

Regaining Paradise? Sustainability in the Early Years

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Discover

From as young as I can remember I have always been infatuated with the outdoors. I think it was bred in to me. Being one of 4 boys my parents took every opportunity to get us outside, immersing us in nature, whether that be in a park, forest or beach. Growing up I lived in Luton, a suburban, built up town with a distinct lack of green space, especially in my first home. We had a slabbed garden and I remember playing out there with my twin brother Jake and often longing for a proper garden of my own. In 2003, aged 8, we moved to the house I would call home for 20 years and the place my parents still call home to this day. This is where my love of nature began to flourish more. Living in the countryside, surrounded by green space, red kites soaring in the sky and the most amazing garden a young boy could wish for. It was here I spent 20 years discovering things in nature, where I sought refuge during hard times and where I could not wait to take my daughter for the first time. Come with me for a walk through my family garden, to discover the most special place on Earth.



Discovering Wildlife

Prior to moving to Markyate in Hertfordshire, where my family home is, I was incredibly naive and blinkered as to what amazing wildlife there was that called Hertfordshire home. A plethora of insects, birds and mammals have filled my garden with sights and sounds over the years, leading me to have both amazing memories of discovering them for the first time, as well as a burning passion for ensuring that there are environments a plenty in which they can thrive. We always had dogs, greyhounds when I was a child that we had rescued from kennels. They could not believe their luck when they first saw their new garden, and watching them discover different parts of it was something that we as a family loved doing together. Now they have black labrador called Roscoe, who again they have rescued, and his love for the garden is already clear to see.

We often have the pleasure of seeing Red Kites soaring high up in the sky. They dance with such grace before swooping down with such power. Seeing the food chain in action like this still excites me as much today as it did 20 years ago.



More Wonderful Wildlife



A spider that has used a drainpipe to help spin its web.



A ladybird, my daughters favourite insect, hiding in the leaves of the bramley apple tree.



A swarm of bees that took over the branch of the apple tree two years ago. Seeing how they worked together to form this was fascinating.



From red kites to the tiniest mites. All creatures great and small find happiness in the garden.

Exploring

Whenever I explore my garden I always feel this overwhelming sense of tranquility and calmness, no matter what is going on around me or in my life. Some of happiest days have been spent exploring, whilst some of my saddest moments have also been spent either walking around or sat in my garden.

When I was younger I used to love exploring in the orchard and the vegetable patch.



The plum tree
coming into season



The runner beans getting
ready to be harvested

I vividly remember the first summer after my parents planted their vegetables. Exploring the patch with my Dad and waiting to see if anything had grown filled me with immense excitement, it now fills me with great joy to watch my own daughter doing the same with her Grandad when we go to visit.

The trees took longer to grow and allow us to harvest their delicious plums, apples and peaches. I still relish the harvest every year as a homemade apple crumble normally follows closely behind.

Exploring

During my exploring I stumbled upon something that made me smile, a football. Coming from a football crazy house and with four football crazy brothers, we were rarely without a ball at our feet growing up. However, they were under no circumstances allowed in the garden growing up. Mum's flowers and Dad's vegetables and trees were far too precious, but not anymore. Their garden is now always filled with the sound of their grandchildren playing football, laughing and running in and out of the flower beds! My parents are adamant they haven't gone soft in their old age, I am not quite so sure!



The ball in question!



Another ball! This time nestled in some plants and some pebbles my brothers and I collected during our childhood holidays to my grandparents caravan in Suffolk. Such happy times. I love looking through the stones and remembering those times spent with my Nanny Marian who I miss dearly.

Self-Exploration

As I said previously, I have often spent my happiest moments in my garden. However, in February 2021 my family suffered an unimaginable loss, when my niece Daisy sadly passed away at 10 days old. Throughout this immense trauma and grief, I used the garden as a refuge, to gather my thoughts, shed a quiet tear and explore my own feelings about the loss of beautiful Daisy. I look back now and I am proud of the strength we showed as a family, Daisy is always in my mind and now when I sit in the garden and watch my daughter play with her cousins, including Daisy's brother Finley, my mind often wanders as to what she would have thought of my favourite place in the world.



These are benches my Dad built out of recycled wood just before Daisy was born. He unfortunately never got the chance to see her sat on one, but we often sit on them and talk about her whilst watching her cousins play.



A cherry blossom gifted to my parents after Daisy passed away. It gives us great joy when it blossoms each year reminding us of her.

As I Sit Here in the Garden

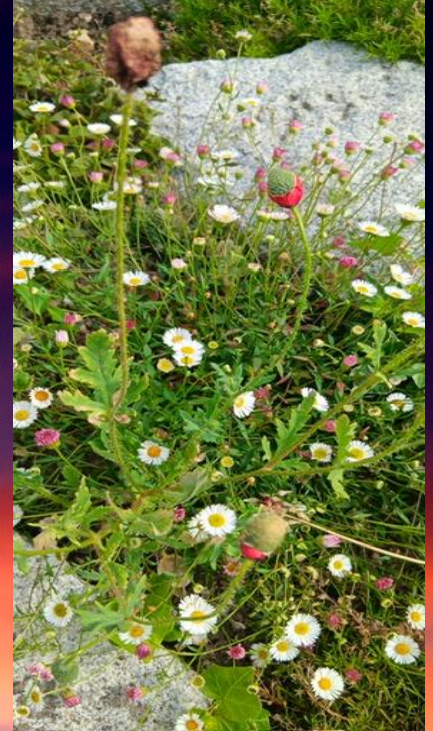
A poem for Daisy

As I sit here in the garden
Wiping a tear from my face
I can't help myself but think
What would you have thought of this place?

Would you have loved the flowers?
Or running on the grass?
Or playing football with your cousins
Wondering if they'll ever pass

I think you would have liked the animals
Watching granny give the squirrels a fright
Or sitting on grandads knee with him saying
Look up there Daisy there's another red kite

You would have loved this garden Daisy
I know that to be true
But every year when the daisies bloom
We will always think of you



Conserve

Over the years we as a family have attempted to aid conservation within the garden. For example, growing a plethora of flowers and trees that are fantastic habitats for different species of animals and insects. An example of this is the bug hotel that we made using logs.



The garden water butt. Not only fantastic in reducing water usage and helping to conserve the environment, but also a hot bed for a number of insects.

Another example of attempts to conserve nature in the garden is the bird house my dad built 20 years ago that has been the nesting place for a family of bluetits every year since. Untouched and undisturbed by enjoyed by us all.



Upcycling



Old watering cans and chimney pots that have been upcycled as pots for plants to grow in each year.



More chimney pots and cowls being utilised as plant pots.



Rims from old whiskey barrels that we now use as a climbing anchor for honeysuckle plants.

My Reflection

I consider myself extremely lucky to have been able to grow up with such an amazing garden to discover new things in, explore different things in and have so many happy memories in. Whenever I go and visit my parents now I make sure I never leave without a walk in the garden. It holds so many important moments in my life and I am keen to make many more in it. I am so desperate for my little girl to have the same relationship with the outdoors and nature that I did growing up and I know her spending time in her Granny and Grandad's garden will foster this love for nature as it did for me.

