Welcome to ***Unearthed: The Power of Gardening,*** a display that explores the transformative power of gardening, and its impact on individuals, communities and the environment.

The display is on four, free-standing units. Each unit is over two metres tall and just under a metre wide, constructed of three panels, so it can be viewed from three sides. The tall, narrow panels are covered with drawings, photographs and text information, which are described and summarised in this guide. Many of the images are from the British Library's collection, others contributed by museums, institutions, photographers and image libraries.

The units are each in shades of a particular colour: Dark-green, pink, orange and light-green, and we suggest you explore them in that order. The whole guide will take just over 20 minutes to listen to.

There may also be other displays in or around the library, as well as events and activities on the theme of gardening. To find out more, or if you need any help, please ask the library staff.

If you're in the library, pause the guide while you locate the dark-green display unit, and the panel with the title, **Unearthed, the Power of Gardening**. Re-start the guide when you're ready to listen.

Unearthed, the Power of Gardening, is in black against the green background, some of the letters suggesting leaves or crumbling earth. Above this, to the right, is the smaller red, rectangular logo for the British Library.

Gardening provides food and mental nourishment, and can change our lives. It can help build more sustainable and beautiful cities, and create a

shared sense of community. Gardeners throughout history have changed lives, and gardeners of today have the power to do the same.

There's a QR code lower down on this panel, which you can scan for more information, as well as some audio tracks.

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A second panel on this dark-green unit is mainly blank. This is for you to get involved and tell The British Library how plants make you feel and how your area could be greener. There should be pieces of paper and pens nearby, to write down your thoughts and attach them to the panel, with one of the magnets provided. Or, there's a QR code at the top, which will take you to the LKN website, where you can share your ideas online.

At the bottom of the panel is a brightly coloured photograph of wildflowers in a sunny meadow. In the foreground are dark pink cosmos, tangled with seed heads, and wispy leaves. The flowers in the background are a blur of orange, purple and lilac against green.

Written above are suggestions for how you might get involved with gardening, such as borrowing a book, planting seeds, joining a gardening group, or sharing things you grow with others.

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The third panel on this dark green unit has a map of the British Isles with labels marking over thirty cities where LKN has library displays like this one, celebrating gardening. A larger exhibition is taking place at the British Library in London until the 10th of August 2025. On the LKN

website you can access digital exhibitions and events streamed from other libraries. Go to LKN, hyphen, events, dot co, dot UK.

Pause the guide now until you're at the pink display unit, and the panel headed **Gardeners Through Time.**

Gardeners Through Time

At the top is a colourful illustration of five blousy pink, red and white peonies, from a book by Jane Loudon, called *The ladies' flower-garden of ornamental perennials,* published around 1843. Louden was a Science-fiction author, feminist, botanical artist and amateur gardener. At a time when women were encouraged to grow decorative plants, Louden's book was a practical manual that encouraged them to be more hands-on.

Further down on the left is a black and white photograph of Gertrude Jekyll, the pioneering gardener who designed over 400 gardens between 1881 and 1932. Standing by a pond in front of an ivy-clad house, she's a well-built, white woman in her fifties, her face shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat. She's wearing a voluminous, floor-length dress with a heavy lace collar, and leans on a folded parasol. Jekyll trained as an artist and her gardens were almost like paintings, with plants of 'warm' or 'cool' colours. A photograph underneath shows her battered, brown, work boots.

Below this is a portrait of one of Britain's earliest known Black gardeners, John Ystumllyn, painted in 1754, when he was about sixteen. His head and shoulders are against a black background, boyish face in three-quarters profile looking to the left, hair short against his scalp. His clothes are European, a pale cravat around his throat, and a moss green jacket and waistcoat. His name is in gold lettering along the bottom. It is likely Ystumllyn was enslaved as a child. He trained as a gardener in Wales,

managing the Ystumllyn estate for much of his life. For his services, he and his family were given a house with a garden of their own.

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The second panel on this pink display is about **Growing Food.**
At the top is a photograph of a white man in his thirties with short dark hair, in jeans and t-shirt, holding a large rhubarb plant, large leaves fanning out. He's looking straight to camera with a neutral expression. Someone is holding up a white sheet behind him, their hands visible either side. This is Martin Costard, taken by his daughter Phoebe Costard during the COVID-19 lockdowns, one of a series called 'Hold Still: A Portrait of Our Nation in 2020'. Phoebe says *"During lockdown my dad became one with our garden and inspired us as a family to pitch in."*

Further down is a title page from a 1636 gardening book, which the author, John Parkinson, called his 'speaking garden'. A black and white woodcut print depicts the Garden of Eden, enclosed by an oval border. Adam and Eve are tiny figures in comparison to the over-sized trees and plants, some bearing fruit. Copperplate writing at the bottom outlines the book sections: the flower garden, the kitchen garden, and the orchard.

Below this is a colourful 1919 landscape painting by Dorothy J. Coke, entitled '*War Allotments in a London Suburb'*. During the First World War, when food was in short supply, the government took over land to grow food. In the foreground, six men and women, including a soldier in a brown trench coat and peaked cap, stand in a cabbage patch, canes of runner beans behind them. More soldiers, civilians and children are working in the patchwork of allotments that stretch up the hill to buildings on the crest, a school in Norbury.

To the bottom left of the panel is a colourful poster from the 'Dig for Victory' propaganda campaign of the Second World War. Rows of green seedlings grow in a rectangle of soil, a fork and a spade upright in the earth. Above it hovers a dining table. The garden tools form table legs, passing through the table to become an upright knife and fork either side of a plate of food. Words read, 'every available piece of land must be cultivated. Grow your own food, supply your own cookhouse.' By the end of the war over one in five households had turned their gardens into allotments.

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The third panel on this pink unit is about **Gardening and Health.** There's a colour photo at the top of a woman holding a tomato plant, in a polytunnel packed with growing vegetables. She wears a baggy white t-shirt and trousers. Her face is deliberately blurred. Taken at HMP Send, a women's prison in Surrey, the photo is from '*Plants, Prisons and Potential'*, by Faye Claridge, commissioned by the RHS. Gardening helps improve prisoners' wellbeing. They can work towards horticultural qualifications, giving hope for the future.

Further down, three images run down the left of the panel. The top one is a coloured ink drawing of a plant. A variety of mint, it has a carrot-like root, sprouting green leaves and small red flowers. Above it are lines of Arabic script in black and red ink, an Arabic version of a Greek work from the 14th century. In medieval times, Islamic scholars led the world in medical knowledge. The mint is recommended as a remedy for hiccups, kidney stones and stings.

Underneath is a page from the only surviving Anglo-Saxon illustrated collection of herbal remedies. Between Old English gothic text from the early 11th century, are two illustrations of green plants with spidery brown

roots. Underneath is a snake, signifying that the plants were a remedy for a poisonous bite.

The bottom image is a detailed pencil drawing showing various aspects of a papaya, a fruit shaped like an elongated pumpkin. Hand-written in the top right corner, 'Papaya' is written in four languages, Arabic, Latin, Malayalam and Konkani. This is a page from a book completed around 1693, *The Garden of Malabar*. Compiled by the colonial governor, Hendrik van Rheede, it was an Indian herbalist, Itty Achudan, who selected the 742 plants that are included.

Now pause the guide and move to the Orange Unit, and the panel headed, **Access to Land.**

Access To Land

A photo at the top shows an allotment gardener with a long grey beard and bright yellow turban, bending down to touch a large pumpkin nestled among green leaves. This portrait is one of a collection by Hark-one-karan, which feature Punjabi Sikh allotment holders who settled in the West Midlands town of Smethwick in the 1960s and 70s.

Images lower down explore the history of land ownership. A faded map shows land allocation in 1791 around the village of Bow Brickhill, Buckinghamshire. Since the medieval period access to common land for rearing animals and growing food has been restricted, and Enclosure changed the British landscape.

In the early 20th century poverty, social unrest, and socialist ideas led to movements to reclaim land. A montage of six black and white photographs from The Illustrated London News, 1906, headed, 'Landgrabbers Imitated by the Rising Generation' show an act of protest against unemployment. People in Levenshulme, a suburb of Manchester, are planting cabbages on unused church land.

By the 20th century, councils had a legal responsibility to provide allotments if there was demand. A colour photograph shows an aerial view over allotments in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Countless rectangular plots are filled with plants, sheds and greenhouses.

At the bottom of the panel, another photo by Hark-one-karan shows a gardener in a pale blue turban tending runner beans.

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The second orange panel on this unit is called, **Gardening in the City**

At the top is a black and white photograph from 1905. A woman in an ankle-length dress and hat, tends a window box spilling over with foliage. Gardening was promoted as a way to improve lives. Poorer people were encouraged to grow plants indoors and on windowsills.

In 1898 Ebenezer Howard put forward the idea of garden cities, a 'joyous union of town and country'. His book, *'To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform'*, has an illustration of a wedge-shaped section from a map, where streets are laid out in concentric circles around a park in the centre. Allotments and farms are on the outer ring.

Under this is a 1912 black and white photograph of Wavertree, a Liverpool Garden Suburb. A residential street is lined with beds of earth, planted with young trees.

Below this a colour photograph of some house plants, the Swiss cheese plant and the spikey mother-in-law's tongue. The Victorian middle classes cultivated these new varieties, which have become popular once again.

In 1972, a group occupied Tolmers Square, near Euston station in London, in protest against highrise office developments in the area. A photograph at the bottom shows a brick wall, with words daubed in white, which read,

‘This site has been taken over by the people of Tolmers Village for a garden.’ The group were evicted in 1979, and the village demolished.

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The third panel on this orange unit is called **The Power of Gardening**

At the top is a colour photograph by Paul Harfleet, called ‘Arson Attack’. Taken at ground level, a delicate mauve pansy is growing at the foot of a tree, in the urban environment of Whitechapel High Street in London. Harfleet’s Pansy Project uses Guerrilla gardening, a term used for gardening in public spaces without permission. Harfleet’s flowers mark the sites of homophobic and transphobic abuse, as an act of quiet resistance and reclamation. Two more of his pansy photos are lower down, side by side. To the left, "Stabbing!", The Two Brewers, Clapham High Street, and on the right, "Queer Bashing!" Spring Bank, Hull.

Above the Harfleet photos is a close-up of tiny purple flowers sprouting from balls of earth. These are seed bombs, a mix of clay, compost and wildflower seeds, used by Guerrilla gardeners to plant flowers.

At the bottom of the panel is a montage of six landscape photos with bright orange borders. People of mixed ages and heritage are working in Shields Community Garden in Glasgow. They dig in raised beds, plant seeds, and sit in the sunshine chatting. Community gardens across the country provide spaces for people not just to grow plants, but to make friends and contribute to a greener, more resilient community.

Pause the guide while you move to the last unit, which has a light green colour scheme. Go to the panel headed **Gardening and Empire.**

Gardening and Empire

For as long as humans have travelled and migrated, we have moved plants, brought here by exploration and trade. The introductory text on the panel goes on to say, "But under the British Empire, the movement of plants became part of a colonial programme, often relying on local expert knowledge and, at worst, exploiting enslaved people's labour. "

The role of indigenous knowledge and assistance in plant collecting is underacknowledged.

Gardeners today are making sense of these tangled roots and addressing gardening's colonial past and connections.

At the top of the panel is a black and white photograph of a smiling person with a tanned complexion, standing thigh-high in a bank of dense vegetation. This is a 1923 portrait of a plant collector called Rhomoo, taken in the Sikkim region of India, bordering present-day Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. Rhomoo has swept back dark hair under a small cap. A well worn jacket is done up with one button, falling open to reveal a waistcoat. A large, curved sheath hangs at their hip, a knife-hilt protruding. Rhomoo, one of the Lepcha people, was employed by Calcutta Botanic Garden until 1916. The Lepcha assisted the plant hunter Sir Joseph Hooker on his 1847 expedition to Sikkim, when he introduced 25 new rhododendrons to Britain, sparking a craze amongst Victorian gardeners.

On this panel there are two images of maps on the left. The first is an intricately drawn fold out map of Jamaica and the Caribbean Islands. Plant collecting was inextricably connected to slavery. Sir Hans Sloane travelled to Jamaica in 1687, sending over 800 plant specimens back to Britain on merchant and slave ships. Sloane relied on enslaved people to explain the properties of the plants. The map is from Sloane's 1725 book, 'A Voyage to Jamaica, Volume 2.'

The second colour map underneath from 1769 shows the Lucky Valley plantation in Jamaica. The land is divided into numbered plots where

enslaved people grew food to supplement meagre diets. The British Library collections include historical evidence of racism in Britain and elsewhere, and this map contains terms that are racially offensive.

At the very bottom is an illustration of a delicate pink rhododendron, a huge single flower-head, with waxy green leaves.

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The second panel on this light green unit is about **Gardening with the Environment.**

At the top is a colourful photo of a gravel garden. Gardener and author, Beth Chatto created the garden in 1991 from a car park near Colchester. Orange plants, 'red hot pokers' stick up above leaves, grasses, and flowers, including pink poppies, spikey mauve sea holly, and clusters of peach-coloured rhododendrons. With UK summers becoming hotter and drier, Chatto chose plants that would thrive, and the garden has not been watered since it was planted. There's a photo portrait of Chatto near the bottom of the panel on the right. White, in her 80s, with short wavy grey hair, she's standing among her plants.

Above this are two photos of the garden in Kent created by Artist, filmmaker and gay rights activist Derek Jarman. Single storey Prospect Cottage is clad in dark wood, with a corrugated roof. It stands in a shingle garden, planted with orange, purple and pink flowers. A circle of stones, only inches high, is in the foreground. Driftwood pokes up between the plants like ancient bones. Along the misty horizon are the large square buildings of the Dungeness Nuclear Power Station. Tuning in with its environment of sea and shingle, this garden became Jarman's way of dealing with his HIV diagnosis and finding solace in the natural world.

At the bottom of the panel is a photo of a line of unglazed terracotta clay pots buried in earth, their lids exposed to the sun. These are olla pots, which have been used for thousands of years. Filled with water, the porous clay allows it to seep into the soil, providing water for roots.

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The last panel on this unit is about **Gardening with wildlife.**

In the top left corner is a coloured botanical illustration of a dandelion plant. The definition of a weed is subjective, defined by the individual gardener. For thousands of years dandelions have been used as food and medicine. They're a source of food for butterflies and moths, as well as bees, which are vital pollinators of many plants and crops.

From the medieval period, Beekeeping went hand in hand with gardening and was typically managed by women. Early beehives were called skeps. Shaped like a bell-jar, they were made of straw, rope or willow. On the right, is an illustration of a yellow woven skep on a square table, bees flying around it.

Underneath is a poster for 'No Mow May', a campaign encouraging us to stop mowing our lawns during May. Leaving grassy areas to grow longer allows native flowers to bloom and provides shelter for small mammals.

And finally, the photo at the bottom features a garden gnome surrounded by weeds. Its hands are clamped over its mouth, as if it's in shock.

We have lost approximately 97% of our wildflower meadows since the 1930s, with devastating consequences for pollinators, but we have over 20 million gardens in the UK and these small patches of land add up. We can use them to make a difference.

This is the end of the audio described guide. Don’t forget to ask the library staff about any other local events, activities and resources.