

AI Cover Sheet

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Cover sheet

Sway scrapbook link sent to Natasha Morgan and Glenda Tinney on the 6th of July 2026

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Exported as word from Sway

John Muir Award

ECEY6005 Sustainability in the early years: Our Garden

Discover

Looking at the photograph of our garden reminds me how much it has changed over the last few months. What started as empty species has gradually become an area of vegetables, flowers and wildlife.



1 - Our garden May 2026



2 - Our garden 2026

My aim was to simply grow our own fruit and vegetables. I wanted to see whether I could successfully grow produce that my family enjoys eating, particularly Bangladeshi vegetables such as bottle gourds, hyacinth beans and naga chillis, as they are often difficult to buy fresh locally. As the weeks went by, I realised that gardening was much more than producing food. For me it became an opportunity to spend time outdoors with my children, learn about nature and

understand how even a small garden can support wildlife and become a more sustainable environment.



3 - Hyacinth bean plants



4 - Bottle gourd plant and male flowers



5 - A variety of naga chillis

At first, I mainly checked whether plants needing watering or feeding, but over time I found myself slowing down and observing what was happening around me. I started noticing insects visiting flowers, vegetables developing from tiny flowers into fruits and how weather affected different plants. One of the biggest things I have learned is that every living thing has a purpose. Before I started gardening, I probably would not have paid much attention to insects, but now I understand that many of them are essential for a healthy ecosystem. Rather than seeing insects as pests, I have learned that many are helping our garden grow.

One of my favourite pictures is of the ladybird sitting on our chilli plant. I was genuinely pleased when I found it because I knew it was helping our garden. Ladybirds feed on aphids, which can damage plants, meaning I did not need to rely on chemical pesticides. This made me realise that nature often provides its own solutions if we give it a chance. Instead of trying to remove every insect, I have learned that encouraging beneficial insects creates a healthier balance within our garden.



6 - Ladybird eating aphids from leaves

Explore

Gardening has encouraged me to spend much more time observing nature instead of simply working in the garden. Every day I notice something different, whether it was a new flower opening, a vegetable beginning to grow or an insect visiting one of the plants. These observations helped me understand that everything in the garden is connected.

Tomatoes

Watching the tomato plants develop has been one of the most rewarding parts of gardening. I watched the yellow flowers appear before gradually turning into small green tomatoes. Looking after them taught me that successful fruit production depends on healthy soil, regular watering and pollination. Growing tomatoes at home means I can harvest them when they are fully ripe instead of buying produce that has travelled long distances. This reduces food miles, plastics packaging and unnecessary waste.



7 - First truss of tomatoes

Cucumber

I found growing cucumbers particularly interesting because I learned how important pollination is. Earlier in the season I spent time learning how to identify male and female flowers and how successful pollination affects fruit production. Seeing the small cucumbers growing made me appreciate how insects play an important role in fruit production. It reminded me that without pollinators many of the vegetables we eat would not develop properly.



8 - Mini cucumbers forming

Leafy vegetables

Growing leafy vegetables has shown me how quickly fresh food can be produced in a small space. Rather than buying bags of salad from supermarket, I can simply walk into our garden and harvest what I need. This means that there is very little waste, as well as plastic packaging bags reduction, therefore supporting sustainability.



9 - Giant mustard greens



10 - Amaranth leaves

Flowers

I used to consider flowers as decorative, but they also provide an important source of nectar for pollinating insects. Flowers provide vital food for bees, butterflies and other insects, which are essential for biodiversity. The hydrangea has produced beautiful flowers, providing a food source while making the garden a pleasant place to spend time. The marigolds have also been beneficial, attracting pollinators while helping to keep pests away, showing that some flowers can support the garden in more than one way. Similarly, the roses have attracted many bees and insects during the flowering season, reinforcing my understanding that flowers are much more than decoration, and that having a mixture of plants ensures there is always something available for pollinators to feed on.



11 - Hydrangea



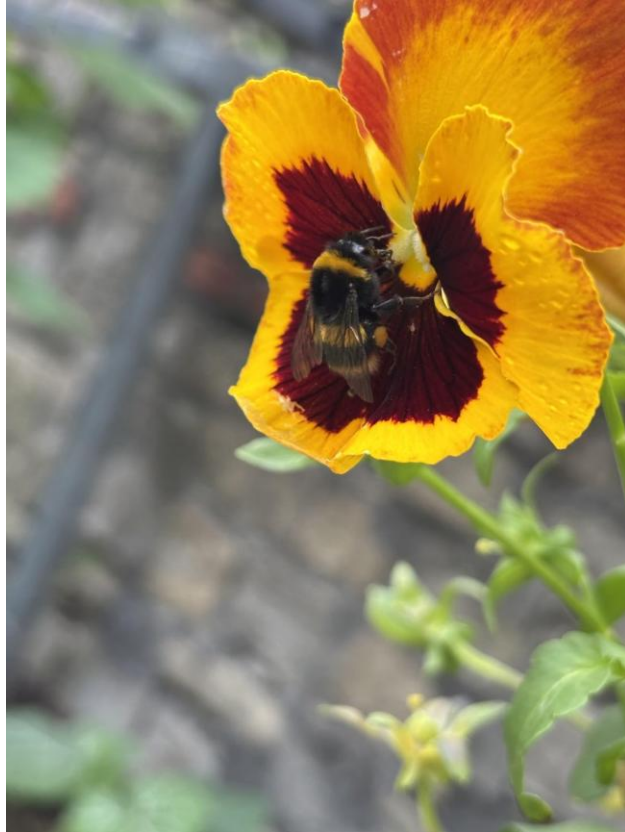
12 - Marigolds



13 - Rose

Bumblebee

This is another favourite picture of mine because it captured a bumblebee collecting nectar from a flower. Seeing the bees at work helped me understand how important pollinators are. Without bees many fruits and vegetables crops would struggle to produce food. It also reminded me why it is important not to use pesticides that may harm beneficial insects. The more time I spend watching wildlife, the more I realise that gardening is not only about the plants I grow. It is also about protecting the insects and wildlife that makes a healthy garden possible.



14 - Bumblebee drinking nectar



15 - Bumblebee pollinating tomato flowers

Conserve

Gardening as completely changed the way I think about conservation. Before I started gardening, I thought conservation mainly involved protecting forest, beaches and nature reserves. I now understand that conservation can begin at home, even a small garden like mine.

Small actions carried out consistently can have a positive impact on biodiversity and the environment.

Reducing the use of pesticides

One way I have tried to garden more sustainably is by reducing the use of chemicals. Rather than use pesticides, I allow nature to help control pests naturally. Seeing ladybirds in our garden reassured me that natural predators were doing their job. I have also taken a hands-on approach by gently picking off leaf eating insects such as caterpillars and moving them to another area of the garden where I created a bug hotel for wildlife. This ensures that they are not harmed whilst still protecting our plants. By avoiding pesticide, I protect bees and other beneficial insects, creating a healthier more balance ecosystem.



16 - Insect habitat created for safe shelter

Rainwater

I have also started collecting rainwater wherever possible. Instead of relying on tap water, I have started storing rainwater to water many of our plants. Rainwater is a natural resource, cost nothing and helps reduce the amount of treated water being used in the garden. During the recent warm weather, I watered the plants early in the morning which reduced evaporation and helped the plants make better use of the water they received.



17 - Collecting rainwater to sustainably water our plants

Composting

Another sustainable practice I wish to develop is composting, by using a compost bin to recycle food scraps and garden waste. Rather than throwing away fruits and vegetable scraps, old leaves and garden cuttings, I will place them into the compost bin where they will gradually break down into nutrient rich compost. This compost can then be added to the soil to improve soil quality and reduces household waste going to landfill as well as reducing the amount of compost I need to buy for gardening.



18 - Keeping food scraps to go into a compost bin

One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that sustainability is about working with nature. Healthy plants depend on healthy soil, pollinating insects, natural predators and responsible gardening practice.

Share

Throughout the gardening project, I have shared the journey with my family, neighbours and friends by showing them pictures of the vegetable, flowers and wildlife that have visited our garden. I explain why I now avoid unnecessary pesticides, why I collect rainwater and why composting is such an important part of sustainable gardening. I have also shared how planting flowers amongst vegetable encourages pollinators, therefore increasing our yield. Some of our family members and neighbours have even started growing their own vegetables, and I have supported them by providing extra seedling that I had grown, helping to spread sustainable gardening practice.



19 - A box of seedlings shared with my sister

I involve my children and extended family in gardening so they can learn about sustainability and caring for the environment for future generations. I encourage them to help with planting seeds, watering plants and observing insects. This shared experience not only makes gardening an enjoyable for us as a family but also helps my children develop respect for the environment and an understanding of how their actions can make a positive difference in the future.



20 - Harvesting bottle gourd



21 - Watering flower

Overall, sharing my knowledge and experiences has helped encourage other to adopt more sustainable practice in their own garden, showing how small actions can have a positive impact on both the environment and wider community.

Jane Davidson: A key figure for advancing sustainability in Wales

When researching individuals who have made a significant contribution to sustainability in Wales, Jane Davidson stood out. During her time as Minister for education and later Minister for environment, sustainability and housing, Jane Davidson introduced a number of sustainability policies including the proposal that later developed into the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Davidson, 2020). What is particularly inspiring is that many of her initiatives

were practical and achievable, encouraging gradual behavioural change rather than unrealistic expectation.

One of Jane Davidson's key achievements was the introduction of the 5p charge for single use plastic carrier bags in Wales in 2011 (Welsh Government, 2017). This was the first policy of its kind but many question whether the initiative would work as previous international initiatives have been poorly evaluated and, in some case, encountered public resistance (Poortinga, Whitmarsh and Suffolk, 2013). However, it is now widely recognised as highly successful, with research showing 80% reduction of single carrier bag use (Thomas et al., 2019), demonstrating how small policy change can lead to significant long-term shifts in public behaviour.

Additionally, Jane Davidson played a key role in improving recycling systems across Wales, contributing to its reputation as one of the leading nations (Welsh Government, 2017). Importantly, she recognises that sustainability must be imbedded in government structures rather than left to individual responsibility (Davidson, 2020).

Furthermore, Jane Davidson advocated for sustainability to be embedded across all areas of government decision making (Good Governance, 2021). She was influential in shaping the vision that led to the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015. This legislation encouraged public bodies to consider the long-term impacts of their decisions and prioritises the wellbeing of future generations (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

Moreover, Jane Davidson supported Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, integrating it into the Welsh curriculum and recognising the importance of embedding sustainability and global responsibility from an early age (Davidson, 2020). These principles continue within Curriculum for Wales, which aims to develop ethical, informed citizens and highlights the important of engaging children with the natural world (Welsh Government, 2022).

In summary, Jane Davidson has made a significant contribution to sustainability in Wales through policies such as proposal leading to the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015. Her introduction of the plastic bag charge and improvements to recycling demonstrates how practical measures influence behaviour, while her emphasis on education continues to shape the Curriculum for Wales today.

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