

John Muir Award

Regaining Paradise:
Sustainability in the Early Years.

View from my bedroom window.





Discover



My Parents Garden

- This is a section of my parent's garden in the Dulais Valleys.
- I choose this garden as it is somewhere that I appreciate a lot more as I have moved away from the area and live in a busy city.
- My parents are both retired now but have always loved gardening.
- My dad has always grown produce in the garden and from a young child I was taught how to look after the garden and the living things around it.



My Home

- We own land, which we had horses, sheep and chickens on when I was younger.
- My parents taught me how to care for the animals and how important it was to ensure that they were happy and safe.
- I would then teach my friends how to care for them as we played in the fields and explored the area.
- The animals have all gone now as my parents found it too hard to look after, but the land is now used by a young family who are starting up as farmers, so we still have animals on there even if they aren't ours anymore.



Click on the black photo to see the walk I use to get to my house, which is where the new farmers have sheep. If you listen carefully, you can hear them.



The walk to the house is kept wild for the bees.

I saw lots of bees and flies buzzing around the wildflowers and grass on my walk.



The Garden

- The garden has changed over the years. My parents have planted more flowers and shrubs and sectioned areas off to make it more manageable.
- I value the peace that the garden brings me as I have gotten older. I love to come home and sit in the garden and listen to the birds and insects flying around and the occasional farm animal – see next slide. I instantly feel calmer being in this environment.



This is a video of the sounds in the garden, if you look closely, you can see a wood pigeon sitting on the line post.

Click on the black screen to access the video.



Explore

Let's see what we can find in my parent's garden.



Growing

- My father has always grown his own produce which we as a family benefit from all year round. Food that does not get eaten now will be frozen for later in the year or donated to the local food bank.
- I remember as a child going to my friend's house for tea and I thought the vegetables tasted funny, but it was because they were from the supermarket not our garden. It is a game my family like to play to see if I can tell the difference between shop bought or fresh still to this day. I always win and so do dad's vegetables.
- My dad also runs the gardening club in our local village, he gives guidance and support to everybody and has said that the club is getting busier and busier as people seem to be trying to grow their own produce to save money and to help with the issues in the world today.

- Firstly, my dad has several glasshouse dotted around areas of the garden, here is what is in one of them.
- In here there are tomato and cucumber plants, seedlings and flowers that are not ready to go out into the garden yet.
- My dad and I have a competition most years to see who can grow the most tomatoes. I have not grown any yet, but there is still time.
- However, in those watering cans is a special 'growing mix' that he will not tell me what is in there as it is a 'secret', so my tomatoes never taste the same as his.



Inside the glasshouse



Tomatoes



Cucumbers



Seedlings

Garden Patches

- These sections used to be much bigger when I was a child. We all helped to make sure the plants were looked after and cared for. I remember arguing with my sister who was going to water the garden every night before bed.
- I also remember trying to sneak into the pea net, as I didn't want to go inside for food. I managed to cut my leg and instead of going to get help I used leaves to stop the blood and carried on playing. I have a scar to remind me that you shouldn't steal, so that's a lesson learnt!
- Today my dad grows food that he and my mother like, see the next slides for what is available in their garden.





Carrots



Red Onions



White Onions



French beans



Leeks



Runner Beans



Iceberg Lettuce



Cabbage



More cabbage



Shallots



Rows of potatoes



Beetroots

Did you know Rhubarb is a vegetable? I didn't until this assignment



Rhubarb



Blackberry plant

Every week, my mother will make my dad a blackberry or rhubarb pie or crumble using the produce from the garden.

Plants and Shrubs

- My parents garden has lots of different plants and shrubs that they enjoy researching and purchasing from lots of local garden centres. They love watching programmes related to gardening and wildlife, so search for plants that will encourage local wildlife to access the garden.
- In the winter months, there are dedicated sheds for plants that need to be kept inside and for the onions hanging from the ceiling to dry.
- It always amazes me how my parents know how to care for the plants and what to do if they look like they are not going to survive. They have so much knowledge I am hoping to gain some for my own garden.





Here are some of the plants my parents have in their garden that I saw bees and butterflies accessing during my observation.











I found some clay and tried to make imprints from the fern that I found growing in the garden.

The marks left from the leaf were so precise, it was amazing to see.





I tried with other leaves too,
I remember doing this with
my parents as a child.

I used to search for all sorts
of things to make imprints.

I will definitely be doing this
with the children at the
settings I work with.



**What other things did I find in
my parent's garden?**



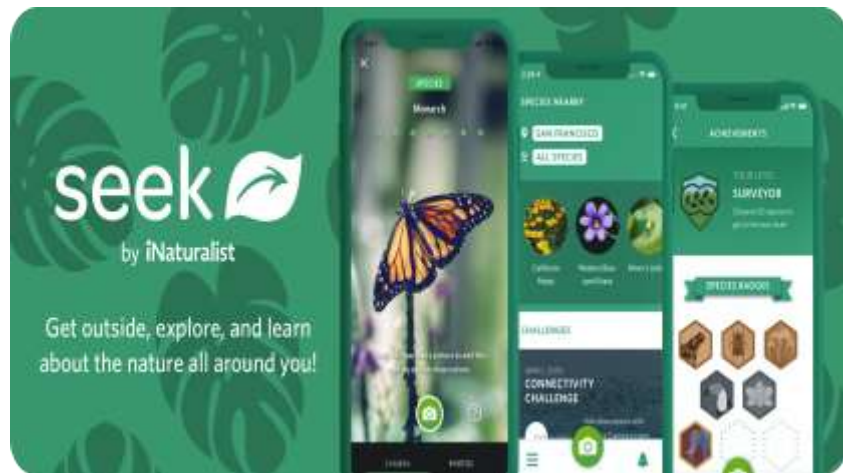
Insects

I used the website [The NHBS Guide to UK Spider Identification](#) to identify this spider. Its is called the Garden Spider.

I found woodlice in the garden. However, there are several different names for these that I have learnt whilst working in Cardiff, names such as Granny Greys, Moch y coed and the strangest Cheesy Bugs.



I used the seek app
https://static.inaturalist.org/wiki_page_attachments/3356-original.pdf
to find out the name of this insect
and this is called a thick legged
flower beetle.



- I also found ants in the garden. It made me think, I wonder if they have a nest.
- I researched how ants make nests and found the clip below showing how they are made.
- <https://sl.bing.net/ecMGaHEPcsK>

Things I have
learnt about ants.

- There are over 10,000 known species of ants living throughout the world.
- Ants can be found almost anywhere in the world, with the exception of Antarctica, Iceland, Greenland, and some island nations.
- Ants can lift 20 times their own body weight.
- The queen ant lays all the eggs in the anthill and can live up to ten or twenty years



Conserve



Wildlife



In this section of my parent's garden sparrows, blue tits and robins are always seen.

They have dust baths in the earth (as long as my dogs didn't see them)

Then they would sit in the basins of the water feature and drink and bathe at the same time.

Click photo of the water feature to see it working.





There are also a lot of bees in our garden, and I managed to capture one gathering pollen from the flowers in the garden.

Click on the black photo to listen to the bee.

Recycle and Reuse

My parents find uses for random items in their garden, as they do not believe in wasting things.

Both my parents think that people in today's society are wasteful and get annoyed that people do not look after things.

Here are some of the repurposed items they have in their garden.



Free and Found Resources



The framework for most of the cover for the cabbage is from a trellis that broke in the wind. My dad made it into a frame so that the net could go over to cover the cabbages from wild rabbits.

The boxes are donated from a local business, which my dad turned into carrot boxes.



Free and Found Resources



The sink that houses the mint is from my mamgu's kitchen. This keeps the mint from taking over the garden.

The chimney pot that houses the blue flower is from our house, when the chimney needed replacing, my dad asked that it was kept for him to use as a planter.



Free and Found Resources



The coal scuttle was from my nanna's house, as she changed from coal to oil, so again my dad took it and used it as a planter.

The compost bin is used regularly in the garden, and they are about to get another one as this one doesn't house enough for them.



Free and Found Resources



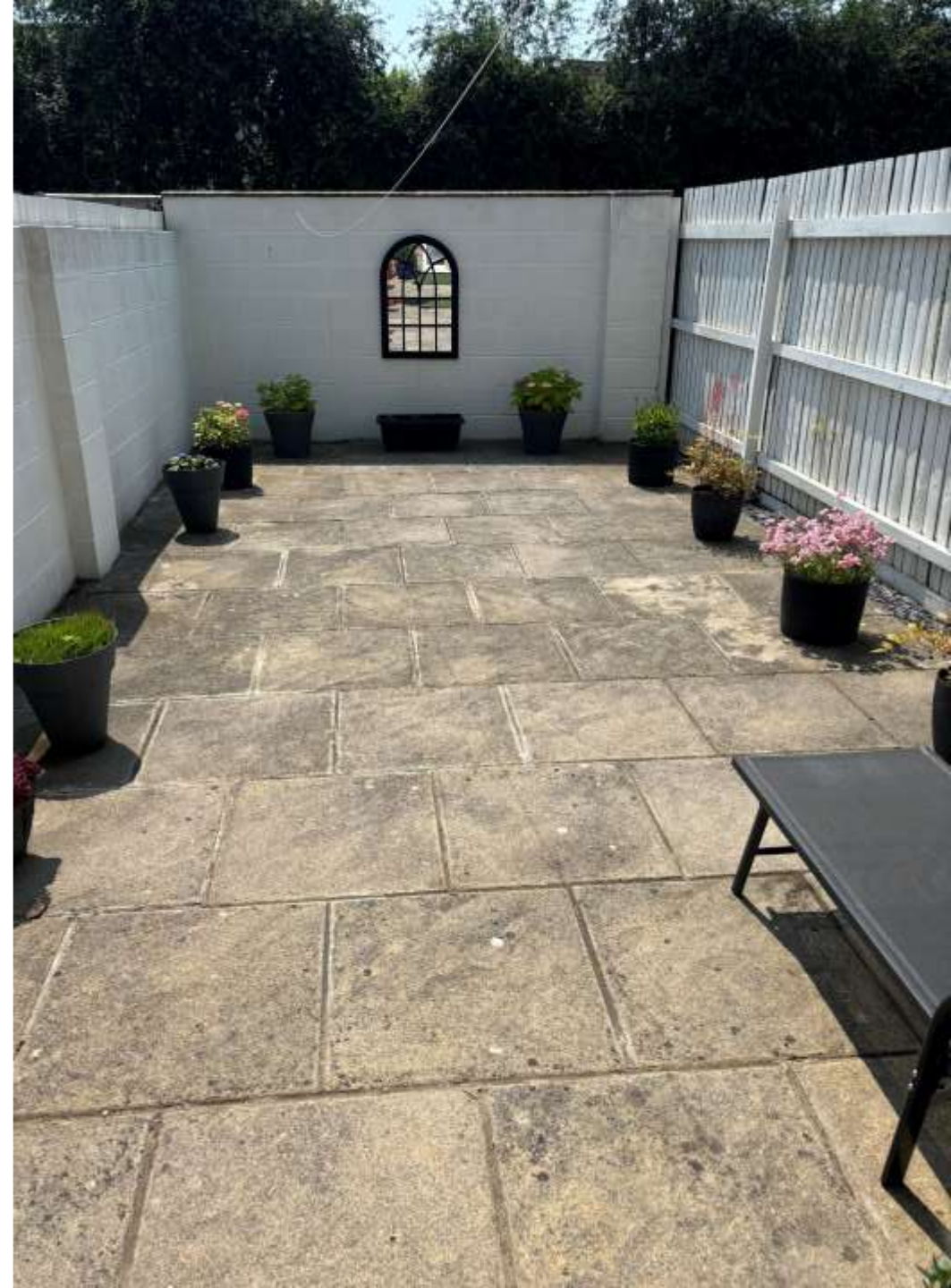
My parents went on a trip to Tenby and saw 'Bill and Ben the flowerpot men' in a shop for £30. My dad said, 'I can make those at home for much cheaper than that' and he did. Here are Bill and Ben made with blocks of wood given to him by a local builder.

Lastly, this is a beer barrel from our local club, my dad cut it in half and used the other half as a water feeder for the horses.

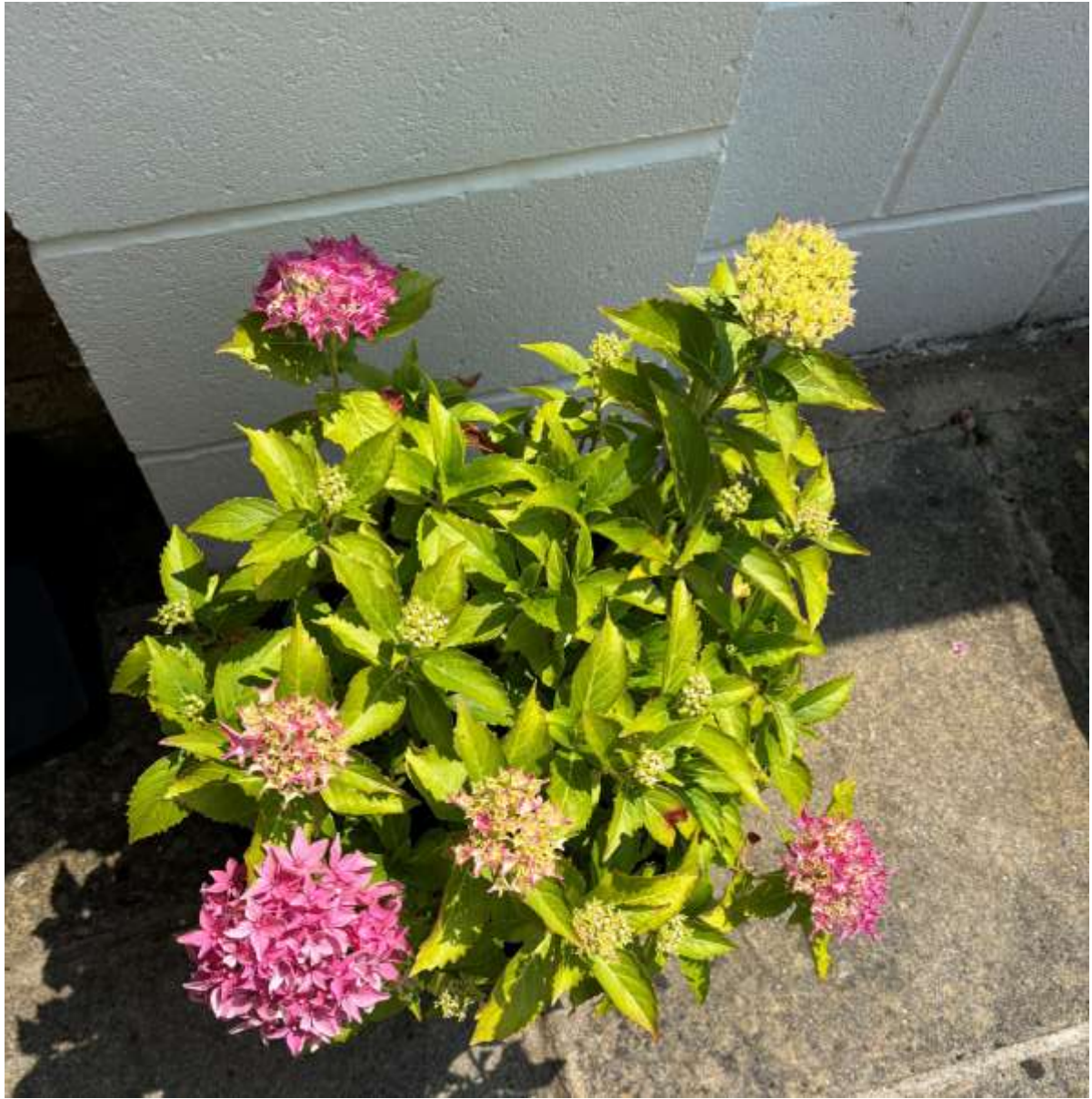


My Garden

- In exploring my parents garden, I have realised how I have neglected my own garden and what I was taught from a young age.
- I live in Cardiff and have a much smaller garden than my parents (see photo).
- The garden as the photo suggests is very concrete heavy, however I have now tried to plant some flowers that I saw in my parent's garden to encourage more greenery and wildlife into my garden (see next slides)
- I have already seen little sparrows coming into the garden and more insects buzzing around.









I have also started to grow my own lettuce and I am going to collect a water butt from a friend's house as they have bought a bigger one. This will enable me to save the rain to water the plants and to use for anything else I need in the garden.



Wildlife I
have in my
garden.



Bird Song

My garden backs onto fields, so in the trees behind the house there are lots of birds.

I hear lots of bird song and love waking up to this rather than the noise of traffic which is on the other side of the house. Click on the photo to listen to the birds.

It makes me realise how fortunate I was to grow up in a house with no neighbours or the noise of traffic.

The area I live in Cardiff is becoming more and more built up as plots of land are being sold and houses are being built, which makes me realise how important it is that I provide a home for the animals that construction will affect.





When I was sitting in my garden, I heard bees buzzing behind me and when I looked, I saw that they were trying to make a nest in my overflow pipe (click on the picture to the left to see the bees trying to go inside the pipe).

This is not something I wanted, so I quickly went to the shop to buy a bee house for them, so that they wouldn't damage my house.

I need to fix the house to the wall, but so far, they have been around it exploring, but no bee nests have been made yet.





Bee Nests

- Seeing the bees trying to access my downpipe made me think, how do bees make nests?
- So, I watched the following video on You Tube to see how they build their nests <https://youtu.be/dmyd-ZyHicA>
- It was fascinating to see how it all works and how clever they are. The queen bee is huge!



Honey

- My father told me how important bees are to the world and I remember watching a video in school of how bees collect pollen to make honey. I loved honey, so I made bee houses in school to put all around my garden when I was a child, which my sister hated as she was terrified.
- I still love honey and use it as a method of easing my hay fever, it seems to work for me, so thank you bees.

[Learn these top 10 facts about bees | WWF](#)

Facts about bees



Share



Sharing what I have learnt



I was chatting to my friend's husband about my new assignment, and I was talking about how much I loved learning about growing things as a child and he said, 'come with me', and behind a fence in their garden he has a greenhouse that he wants to grow things in. My friend thinks he is ridiculous, but I have helped him, and his children (with the help of my dad) to grow tomatoes, sweetcorn and cucumbers. They love looking after the plants and have managed to grow some tomatoes that have not made it into the house yet!!!





This is my friend's daughter who used to attend my setting when she was two years old.

I loved being outdoors and would show all the children the minibeasts we would find in the garden. I explained that we need to look after them, so they need to be taken home to their 'bug house' so that they are safe.

My friend's daughter still remembers this and has now helped her Bambi make logs with holes in, just like we did for her school minibeast hotel.



My Parents

I believe that my parents have been and are still doing the best they can for the world.

My mam and dad both go to the local schools to support the teachers in their growing projects. Both the English and Welsh school parents are now becoming part of the gardening club that my dad runs, which is a great way to pass the message on that this is our world, and we need to look after it.

My parents also make donations to the local food bank, so that people have healthy fresh produce as well as the tinned and packaged food.



Work

I work in a team that supports local playgroups within the Cardiff area.

The focus for the team is Froebelian principles which includes children connecting with the world around them.

Being in nature is key to this, so to support this, we are currently running a competition to grow your own Pumpkins with the children.

The settings have really taken this on board and have caught the planting bug. We have some settings that have planted different types of vegetables as well as the pumpkins. See next slides.

We also gave all settings fruit trees from Coed Caerdydd [Coed Caerdydd - Outdoor Cardiff](#) which are growing beautifully from all the watering the children are doing.





Here are some
of the
pumpkin
plants from
the settings.





This setting has a member of staff who loves the garden.

We had a conversation about how important it is to show the children how to grow things and where things come from, so they have now planted some carrots, pumpkins and herbs.

This is the apple tree from Coed Caerdydd that is placed where the parents and children can see daily.





One of the settings I work with are struggling for money for activities for the children, so I suggested to plant some herbs so that the children will always have a supply of authentic resources for the mud kitchen.

I also suggested picking up all the flowers that had fallen off the plants they have in the garden and freezing them so that the children can break them free and to use them to make potions, I used to love doing this in my garden as a child.





- I also advised the setting to grow their own fruit for the children to eat at snack, so far they have grown strawberries , and when I went to visit the children took my hand and dragged me to see the strawberries and told me that ‘ I wasn’t allowed to touch them yet as they are not red, but if I see a slug or snail on the pot to take it and put it in the mud as they will eat the strawberry’.
- Next week I am going in to help them make a bug hotel, the children are really excited to help me use my real drill.

Me

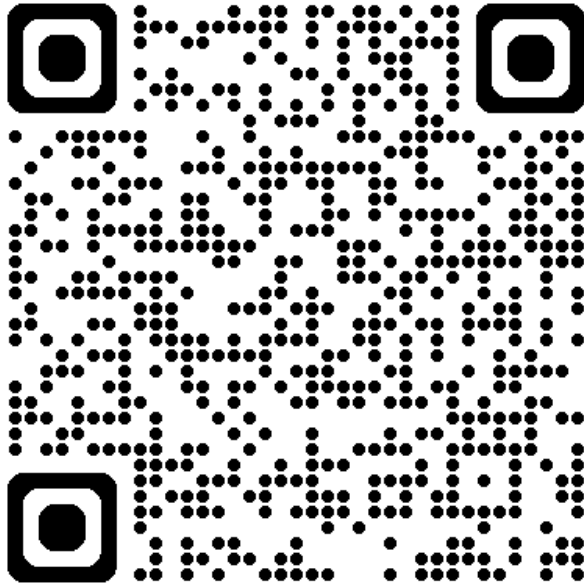
Aswell as planting within my garden to encourage wildlife, I became conscious of wasting water after looking at the Dwr Cymru website information (see next slide) I now make sure I do the following things to save money and water: -

- I do not leave the water running when I brush my teeth
- I only fill the kettle with water I will use for the cup of tea/coffee I will drink
- When I empty my fish tank, I use that water to water the plants
- I have more showers than baths



Dwr Cymru

Here are some tips for saving water in the bathroom, kitchen and garden.



Here is a video on how we can save water

<https://youtu.be/IV-ZX-0hJus>

Did you know?

The average person uses 176 litres of water a day, that's almost 310 pints!



What I will take from this assignment

- This assignment has made me realise that I had lost touch with the natural world and things that I was taught as a young child. I have used some of what I was taught in the settings I worked in but have not used it in my own garden and life.
- I am going to make more of a conscious effort to look after my garden and surrounding areas. I have been told by one of my neighbours that there is a local litter picking group that I could join, as we need to do our part in helping the world, it isn't solely down to the Governments and people like David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg. I am looking forward to getting started.