



Muscular Dystrophy UK – Forest Bathing Garden, designed by Ula Maria for Chelsea Flower Show 2024. Photo G Hines.

# Recruitment of Board Chairperson Information Booklet, June 2025



# WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in becoming the new chair of our Board of Trustees at Plant Heritage. This booklet will give you more information about the charity. You'll find lots more on our website

[www.plantheritage.org.uk](http://www.plantheritage.org.uk).

We welcome applicants from diverse backgrounds and with a variety of skills. You don't have to be a plant expert, but a passion for plants will make the role more enjoyable. We're a membership organisation so we ask that all trustees including the chairperson are members or become members of Plant Heritage. If you aren't yet a member, you can find out more [here](#). If you have any questions, please feel free to email [comms@plantheritage.org.uk](mailto:comms@plantheritage.org.uk) or phone us on 01453 447540.



Left to Right: Chief Executive Gwen Hines, Plant Heritage President Alan Titchmarsh, Board Chair Cecilia Bufton, Business Manager Gill Groombridge at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2025.

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# WHO WE ARE

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Plant Heritage is a charity, founded in 1978 with a unique mission to protect the diversity of garden plants across the UK and Ireland. We are the home of the National Plant Collections® and the Plant Guardian® scheme (see next page). With our members, we are safeguarding nearly 100,000 different garden plants for the future by growing them, caring for them and recording them. This living library is a great resource for gardeners, garden designers, botanists and researchers alike. It includes rare and unusual plants that aren't widely available commercially. It continues to expand as new plants are added.

*We're protecting the diversity of garden plants so everyone can enjoy them today and tomorrow, through our living library.*



Plant Heritage is not just about plants. It's also about people and partnerships. We have thousands of members and hundreds of volunteers, united by their passion for plants. We have a network of local groups who support members, organise events and help to raise funds for our conservation work including from plant sales.

One way that we recognise excellence in conservation is our prestigious Brickell Award. This is named after Chris Brickell who was one of Plant Heritage's founders and is a distinguished plant expert.

Garden historian Advolly Richmond presents the 2024 Brickell Award to Gill Mathers, David Mathers and Jim Durrant of the Mathers Foundation for their outstanding orchid conservation work.



# NATIONAL PLANT COLLECTIONS

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National Plant Collections are registered and documented collections of specific groups of plants. The plants can be linked botanically by plant group, or have a shared history (such as a historic site or plant breeder) or geography. There are over 720 National Plant Collections, from cacti to fruit trees.

Collection Holders can be individuals, groups of people or organisations. They are supported by our staff team and volunteer Collection Coordinators. New Collections are accredited by expert members of an independent Plant Collections Committee. There are National Collections everywhere from windowsills to back gardens, greenhouses, parks, allotments, public gardens, plant nurseries, zoos and even a pub and a women's prison.



## OUR PLANT GUARDIAN SCHEME

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Any member of Plant Heritage can become a Plant Guardian and look after one or more rare or unusual plants, without looking after a whole National Collection. Sometimes people already have a special plant, and we can check if it is rare or unusual. There are more than 2,600 plants registered under our Plant Guardian Scheme. It's a great way for more people to get involved, and for us to help conserve more special plants.

## PLANT RECORDING WITH PERSEPHONE

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With our members, we register the plants in the National Collections and the Plant Guardian Scheme in our award-winning plant recording system Persephone, so we can keep track of them, along with the stories behind them. For more information on Persephone, please visit <https://persephone.plantheritage.org.uk/>

# CONSERVING GARDEN PLANTS TOGETHER

Plant Heritage works closely with world famous organisations including the RHS, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and at Edinburgh, the National Trust and the National Trust for Scotland, the Irish Garden Plants Society, as well as Plant Network. The Manx Plant and Garden Conservation Society (Isle of Man) and Plant Heritage Guernsey are affiliates.

We organise talks, workshops, garden visits and take part in public events like flower shows to build understanding of the importance of plant conservation, and to share skills like seed collecting and plant recording.



Students at the Threave School of Heritage Gardening, looking after the National Collection of *Iris sibirica*. The National Trust for Scotland looks after 17 National Plant Collections.

# THREATENED PLANTS PROGRAMME

Through our Threatened Plants Programme, we track the history, availability and locations of cultivated garden plants to work out how rare or threatened they are. We've assessed around 130,000 plants so far. We produce reports for others, based on this data, that can help them to prioritise their conservation efforts.

## THREATENED PLANT OF THE YEAR COMPETITION



The Judges' Choice 2024: *Aubrieta 'Shangarry'*. First listed in 1935 and probably named after Shanagarry in County Cork, Ireland.



The People's Choice 2024: *Rhododendron 'Leonardslee Primrose'*. Now rarely if ever found outside Leonardslee Gardens, Sussex.

We run a public competition asking people to nominate a rare plant, as a fun way to draw attention to a serious issue.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR WORK

We are a nation of gardeners, with a long history of developing and caring for a huge variety of plants, from apples to zinnias.

Nobody knows exactly how many different garden plants there are. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has estimated that there could be 400,000. Most nurseries and garden centres stock only a limited range, and public gardens can't look after them all. What is popular changes over time, and plants can disappear forever if they are not kept safely in National Collections.

**Today, our work is more important than ever, because of the increasing risks from climate change as well as new pests and diseases.**

Plants are a valuable historical and future resource, whether for their beauty, or having edible, medicinal or other useful properties. Each plant has a unique genetic code making it impossible to replace if lost. Protecting a diverse range of plants is good for biodiversity and increases our resilience to future shocks, like extreme weather.



***“The best way to save plants is to cultivate and propagate them, then share them with others.” Roy Lancaster***

Photo: Roy Lancaster, renowned plant expert and Plant Heritage Vice President, with Daniel Myhill and his National Collection of *Rosa persica* at RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival 2024.



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

One of our future priorities is sustainability, both in terms of our environmental impact and the continuity of the National Plant Collections. We will step up support to individual Collection Holders who want this and encourage more duplicate Collections. We welcome requests for 'Shared Collections', such as the proposed National Collection of *Ajuga* held by the Surrey Plant Heritage group (see below).

Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2028 will be a big moment for the charity. One of our ambitions is to create an interactive, online version of the National Plant Collections. We also want to expand and diversify our membership and our partners, so more people get involved in our work and can benefit from the plants, knowledge and networks we offer.



Members with some of the 58 *Ajuga* in the proposed Surrey National Plant Collection.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



By making sure plants don't disappear and encouraging people to grow a diverse range of plants, we are making a positive contribution to environmental sustainability. We are committed to minimising our waste and reducing our carbon emissions, including at our office and events. We will continue to encourage our members to adopt sustainable growing practices – some have been leading the way for decades.

We have organised workshops and talks for members on alternatives to peat, including with the RHS and Melcourt Industries (the photo above is from a visit to Melcourt's production site in Gloucestershire in February 2024).

# OUR GOVERNANCE

Plant Heritage is a charity, registered with the Charity Commission and Companies House as a charitable company, limited by guarantee (one of four possible types of charity in the UK). The charity's business is managed by the Board of trustees, who also serve as the Company Directors. Board meetings take place every quarter, with two held in person. The key governance document is our Articles of Association.

The Board is accountable to our membership. We hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) for our members each Spring. New trustees are appointed by the Board and put forward for a vote at the next AGM. Each member (whether an individual or an organisation) has one vote and decisions are taken by a simple majority. At each AGM one-third of our trustees stand down. They can be re-elected if they are recommended by the rest of the Board and have served fewer than eight years.

The Board is supported by committees and working groups. For more information, go to our website: [www.plantheritage.org.uk/about-us](http://www.plantheritage.org.uk/about-us)





## OUR LOCAL GROUPS

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Our local groups are run by volunteers, elected by their members. In some parts of the UK where there isn't a local committee, there is a volunteer Local Representative.

Local groups play a key role in supporting members and National Collection Holders in their area. Group finances are managed in line with financial guidelines agreed by the Board, and our annual accounts include group activities.



Members of Plant Heritage North West Group with the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire Mrs Amanda Parker JP  
(Photo by John Siddall).

## OUR PATRON, PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENTS

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Our Royal Patron is HM King Charles III.



Photo credit Jean Paul.

Our President is well known gardening presenter and writer Alan Titchmarsh MBE.

We are lucky to count several distinguished horticultural experts as our Vice Presidents: Christopher Brickell; Jamie Compton; Lady Corinna Hamilton; Roy Lancaster; Sir Roy Strong; Michael Marriott; Elizabeth Banks; David Knott; and Sarah Bray.

Our Patron, President and Vice Presidents do not play a formal role in our governance, but we are extremely grateful for their support to Plant Heritage.

# BEING A TRUSTEE FOR PLANT HERITAGE

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Being a trustee for Plant Heritage is a fantastic way to make a tangible difference in plant conservation. You'll get to work with our passionate and dedicated team of staff and volunteers. With the rest of the Board, you will help to shape the future of the organisation. It's also a great way to gain experience in charity governance and strategic planning.

As a membership organisation, we ask that all our trustees are members of Plant Heritage or become members. You also need to be resident in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man, over 18 and eligible by law to be a charity trustee and company director (you can find out more about this here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-trustee-whats-involved>).

Once appointed, trustees sign our trustee Code of Conduct, and have to sign a declaration about potential conflicts of interest.

All trustees are expected to attend four half-day Board meetings per year, plus preparation and follow up. These take place during the working week, with at least one held in person in London or at our offices in Wisley (near Woking). We also ask trustees to join at least one sub-committee, although we could waive this requirement, depending on personal circumstances and if we have enough trustees overall.

# GET INVOLVED

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We take part in several public events every year, such as the RHS flower shows at Chelsea and Hampton Court, as well as local plant fairs, garden visits and talks. Trustees are welcome to join in these activities as volunteers.



Plant Heritage President Alan Titchmarsh and Josh Egan-Wyer of Pershore College at our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2023.

You are also welcome to attend our annual Members' event, which is a great way to meet other members, visit fantastic gardens and hear inspirational speakers. As a small charity, we ask that you buy a ticket like other members, which goes towards the costs of this event.



# OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Our Trustees are volunteers and kindly donate their time, skills and experience to support our work, by providing strategic advice and constructive challenge to the CEO and team; ensuring the charity is compliant with UK legal and regulatory requirements; overseeing financial health and sustainability; and supporting awareness raising and fundraising efforts.



Left to right: Cecilia Bufton (Chair), Jim Marshall (Vice Chair), Gareth Morgan (Treasurer), Jasmine Jahromi, Della Weight, Sally Flatman, Kavita Kapoor, Emma Crawford, David Mathers, Roderick Newton, John Humphreys, Claire Farrer.



# OUR PLANT HERITAGE STAFF TEAM

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We have a small team of professional staff, who mostly work part time and are based out of our office next to the RHS Wisley garden in Surrey. They handle membership enquiries, charm sponsors, manage the conservation programmes, write newsletters, run workshops, liaise with partner organisations, court the media, orchestrate our displays at flower shows, consolidate the accounts, and juggle a thousand other tasks!



Gwen Hines  
Chief Executive



Gill Groombridge  
Business Manager



Julia Cogan and Claire Ader  
Membership Team



Mimi Wong  
Finance Officer



Lucy Pitman  
Conservation Adviser



Liz Edwards  
Conservation Adviser



Kalani Seymour,  
Threatened Plants Programme  
Manager



Alison Foster  
Plant Records Officer



# VOLUNTEERING AT PLANT HERITAGE

Volunteers are at the heart of our work. We have many different kinds of volunteers, from trustees and committee members, to those who run local groups, organise events and represent us at shows, or take on specific roles like plant recording and digitising our archive. Many of our National Collection Holders are individuals who do it on a voluntary basis, and they are supported by volunteer Collection Coordinators.



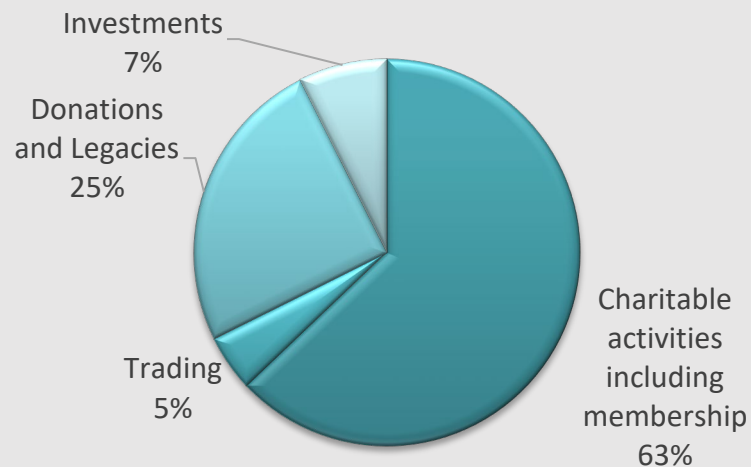


# OUR FUNDING

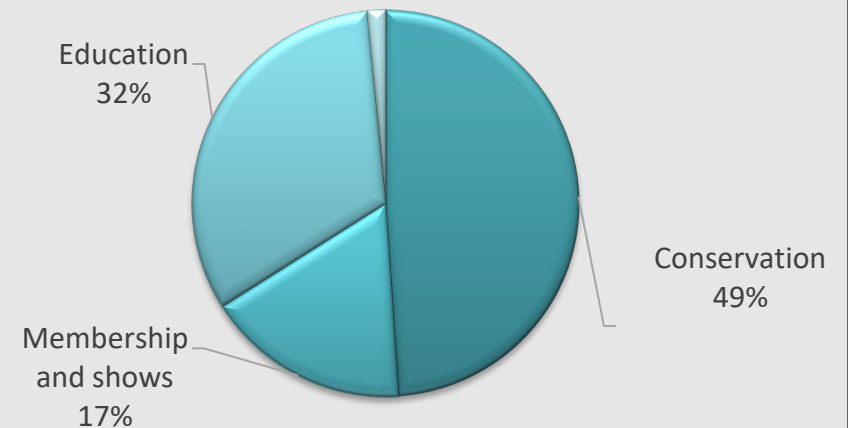


As a small charity, our income and expenditure varies significantly year by year. We rely heavily on membership subscriptions, funds raised by our local groups, as well as donations from trusts and foundations and some corporate partners. In recent years we have received some exceptionally generous legacy donations, which we are using to invest for the future. Our financial year runs from 1 November to 31 October so FY2024 ended on 31 October 2024.

## 2024 Income £405k



## 2024 Expenditure £462k\*



\*The deficit was planned, and reflects investments in the charity's future, and was met by drawing on our reserves.



**FIND OUT MORE**

## BEING A TRUSTEE

To find out more about charity governance and what it means to be a charity trustee, we recommend this UK government guide: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-trustee-whats-involved>

Registered Charity Number 1004009/SC041785  
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Photos by team unless stated.

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CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY  
OF GARDEN PLANTS