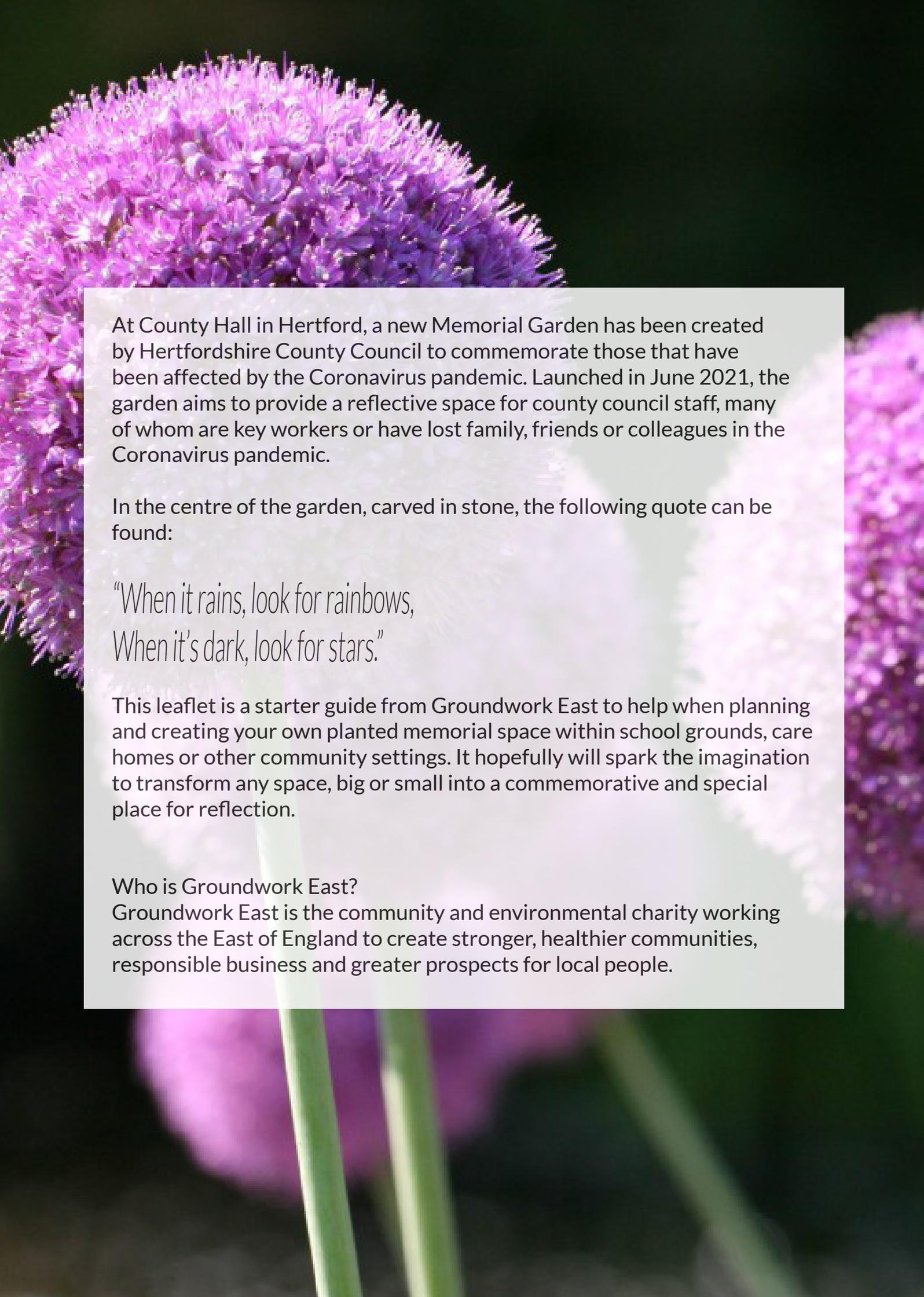


**Creating contemplation gardens in schools,
care homes and community areas.**

“When it rains, look for rainbows,
When it’s dark, look for stars.”



At County Hall in Hertford, a new Memorial Garden has been created by Hertfordshire County Council to commemorate those that have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Launched in June 2021, the garden aims to provide a reflective space for county council staff, many of whom are key workers or have lost family, friends or colleagues in the Coronavirus pandemic.

In the centre of the garden, carved in stone, the following quote can be found:

*“When it rains, look for rainbows,
When it’s dark, look for stars.”*

This leaflet is a starter guide from Groundwork East to help when planning and creating your own planted memorial space within school grounds, care homes or other community settings. It hopefully will spark the imagination to transform any space, big or small into a commemorative and special place for reflection.

Who is Groundwork East?

Groundwork East is the community and environmental charity working across the East of England to create stronger, healthier communities, responsible business and greater prospects for local people.

Creating a space

It is important that regardless of size, shape, position or type of space you have, that the following are considered before creating your space.

- **Maintaining the grounds** – who is going to be responsible for helping maintain the area after plants are in the ground? Watering, weeding and aftercare of your chosen plants are crucial year-round tasks.
- **Existing areas** - Are there any existing areas that could be used? This could be a wild-play area, wildlife area or an area that is currently used for reflection. Areas with seating or those that are easily accessible could be very good candidates.
- **Active groups** – Do you have a PTA, gardening or Eco-Schools group that could help regularly maintain the area? If not, this could be a great opportunity to set up a gardening club or build outdoor education into the school day, with opportunities for art and design, science, maths and English that gardening and conservation presents.
- **Health and Safety** – this is always on the list! Check (or get checked) the area you plan to use for overhanging trees, underground services or other hazards. You don't want to put a spade through something dangerous, or have to wear hard hats whilst visiting the garden due to unsafe trees!

Improving the soil

When starting any sort of garden, the type of soil that you have is very important. If you are lucky to have an organic rich, loose soil then that is an excellent start, otherwise you may need to purchase compost, soil improver and/or top soil to improve the soil structure and organic content.

This step is as crucial as the plants that you choose! Soils that are too clay rich or firm risk waterlogging your plants and roots in the winter, whilst those that are dusty or sandy in nature risk drying out and cracking in the summer, which can exacerbate any drought like conditions.

When preparing a soil, the following steps are important. Remember to wear gloves and practice good hand hygiene when handling soil!

1. **Digging or turning the soil** – this loosens and aerates the soil and provides air pockets for moisture. A strong handled spade or fork can achieve good results.
2. **Turning in** – a compost/top soil mix can help trap moisture, improve organic matter in the soil and provide long lasting nutrients for plants. Try and use peat-free compost as this is better for the environment and mixing with top soil means that the water-retaining qualities of peat are less needed.
3. **Soil improvement** – if you have a particularly poor soil, or a soil in which nothing has been grown before, you may need to go a step further and buy a soil improver such as organic manure. This will add nutrients to the soil and improve the soil structure.
4. **Careful use of certain plants** – can add extra nutrients to the soil. Plants that are labelled as dynamic accumulators (that draw up nutrients from deep in the soil) or nitrogen fixers (fix nitrogen from the air to soil) can be hugely beneficial, especially when used as groundcover between bushy shrubs or to showcase plants such as roses.

Building in sensory and wildlife friendly elements

The best gardens engage a range of senses, and a memorial garden is no different. Smell, touch, sound and light are all important elements to consider.

Try and aim for a mixture of plants that provide a range of colours and work well together. Sensory elements like sound from rustling leaves or seedpods draw attention to areas that are important within the garden, and tall grasses or plants also can provide shade and texture to areas.

You might also want to include herbal or edible plants depending on the style you wish your garden to achieve.

Suitable commemorative plants

Roses – have been a centrepiece of many flower gardens over hundreds of years. Their fragrance and vibrancy make them an excellent addition to a memorial garden, with many being named in memoriam of events, regions and individuals.

The roses below have been highlighted as they feature in the contemplation garden at County Hall, Hertford.



Absent Friends – a floribunda rose (grows in clusters) that blooms in late summer to autumn. Has a pastel apricot colour that fades to pale pink, with a medium fragrance. Can be grown in container or border. Height: 1m. Spread: 1m.



Celebrating Life – another clustered rose, which produces plentiful clusters of fragrant pink flower heads. Colour varies to lilac. Long flowering period from early summer into autumn. Grows well in borders. Height: 90cm. Spread: 70cm.



Loving Memory – a hybrid tea rose (hardier, repeat flowering). Produces large red flowers with subtle fragrance. Long flowering season from spring to first frost in autumn. Height 120cm. Spread: 60cm.



Hertfordshire Rose – provides ground cover, with a shorter habit. Small single carmine pink flowers with a light fragrance that bloom summer into autumn. Container or border and good for filling gaps in garden areas. Height: 50cm. Spread: 100cm

Other roses to consider: Remember Me, Thinking of You, Remembrance, Blue For You, Compassion, For You with Love, Duke of Edinburgh, Captain Tom.

Shrubs – their hardy nature and low maintenance needs make most shrubs ideal for planting in borders or gardens. There are a few species and varieties that provide colour and shape in amongst showpiece plants such as roses.



Caryopteris x clandonensis 'Heavenly Blue' – is a tender, deciduous plant, with a fragrance not too dissimilar to lavender, which can also make an excellent border plant. Great for pollinators, and flowers August-September. Full sun. Height: 0.5-1m. Spread 1-1.5m



Hawthorn (*Crataegus spp.*) An underrated and spectacular shrub, providing early white delicately scented flowers and berries. Useful for hedging and providing hard edges to areas as becomes a dense thicket over time. Prefers full sun. Height: 2-4m. Spread 4-8m.



Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) 'Stairway to Heaven' – the Polemonium family are all called Jacob's Ladders. This particular variegated version has delicate foliage and flowers from April to May. Can be planted and thrives in full sun. Height: to 40cm. Spread: to 45cm.



Rosemary (*Rosemarianus spp.*). Produces a vibrant scent and blue/purple flowers if planted in a sunny spot from April/May. Great companion plant; helps keep pests off roses. Traditionally was used in floristry to symbolise remembrance. Prefers full sun. Height: to 1.5m. Spread 1m.

Perennials – great at filling spaces and providing ground cover. Several plants, including those that can be found in the British countryside as 'wild plants', are included here. Perennials are also often low maintenance and hardy in nature which make them an excellent choice for longevity.



Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla Mollis*) has light green foliage with delicate lime green flower heads. Can grow in full-sun to shade; a great generalist. Works well as ground cover between roses. Height: to 50cm. Spread: to 50cm.



Thrift (*Almeria spp.*). Thrift grows as a wild plant on coastal cliffs and shingle, and featured on the war-time three-pence piece between 1939-1953. The meaning of course, to be 'thrifty' has modern day relevance, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. Almeria has bauble-like flowering heads (inflorescences) that bloom during the summer months, prefers full sun and can tolerate desiccation. Height: to 30cm, Spread: to 15cm.



Perennial Forget-me-not (*Brunnera Macrophyllia*). Produces sprays of beautiful gentle blue flowers in spring to summer, with heart shaped leaves. Shade loving. Height: to 45cm. Spread: to 60cm.



Lungwort (*Pulmonaria spp.*) . Semi-evergreen, with spotted leaves and funnel shaped flower ranging from pink to blue. The leaves have been used in the past and up to the present day as a medicinal, to treat respiratory complaints. Full or partial shade. Height: to 50cm. Spread: to 50cm.

Spring bulbs – best planted in late autumn and provide excellent colour in springtime. Add variety and seasonality to the garden, as well as vibrant colours when shrubs and perennials are yet to flower. A few mainstays are included here that will provide colour and interest in a memorial garden.



Alliums (*Allium spp.*) require full sun and well drained soil. Provide round flowering heads in a variety of hues. Less hardy than other spring bulbs, and sensitive to late frosts. Blooms in late spring, early summer. Height: to 2m. Spread: to 1m.



Primroses (*Primula spp.*) are native and grow in a range of conditions and shade. Very hardy. Produce large white, yellow or pink blooms, with a crinkled low lying rosette of leaves. Cowslips are another *Primula* species and have drooping heads and prefer sunnier spots unlike other primroses. All are hardy and can survive hard and late frosts down to -10°C. Height: 35cm. Spread: 30cm.



Daffodils (*Narcissus spp.*) can be found in a range of yellow, orange and white hues and different sizes. Some varieties to look out for include 'Topolino', 'Silver Lining', 'Thalia' and 'Sweetness'.

Aftercare

Roses - dead-head during the flowering season and cut back dead branches and living ones to half the height in late winter - early spring in order to produce strong growth. Without this, plants will become 'leggy' and less productive in terms of flowering heads.

Shrubs – the nature of shrubs mean they shouldn't require much attention, but when planted initially, they will need to be watered regularly whilst roots develop. Any dry spells throughout the year should also prompt watering as required.

Perennials – should be immediately mulched with good peat-free compost. This will prevent competition, help retain moisture and provide nutrients for newly established plants. Once established, perennials should require less and less watering, especially after the first year.

Spring bulbs – unless you wish to dig up bulbs and replace year-after-year, most foliage of spring bulbs can be cut back but only after the leaves yellow. This allows maximum energy to be regained by the bulb. Some seed heads (e.g. Alliums) are attractive and can be left on to add texture to a garden.



