

Botanics' expert has tips for a green garden

Green-fingered gardening enthusiasts are being given expert tips on how to make their gardens bloom while keeping their water usage low.

Herbaceous Supervisor at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Kirsty Wilson, who is a BBC Beechgrove presenter, is supporting a Scottish Water campaign to remind homeowners of ways to be more environmentally friendly when it comes to gardening.

Kirsty said that although her 'garden' at RBGE is 70 acres, there are plenty of methods that people can adopt in their domestic setting to ensure they are not being wasteful with water.

Ensuring water resources are protected and waste reduced is a vital part of how Scottish Water is supporting sustainability, which is being highlighted during Climate Week.

One of the best tips is to water in the morning, which will allow plants to draw from water throughout the day, avoiding anything draining away overnight.

Kirsty said: "We can train our plants to drink water slowly by giving them less water, which will actually encourage them to drink less. In essence, if you keep the glass half full, your plants will adapt and learn to drink more slowly.

"If we swap hoses for watering cans, we can save a lot of

water – using a watering can slows the flow of water, meaning more water stays in your plant pot rather than running out of the base.”

People with gardens should avoid watering lawns and grass, as the average lawn will bounce back quickly after a burst of rainfall
– which is still always likely in Scotland.

Kirsty, who has also worked at Highgrove House for HRH the Prince of Wales, RBGE’s royal patron, added: “You can make your garden more environmentally friendly by installing a water butt – not only is rainwater better for your plants than mains tap water, it reduces pressure on drains during periods of heavy rain.

“If you don’t have space for a water butt, you can improve how well your soil holds water by adding organic materials like homemade compost, so when it does rain the soil retains more water.

“Water from your household is also ok to use, with care, on your outdoor plants – water from your kitchen, washing machine, baths or showers, is safe to use on most garden plants.”

RBGE is the latest to Join the Wave in supporting Scottish Water’s ‘Your Water Your Life’ campaign, which aims to encourage people to celebrate the country’s precious, natural resource – our Scottish tap water.

According to Kirsty and RBGE, gardens play an important role in preventing surface water from flooding urban areas. Green spaces soak up rain, whereas tarmac and paving can increase the amount of rainwater that runs off into street drains.

RBGE is also pioneering an experimental ‘Raingarden’ which is already proving to be helpful in understanding and planning strategies for coping with unpredictable weather.

Kirsty added: “Longer dry periods followed by heavy downpours are particularly problematic in terms of maintaining plant health and avoiding localised flooding in gardens of all sizes.

“Lawns are simply not effective at soaking up or trapping excess water and the answer does not lie in resorting to concrete or paving. We need to develop different gardening practices. Replacing hard surfaces and grass areas with a mixed selection of herbaceous perennials and shrubs can capture water runoff and increase the wildlife and habitat value of the area. This is a model that can be picked up and adapted to suit the needs of any plot, large or small.”

Brian Lironi, Director of Corporate Affairs at Scottish Water, said: “‘Your Water Your Life’ aims to highlight the importance of water in all of our lives, encouraging us to think about our water usage in a different way.

“Gardens and green spaces played a huge role in our lives during lockdown as a positive place and outlet for many of us to channel our energy. These tips show us how easy it is to keep our gardens green and beautiful while also being mindful of how much water we use.

“As we all strive to reduce the impact of all our activity on the environment and increase biodiversity, using water efficiently, saving it where we can and reducing waste, will really help.”

As Herbaceous Supervisor at RBGE, Kirsty is part of a globally important plant research and conservation horticulture institute, working at home and around the world to combat the impact of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.

Kirsty works with scientists and fellow horticulturists,

outreach ranges from engaging with students and volunteers to her Beechgrove appearances, leading tours, writing articles, and inspiring citizens of Scotland to make changes for the better.

Find out more at: <https://www.yourwateryourlife.co.uk/>