# Chelsea Flower Show gardens spotlight survival strategies for drought and flood



The Chelsea Flower Show, a pinnacle event in the horticultural calendar, is gearing up to showcase gardens that grapple with an increasingly arid future, reflecting the pressing challenges posed by climate change. As this year’s show approaches, the chilly light of a dry spring has prompted both amateur gardeners and experienced designers to rethink their strategies in preparation for what might be a drought-stricken summer. The Environment Agency has issued alerts about the possibility of drought conditions, the likes of which have not been encountered in nearly 60 years, forcing many households to brace for potential water use restrictions.

In response to this alarming trend, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has reported a significant 20% increase in inquiries from concerned gardeners since early April compared to the same timeframe last year. Queries have primarily revolved around the challenges of underperforming spring-flowering plants like lilacs and wisteria, underscoring the broader disruptions that erratic weather patterns are causing in horticulture.

Amid these difficulties, several gardens featured at the show are purposefully designed to address the dual threats of drought and flooding, presenting a vision for resilient landscaping. The King's Trust garden exemplifies this focus, aiming to blend innovative design with the natural resilience of certain plant species. Using non-cement construction methods, the garden promotes permeable surfaces that can help mitigate flash flooding during intense rainfall. This approach is not merely an aesthetic choice; it reinforces the notion of adaptability, mirroring the resilience young people supported by Charles’s charity are encouraged to embody.

Another imaginative entry, the Killik & Co Save for a Rainy Day garden, transports visitors 25 years into the future, envisioning how southern English gardens might adapt to a landscape increasingly marked by flood and drought. Designer Baz Grainger observed how contemporary practices must evolve, leading to the creation of a “flood zone” and utilising water collection techniques to buffer against harsh weather extremes.

The ecological narrative is further enriched by the Garden of the Future, which takes inspiration from agricultural practices in the global south. This garden showcases drought-resistant crops such as sweet potatoes and millet, creatively adapting to the changing climate and illustrating how traditional farming can inform sustainable practices in the UK.

However, the dry conditions leading up to the show have not favoured all participants. For example, Zoe Claymore’s temperate rainforest garden, aimed at highlighting the rare habitats now dwindling in the UK, has faced particular challenges. This unique project, which represents the Wildlife Trusts’ commitment to the preservation of these ecosystems, depends heavily on moisture-loving plants like ferns and mosses that have struggled to thrive in the ongoing dry spell.

The shift towards sustainability is also evident with innovative initiatives like Project Giving Back (PGB), which sponsors landscape designs that can aid communities after the event. This project has encouraged a departure from traditional corporate sponsorship, positioning philanthropy at the forefront of garden design. Showcasing a range of climate-adaptive plants, gardens inspired by landscapes such as volcanic regions and sand dunes serve to educate visitors on environmental stewardship.

Yet, not all developments are met with universal acclaim. The RHS's decision to extend its peat-free commitment until 2028 has drawn criticism amid growing concerns over the degradation of peatlands, vital carbon sinks that are quickly being lost. The continued reliance on peat in professional gardening media raises questions about the commitment of industry players to sustainability, especially at a time when ecological responsibility is more crucial than ever.

In light of this, the RHS is actively advising amateur gardeners to cultivate practices such as using water-efficient gardening techniques, employing organic matter to enhance soil retention, and mowing lawns slightly higher to encourage deep-root growth—all pragmatic responses to the current climatic upheaval.

As the Chelsea Flower Show unfolds, it is clear that the gardens are not just a canvas of beauty but also a poignant reminder of the reality of climate change. Each garden tells a story of resilience and adaptation, offering a glimpse into how we might cultivate our landscapes, homes, and communities in the face of volatile weather patterns ahead.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraph 6
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 2, 4, 6
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.perspectivemedia.com/chelsea-gears-up-for-future-of-extremes-as-dry-spring-affects-show-preparations/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/5f1bb385-f9a5-4d46-aad5-8be3426a533f> - The 2025 Chelsea Flower Show is embracing a transformative shift towards sustainability, philanthropy, and innovative garden design, driven largely by Project Giving Back (PGB). Launched in 2021, PGB sponsors designer-charity collaborations, funding gardens that are later relocated to permanent sites benefiting communities. Highlights this year include gardens inspired by volcanic landscapes, the Mallorcan mountains, and sand dunes—each showcasing resilient, climate-adapted planting. PGB is credited with shifting the show's focus from corporate sponsorship to charitable causes, fostering experimental, sustainable projects like Allon Hoskin's homelessness charity garden made entirely from recycled materials and fungi-based structures. This approach aligns with the Royal Horticultural Society’s new green audit to reduce emissions, which cut carbon output by 28% last year. The impact extends beyond aesthetics: gardens have raised substantial funds, increased public awareness, and reached millions through social media, with charities like RNLI and Centrepoint seeing direct benefits. Designers, inspired by meaningful collaborations, are returning to Chelsea with renewed purpose. PGB's model of 'creative philanthropy' is seen as a potential blueprint for future collaborations between corporations and charities, reshaping how gardens can drive social and environmental change.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/11671a26-2b63-4da7-8096-0ed7d6377a4f> - Garden designer Zoe Claymore highlights the value of moss and native vegetation in recreating temperate rainforests, advocating for their preservation and restoration as part of the Wildlife Trusts' 100-year project. These rare ecosystems, which once covered 20% of the UK but now just 1%, are rich in biodiversity and vital for carbon storage. Claymore’s Chelsea Flower Show garden emulates the rainforest landscapes of western UK, using native flora such as silver birch, hazel, ferns, mosses, and ivy. These elements, often dismissed in home gardens, provide essential habitats and environmental benefits like CO₂ sequestration and flood mitigation. The UK’s temperate rainforests were severely impacted by industrial pollution, deforestation, and invasive species. Now, with funding from insurer Aviva, the £38 million Temperate Rainforest Restoration programme aims to purchase and rehabilitate 1,755 hectares of land, projecting a carbon capture of 222,000 tonnes by 2050. The initiative seeks to raise awareness and inspire broader participation in rainforest restoration, emphasizing the public’s shared responsibility in protecting these globally scarce ecosystems.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/8f97230a-ea34-42c2-9456-ac2299289cae> - The RHS Chelsea Flower Show, a major UK gardening event, has delayed its peat-free commitment until 2028, citing supply chain complexity and lack of legislation. This decision has reignited criticism, given that peatlands—critical carbon sinks—are being rapidly degraded, emitting significant greenhouse gases and contributing to ecological loss. Despite governmental promises to ban peat sales by 2024 for amateurs and 2026 for professionals, no laws have been enacted. Although alternatives have improved, peat still comprises 39% of professional growing media. Successful peat-free nurseries like Hortus Loci, Great Dixter, and Kernock Park Plants demonstrate that transitioning is possible, albeit costly and complex. Some companies remain resistant, particularly when cultivating peat-dependent plants like rhododendrons. Efforts by entities like the RHS aim to support the shift, investing millions in trials and advocating for regulatory clarity. However, the supply chain remains heavily reliant on imported peat plugs. Consumers face transparency challenges, as many plants are still grown in peat-based media. The broader issue highlights the limitations of voluntary industry efforts to address climate-related practices and the pressing need for enforced environmental regulation to protect remaining peatlands and advance sustainability within horticulture.
5. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/gardens/2023/shifting-garden> - The Shifting Garden, designed by The Chelsea Gardener, is a sustainable urban garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023. It features drought-tolerant planting schemes and uses natural, bio-composite, and recycled materials to reflect the UK's shifting climate and extreme weather patterns. The garden includes a sentinel Albizia julibrissin tree, recycled plastic rod screens representing water without actual water, and staggered containers with inbuilt seating constructed from hypertufa, a natural-stone appearance material.
6. <https://rhs101.rhs.org.uk/garden-design/drought-resistant-gardening> - The Royal Horticultural Society provides guidance on making gardens more drought-resistant. Recommendations include cultivating soil deeply and adding organic matter to improve water retention, applying sufficient fertilizer to promote efficient water use, choosing plants with grey-green or silver leaves to reflect sunlight and conserve moisture, selecting plants suited to the site's soil type and aspect for better tolerance to varying climatic conditions, and planting small to allow establishment before dry periods.
7. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240520-changing-climate-influences-london-s-chelsea-flower-show> - The 2025 Chelsea Flower Show in London is being influenced by changing climate conditions, with gardens focusing on water harvesting to combat drought. Among the 35 gardens competing, one features a pavilion with a sloping roof that collects and stores water, while plants are selected for their resilience to drought or flooding. The Water Aid Garden is designed to be like a giant sponge, utilizing permeable hard landscaping to allow water to pass through and soak into the garden.