

By Leaves We Live: A New Mandala at the Botanic



'We live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests.'


The great Scottish biologist **Patrick Geddes** (1854-1932) described the world as a vast leaf colony, both growing on and forming a leafy soil. It is, he said, 'by leaves we live.' **Mandala** is a Sanskrit word meaning both 'circle' and 'centre'; mandala shapes may be seen all around us in the natural world – in tree rings, flower heads, spiders' webs, shells, snowflakes.


They represent the universe – the visible world outside us (the circle) and the invisible one deep within us (the centre.) Both **Buddhism** and **Hinduism** use mandalas as spiritual tools and aids to meditation. They traditionally consist of colourful geometric patterns and symbols organised around a unifying centre; Buddhist monks have to undertake long training before they can create a mandala, which they often make from sand – this can then be brushed away as a representation of the impermanence of life.



This week at the Botanic **Therese Muskus**, artist **Karen Shewan** and her husband **Mel** have created a mandala from autumn leaves, berries, fruits, dried flowers, seed heads and pine cones – the abundant and colourful plant material that nature offers as the seasons change. Therese, Karen and Mel worked hard all day in Monday's dreich weather; despite the rain, they were the first people into the gardens in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. Their efforts have certainly paid off – the mandala is stunning, with an outer

circle of bark and leaves enclosing a star, each point of which is filled with meticulous arrangements of red, yellow, green, blue, orange and pink fruits, vegetables and flowers. They hope that people will spend a few moments reflecting on and enjoying the beauty of the colours, shapes and patterns, saying; 'In our troubled and over-exploited world the mandala is a symbol to remind us of our dependence on the earth's trees and plants, and the need to protect them.'

Also on display is a cloak that Therese (who runs a croft  and holiday homes at **Laikenbuie** in Morayshire) has embroidered with a mandala, and photographs of one that she, Karen and Mel made on **Nairn beach** from the things they found there. Children and adults are invited to have a go at creating their own mini-mandala; materials are provided.

 The mandala will remain in place at least until the end of this week and is free to visit; it can be found alongside the outer path that runs parallel to Inverleith Terrace – it's easy to spot, but you can also ask staff in Reception for directions.



(Photos of mandala-making at Nairn beach courtesy of Karen and Mel Shewan. You can also see some examples of Karen's beautiful paintings on her Facebook page [here](#).)