



Chelsea 2024: A guide to the Octavia Hill Garden

Garden designer Ann-Marie Powell is creating this year's Octavia Hill garden for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024 - Published: May 19, 2024 at 3:50 pm

What would Octavia do? That's the question [Ann-Marie Powell](#) asked herself in October 2022, when the National Trust chose her to create an exuberant, contemporary show garden inspired by [Octavia Hill](#) (1838-1912), a founder of the charity. "She was a pioneer – a forward-thinking, energetic, positive, amazing woman who was leaps and bounds ahead of her time," says Ann-Marie. "Way back in the late 19th century, she was championing green space for heart and mind for people who needed it."

With this in mind, the scheme is a [community garden](#) created for an urban brownfield site, providing a place for people to come together and experience nature, as well as boost [biodiversity](#) in the city. Built around the concept of 'open-air sitting rooms', it features seating areas with views across colourful, bright, [pollinator-friendly](#) planting, including [foxgloves](#) and [geraniums](#).



Ann-Marie Powell sits against a backdrop of Hemerocallis and Monarda 'Scorpion'.

The main focal point is a large metal canopy – the one element keeping Ann-Marie up at night. “The structure is completely without foundations, so we are not using any concrete in the sub-base – it is cantilevered. There’s a canopy for [shade](#) and we’re going to grow climbers up it for wildlife habitat.”

It’s an adventurous garden in other ways too, being split-level, with sloping paths accessible for wheelchair users or parents with a buggy, and it also features audio experiences for the visually impaired. Ann-Marie returns to the show after a hiatus of eight years. “I’ve done [Chelsea](#) before but never had a large show garden, so that makes me nervous,” she admits. “I hope that if Octavia were alive today she would give our ideas a big tick.” Designer Ann-Marie Powell. Sponsors Blue Diamond with The National Trust.

5 key elements

1. **A steel-lattice canopy** designed in the pattern of a dragonfly wing by architect [Giles Jollands](#) and fabricated in recyclable steel by [Richard Weaver](#), the self-supporting structure offers shade and operates as a habitat for wildlife.

2. **Hand-carved wooden seating** created by master carver Kate Hanrahan ([@kate_hananrahan_carver](#)) from storm-fallen oak from National Trust woodlands.

3. **Wildlife features** Ann-Marie has designed both a contemporary [wildlife pond](#) and 'walkable' stream, which provides a gentle sound of running water, as well as [bird boxes](#) in the trees.

4. **Secret edimentals** The planting includes good-looking edible plants that have been chosen for wildlife and [foraging](#) possibilities. They form just one part of Ann-Marie's vibrant, adaptable, resilient community of plants.

5. **Reclaimed materials** Brick, stone and timber sourced from National Trust properties around the UK are being used throughout the garden in what Ann-Marie describes as a giant jigsaw.

Find out more about Ann-Marie's garden in our [Talking Gardens podcast](#), available from mid May.

Theme A colourful community garden for people and wildlife on an old brownfield site.

Contractors [The Landscaping Consultants](#).

Soft landscaping by [Location Landscapes](#).

Plants Hortus Loci.

After the show: Blue Diamond's Bridgemere Show Gardens, Cheshire.

Contact [ann-mariepowell.com](#)