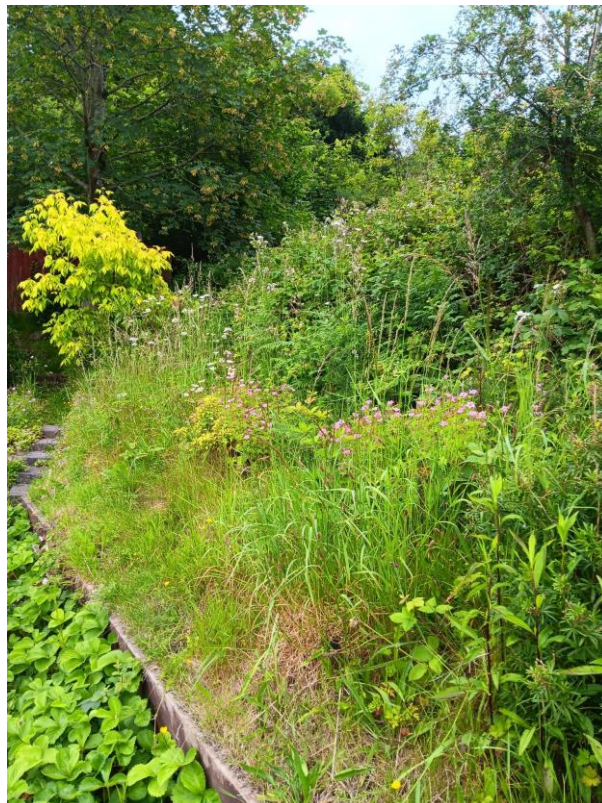
I consider myself extremely lucky to have had a very happy childhood. I grew up in Swansea within a mile of the coast and spent a lot of my early weekends and days off exploring rockpools, paddling in the waves and building sandcastles. As I grew up into my teen years I was obsessed with horses and spent every spare hour I had outdoors, whatever the weather, learning to care for the ponies at the local riding school. My family holidays were all in the United Kingdom and we would regularly travel

as a family group of ten or more on the train to various Youth Hostels, the journey to and from, just as interesting and exciting as the destination. Our big family holidays, that were always organised with precision by my grandmother, were cost effective and run like clockwork from arriving on time via the bus to the train station thirty minutes before our train was due to leave and then our onward journey, usually a hike with all our gear on our backs to the local Youth Hostel and the awaiting adventure.

My grandmother always championed taking care of the planet, she gave up driving when my father was young, cycled, walked or used public transport to get everywhere she needed to go. She grew her own food, which all of my cousins and I loved to tend, we saved water in old bins and thanks to my connection with the stables, we always had a ready supply of well rotted manure for the crops!

I am now a mother of four and try to instill the same sense of care and attention to our local environment, encouraging my children to grow their own flowers and food and to care for our surroundings, whilst exploring the wonderful world of creepy crawlies and the varied fauna and wildlife that we have developed through creating our own garden.

We moved into our current home ten years ago and the garden had in earlier years been a fruit tree orchard that the previous owner had cut down and removed. A big section of the garden had also been fenced off as it was badly overgrown. We, unfortunately, had to remove fifteen trees within the first year of us owning our home as there was movement on the bank where they were growing, however, that has meant that over the past ten years we've started from scratch and developed the garden to suit our needs.





2 - Our strawberry patch



3 - A few more days to achieve the sweetest strawberries possible!



4 - Our blackcurrant bush which was grown from a cutting from my auntie has produced a small amount of blackcurrants that the birds have all but eaten.

The garden has been developed to allow room for the children to play on a lawned area, we also created on the banked area shrubs, wildflowers, grapes, alpine strawberries in abundance and a variety of wildflowers that have self seeded. We removed fencing at the rear of the garden and allowed the blackberry brambles to grow which we harvest for jams and crumbles. We were lucky enough to find a greenhouse for free on a local preloved website where we are currently growing tomatoes, butternut squash and watermelon. My son has recently planted chilli pepper seeds that have just begun to shoot up! We have also shared our tomato plants with family members to encourage them to grow their own as we didn't have enough room for what we started and didn't want them to go to waste.

I was surprised at the start of this journey (which will continue into the future and evolve as our understanding of sustainability grows) how much we can do in our own garden to improve the outcome for wildlife and nature literally on our doorstep whilst also learning about and considering global issues such as hunger, our water usage and looking at where our food comes from and how we can grow our own whilst promoting outcomes for insects such as bees.



5 - Our tomato plants, grown from seed, full of flowers waiting to produce tasty tomatoes for us to harvest.



6 - My mother's new tomato plants. This is the first time that she has attempted growing her own tomatoes. Fingers crossed they are a success.



7 - These are the tomato plants donated to my auntie, a seasoned gardener who appreciated not having to spend extra money in the garden centre this year.

I spoke with my children about the John Muir Award and asked for their opinions on what they liked most about our garden and then encouraged them to explore that area or idea further. We discussed our greenhouse where we have grown tomatoes from seed for the first time, amongst other food. We have strawberries that are dotted all over the garden for the children to hunt for when harvest time comes. We have insects under rocks and amongst our old bug hotel, we have shrubs and flowers (some planted, some are self sown) and we have several fruit shrubs and trees that produce apples, plums and blueberries



8 - Our slow worm that the children named "Sherbert"



9 - Creepie Crawlies from our garden

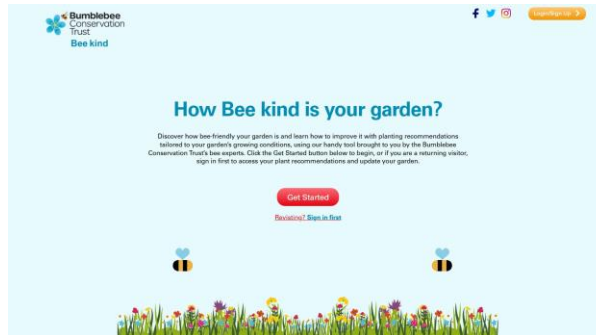


10 - My son loves to dig over the mud searching for worms



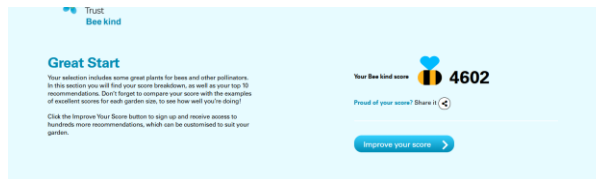
11 - My daughter likes to collect the wood lice that she finds

Our first highlight is the number of bees that we have in our garden. We have Mason Bes that live in the old lime mortar at the back of our house and we also have a Bumblebee Nest at the top of our garden. My daughter decided that she would like to do some further research on bees so we looked at the the bumblebee conservation trust and carried out a survey to see how bee friendly our garden is.



12 - If you would like to find out how bee friendly your own garden is, please click on the link below.

beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org



Your Score Explained

See how your garden scores below and how it compares to our excellent garden scores on the right. Tap or click the info icons for additional information.



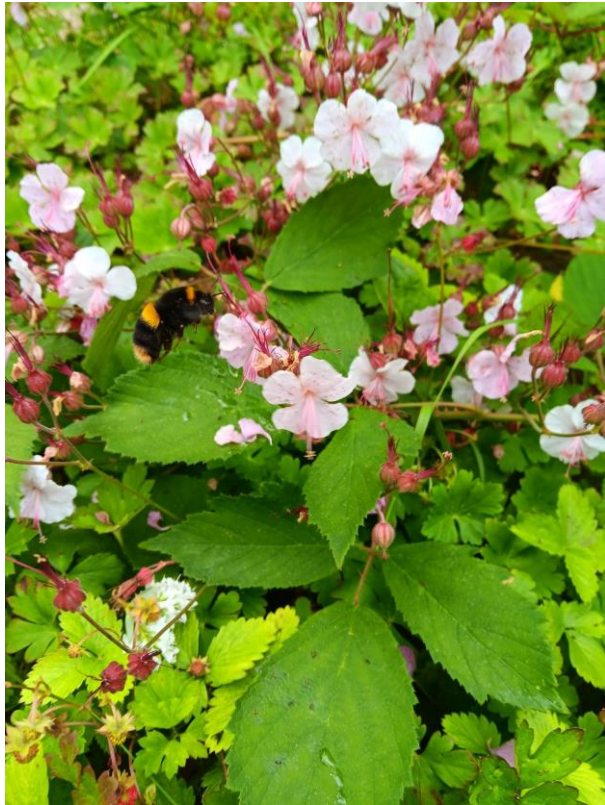
13 - We scored well, however, there were recommendations to help us provide wintering flowers that bees rely on during the colder months between November and March. We discussed whether to order seeds or plants from a website or perhaps visit the local garden centre, however, my daughter suggested that we should ask friends and family member if they had any of plants that were suggested and my mother's neighbour has given us a cutting from a honeysuckle plant from her garden. My daughter has arranged a swap, we have received cuttings from her honeysuckle and we will share some of our home grown tomatoes once they have ripened. My daughter has also suggested that we collect seeds from our Aquilegia wildflowers as they are easy to grow and share them too.

Your Plant Recommendations

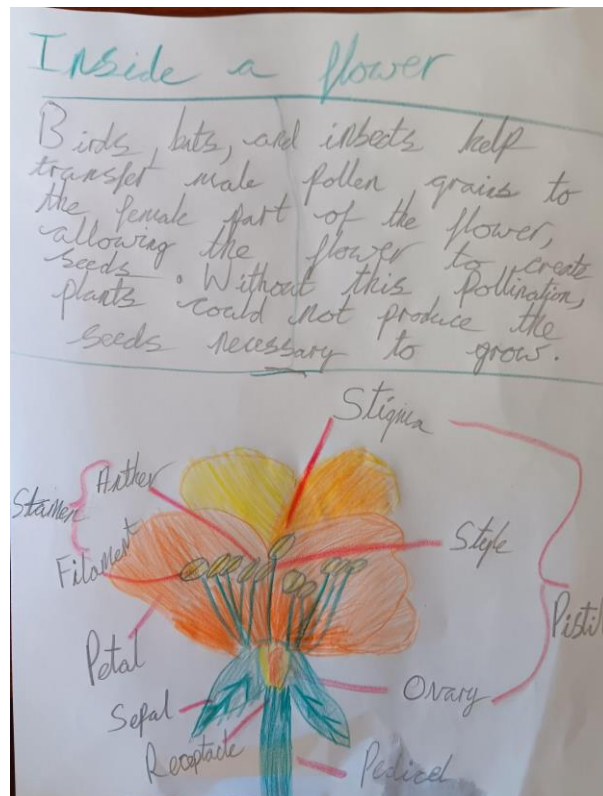
Here are your top 10 recommended plants to help improve your score. To receive hundreds more recommendations which can be tailored to your garden's growing conditions, simply login or create an account, where you will also be able to add multiple gardens and create a planting schedule.



14 - Our recommendations to give a little extra help to our bees over the winter months.



15 - Our wintering honeysuckle, donated by a friend



16 - My daughter was keen to learn about how our pollinators work their magic

We also learned that Mason bees are one of the most effective pollinators in the world. They are solitary bees that will happily nest alongside a large number of other solitary bees, however, they generally stay with a 30 metre radius of their nest. This means for us that the Mason Bees in our house are almost completely dependent on our garden for sustenance. We feel a lot more responsibility for the survival of our Mason Bees since learning this fact and have hung bee nesting boxes to encourage them to stay within our boundaries. They have filled one box that we hung in May and we have just hung a bigger box with more capacity for the new bees that have already started to hatch out of the original house.



17 - Our blue house is full so we have hung a new house to help our Mason Bees thrive.



18 - The Mason Bees have been busy filling the bamboo shoots with their larvae, each one contains a single larvae and they build the nest around it.



19 - Their new home to encourage their numbers to grow



20 - Over recent weeks our Hypericum has bloomed which our bees love to visit



21 - A little mushroom tucked away under our Bramley Apple tree



Through learning about the various insects and amphibians that visit our garden, we have replanted our flower pots at the front of our property which had daffodils previously but needed a refresh. We have chosen bee friendly plants to encourage our pollinators that my daughter researched in more depth. My younger two children also created some natural art to officially welcome the bees into our garden and to say thank you for all their hard work!





22 - Our natural art

We also decided that we could share some of our wildflower seeds with the local park, a place where my children have played for the last ten years and still visit regularly. The park is owned by the local residents and we had permission from the Tenants and Residents Association to develop two flower beds at the entrance to the park to create an area that will welcome both people and pollinators. We have planted wildflower seeds and will, in Autumn, plant daffodil bulbs that we have removed from our own plant pots that we replanted this year with cornflower, all of which, we grew from seed.



23 - The chosen site for our flower bed



24 - We have decided to adopt this flower bed, maintain it and replant it when needed

With our connections through the Tenants and Residents Association we carried out a litter pick of the local area which was promoted and advertised through Facebook. The litter pick was organised in conjunction with Keep Wales Tidy who loaned litter pickers, hoops, high visibility vests and gloves to ensure that everybody was properly equipped and we collected six bins full within various twenty minute circular routes from the park. We regularly carry out litter picking in our area and I keep my litter picker and bin bags in my car. My children will generally ask to do a litter pick if we are visiting the beach and they spot litter which then leads to a discussion of the types of rubbish that we find, unfortunately, they already recognise single use vapes and they will say that smoking is unhealthy which links to the sustainability goal of access to adequate health care and how to promote healthy living.







25 - This bag of rubbish was collected just three weeks after the organised litter pick and came from inside the park only. I have requested through my local council that a bin should be placed inside the park, there is a bin at the bottom of the road, approximately 20 metres away from the park entrance, however, with a conveniently located bin and possibly signage encouraging people to dispose of the rubbish responsibly the litter problem will improve in the future.

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Your comment has been logged in our system and you should shortly receive an email with a PDF document attached containing a copy of your submitted form.

If you have an account with us, you can track the progress of your requests, reports and applications online at any time by logging in and clicking on **My Account**.

If you have time we would appreciate it if you could complete our [equal opportunities monitoring form](#). We hope you don't mind us asking for this personal information but we have a legal duty to monitor information on equal opportunities.

26 - My request to Powys County Council for a new bin to be placed within the park

COMMENT

Comment

Good Evening,

I live in Lower Orewen and my children frequently use the the house park which is almost full of rubbish. We regularly carry out litter picks, however, there are no bins located inside the park and the littering has increased markedly since the removal of the single, small bin that was located inside the park a number of years ago. There is a bin at the bottom of the road outside the park, however, this is clearly not being utilized by park users. Could the council please place a bin inside the park to help reduce the problem of littering?

I have recently visited our a litter pick in and around the house park in consultation with the Residents and Residents Association and have returned to the park three weeks later and collected another full bag of rubbish just from within the park.

Kind regards

Sarah French

Would you like a response? ☒ Yes

Contact Information

Name: Sarah French

Address: 45 Orewen Road, Llanidloes, Powys, SY23 3AA

Email: sarah.french@powys.gov.uk

Telephone: 01542 811111

Language Preference (Written): English

Language Preference (Spoken): English

5469-5153-6041-0772

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Thank you for sending us your **comment**.

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Your comment is logged in our system and a PDF document is attached to this email containing a copy of your submitted form.

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Another area of our garden that we have discussed previously but haven't actioned yet is how to save water so we can water our plants without having to use the hosepipe. We had a look on the

Dwr Cymru website on ideas for saving water in the garden, however, my children wanted to go further and look at saving water in the home too.

We have purchased a water butt that has been connected to the roof of our greenhouse. We may decide to relocate the butt to the bottom of the garden to collect water from the garage roof, however, we felt that as we use a lot of water in the greenhouse it would be best to site the butt as close to that as possible.

We also looked at purchasing timers for the shower to encourage everybody to use less water, however, when we looked at the timers online from Amazon, my children decided that they weren't necessary and we could try using the timer on Alexa or a mobile phone first, I felt this was a true demonstration of responsible consumerism on the part of my children!



27 - Our new water butt



28 - Art work inspired by the butterflies that regularly visit our garden. We live next to the Cae Lynden Nature Reserve which is home to the rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly where we will often to walk our dog, please see the link below for details of the reserve.

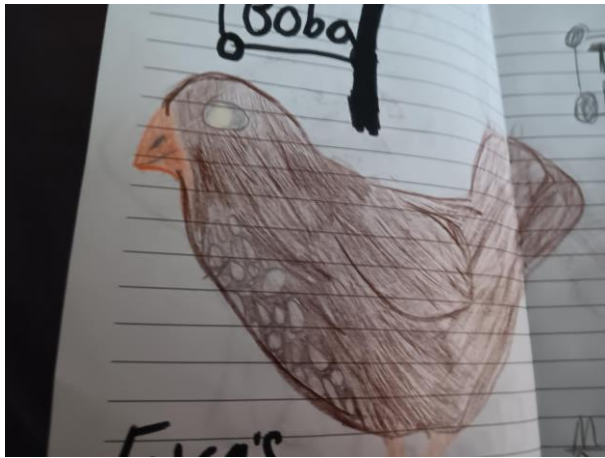
[Cae Lynden / The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales \(welshwildlife.org\)](http://www.welshwildlife.org/)

During our exploration of the wild area at the top of garden, we found a frog. We have found frogs before, however, through developing this deeper understanding of the impact we have on the wildlife that surround us, my children have asked about developing a small pond, with hedgehog friendly pebbles to help any small animals that may fall into the water to escape. They also suggested that we create small pebbles for bees to drink from if needed. We are currently deciding where best to place a pond and we have used the RHS website for ideas and things to consider when developing a new pond.

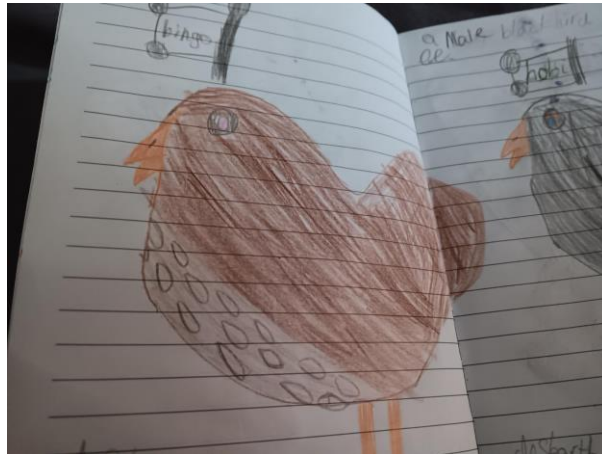
[Wildlife ponds / RHS Gardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/wildlife-ponds)



29 - An ants nest that was discovered on our frog hunt



30 - My daughters artwork or the bird that visit our garden



The pictures that my daughter created inspired me to write a little note on how the birds that visit our garden make me feel, this is my first attempt (possibly ever) of composing a poem:

Our Birds

It is 4.08 and I am wide awake, the birds have rudely awoken me from my slumber.

I stretch and get out of bed and accept that my day has begun.

I shuffle downstairs and flick the switch that will bring my senses alive with the aroma of coffee.

I open the back door and take my first lungful of fresh air and wrap my dressing gown tightly round me to stop the chill from entering my bones

I sit on my patio and inhale the wonderful smell of dew covered grass and feel my senses tingle and my brain come alive.

I look about my garden. See my flowers blooming. Notice my greenhouse full of tomatoes yet to ripen and..... *breath deeply*....

Life is good. Sat here, listening to the early birds. Happy now, that they have woken me at this silly hour, to marvel at life's simple pleasures.

Through both covid lockdowns, I felt extremely lucky to have a large garden and we spent a lot of time looking under stones, building bug houses and changing the layout to suit our needs, however, I feel that I have become more connected to the outdoor space and feel that I know more about the wildlife and flowers that inhabit it and how best to support them to thrive. I have been surprised at the depth of my children's knowledge and enthusiasm for our garden and I feel that the John Muir Award has broadened my view of how sustainable we can be when looking after the little things such as hanging bird boxes and growing flowers from seeds. It has developed a feeling of satisfaction that we have grown something from seed that will, in the case of our tomatoes, feed our family and will hopefully taste the sweeter for it.

Ideas such as the water butt will help us reduce our water usage, my children have also linked that to saving electricity by turning off lights when not in use, all of these contribute to the 17 sustainability goals and encouraging responsible global citizenship. I am very proud of my children for demonstrating to others the affect you can have on your future through carrying our socially conscious activities such as litter picks and planting wild flowers for everybody to enjoy.

I believe the John Muir Award should be something that all schools should take part in, to help children gain a sense of belonging and agency over their own immediate surroundings but also understand how everything we do is interlinked, from travelling by public transport or walking if possible, looking critically at where our food comes from and how we can eat healthily, more sustainably.

