

# GARDENS

With the Ginger Gairdner, **Brian Cunningham**



Plants in movable raised planters give wheelchair users an accessible eye-level experience.



## The healing – or therapeutic – powers of gardening are being tried out in hospitals

I'm aware of how our outdoor spaces and, in particular, the act of gardening is good for our mental and physical wellbeing. And I'm quite sure those who live and work with me are, too. I dread to think how grumpy I would be if it wasn't for my daily opportunity to be out in the garden, tending my favourite plants, breathing in fresh air and listening to the sounds of the wildlife around me.

Indeed, the use of plants in therapy has been recognised since the early 1800s, when Dr Benjamin Rush, often seen as the father of therapeutic horticulture, in his role as a physician documented the benefits plants had on patients at his Philadelphia clinic.

His work led to horticultural therapy becoming a treatment option for those suffering from mental illnesses and requiring physical rehabilitation. Today it is common practice throughout the world.

During my career, I've never had any

actual hands-on experience within this field, but I can understand how this could be so. By their nature gardens are calming places, while growing plants can help bring out a sense of nurturing in us as we observe how plants respond to our daily care.

This week, I grabbed the opportunity to see horticultural therapy in practice when I visited Horatio's Garden at the National Spinal Injuries Unit in the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, Glasgow. It would be no understatement to say I was humbled by what I saw.

One of seven around the UK, with another currently in the making, Horatio's Garden is named after Horatio Chapple, a schoolboy who wanted to be a doctor, who, while volunteering at a spinal treatment centre in Salisbury, noticed there was a lack of outdoor space for patients with spinal injuries and for their loved ones who came to visit.

Horatio, encouraged by his father who was a spinal surgeon, began investigating the concept by taking advice from patients and staff on what should be included in

the space and how the garden should look. Before having the chance to realise his ambitions, Horatio's own life was tragically cut short when he was only 17.

The outpouring of love that followed to complete the work he started saw the first garden designed and created by seven-time RHS Chelsea gold medal-winner, Cleve West, using Horatio's original research in the process.

Having witnessed the powerful effect these garden oases have among clinical settings, I can fully support the view of how much of a success this first garden was. A nationwide charity was formed to create gardens in the remaining 10 spinal injury centres around the country.

I don't know what I was expecting – maybe a dream-like gardening world – but the first thing that hit me was that this IS a hospital, treating serious and traumatic injuries. As I walked down the corridor, there were hospital wards and a gymnasium full of devices and apparatus to help patients adjust to the rest of their lives.

Then, through large windows, you start to get glimpses of carefully chosen trees and plants that can be enjoyed equally from any overlooking room, no matter what time of year it is.

The importance of a nice view cannot be underestimated, with 94% of beneficiaries reporting an improvement in their wellbeing – in complete contrast to the wasteland and motorway that was originally seen outside the windows, with the nurses opting to have the blinds closed.

The Glasgow garden can be described as long and thin, making the most of what space was available. Smooth paths enable safe movement for patients in wheelchairs to meander around the garden – the smallest of bumps can be very painful.

Beds are raised so low-growing bulbs and plants are at eye level when sitting in chairs, with scented shrubs like the mock-orange or sweetpeas being grown in movable containers so patients can be active planting.

The scents sweeten the air and waft into the hospital through open windows.

**WELLBEING:** Horatio's Gardens, such as the one at the National Spinal Injuries Unit in Glasgow, have benefits for patients' quality of life.

What value the physiotherapists' garden must be to those adjusting to life in a wheelchair. Ramps, small steps and a steep incline are included in a training area within this safe environment.

Horatio's Gardens are importantly being used for the reflection and adjustment needed by people facing life-changing injuries and having long stays in hospital.

Vouched for by one lady whom I had the pleasure of talking to – she's philosophically taking on her new life.

She told me how her quality of life was being improved by not only enjoying the garden, but carrying out tasks and making crafts based on the plants, keeping her body active and mind positive.

My visit certainly has put a few things in perspective. I get so much joy out of gardening – but this, this is gardening at its most powerful and begs the question, why do we not see more of these kinds of gardens when their value is clearly seen?

Or indeed, as a society, why don't we value the benefits of gardening more?

## Places to visit



### The Castle and Gardens of Mey – Thurso

This romantic garden – open regularly until September 30 – is a reminder that, however daunting the weather, it is often possible with a little vision and energy to create and maintain a garden in the most unlikely of locations. The castle now includes an animal centre, gift shop and tearoom serving locally sourced food and drinks, often using produce from the castle's own gardens.



### Glamis Castle – Angus

With spectacular gardens and a fascinating history spanning more than six centuries, Glamis Castle offers visitors the perfect place to relax and enjoy the sights of the grounds, all year. In autumn, the abundance of trees in the grounds ensures visitors are treated to a glorious spectacle of autumnal colour.

# MARY-JANE DUNCAN



## THE VIEW FROM HERE

It appears my plans for the immediate future will have to change – due to circumstances beyond my control – rather sadly, quickly and dramatically. I will no longer be entering the world of further education in Glasgow and, naturally, I have decided to make a new plan. Imminently.

Because, Lord forbid, I actually do take it easy, slow down or give myself a moment. This is just not my style.

While I retired from the “Busy Olympics” after handing over the business, I cannot reconcile myself with no longer challenging myself or learning new skills. Or sitting still for a moment.

Naturally, as with all decisions in my life, a list is required to help steer the decision-making process.

Let's start with the things I am super, super good at and go from there. Please excuse any boasting below, stealth or otherwise.

1. Forgetting someone's name literally two seconds after they introduce themselves.

2. Placing items in a safe place only to immediately forget where that is.

3. Having to dig through the bin for the instructions on a food label because I've forgotten what they are already.

4. Leaving the laundry in the machine until it needs to be rinsed/spun again, only to forget about it a second time.

5. Napping.

6. Swearing.

7. Binge-watching trash TV after becoming overly invested in whether she'll say “yes” to the dress or not. I know, I know – the shame is overwhelming, and yet, here we are. Car-crash TV is an addiction.

8. Deciding once and for all to meal plan, researching and writing a diligent shopping list, only to realise I've left said list at home the moment I arrive at the supermarket.

9. Making plans and then immediately regretting them.

10. Conducting extensive research into numerous holidays, trips and travel destinations – all of which are beyond our budget, and I'd never manage to get insurance for them in a million years.

11. Spending an imaginary lottery win.

12. Online house hunting.

13. Interpreting songs with my own lyrics: “Footloose, pet goose, picked a fight with a moose. Cheese, stiff breeze, watch out there are 10 bees,” and singing them at the top of my lungs when driving anywhere.

14. Deciding when I need a wee treat – I deserve a treat when I have a bad week, but I also deserve a treat when I have a good week. I simply always deserve treats.

15. Writing fiction – mainly lists.

16. Having uncontrollable facial expressions that perfectly match and clearly portray my inner thoughts. If you irritate me, you will know immediately.

17. Oversharing.

18. Being able to “out-rude” rude people.

19. Disappointing my family with their dinner options.

20. Avoiding a midlife crisis – mostly due to my entire life being a crisis.

21. Being in my pyjamas within 15 minutes of getting home. Regardless of the time of day.

On reflection, I think this is an excellent set of qualities.

All I need to do now is convey this in a professional and engaging manner in a CV and cover letter.

This should allow prospective employers to see exactly what I bring to the table and, hopefully, a stack of job offers with a six-figure salary for a two-day week will follow imminently.

I don't think that's too much to ask, now, is it?

Possibly, I should add one final point to my extensive and admirable skill set.

22. Daydreaming!