

# A world outside the classroom

**Victoriana Nursery's enthusiasm for young gardening recently led to a medal**

**AS** a company we have long been at the forefront of encouraging children to garden – be it at home or in school. So when we received an email in late January asking us if we would be interested in growing the fruit and vegetables for a show garden, on a school gardening theme, to be displayed at BBC Gardeners' World Live later in the year we were naturally very interested.

Little did we know the journey this project would take us on or that it would lead to us winning both a much coveted RHS Silver Medal and being voted Favourite Show Garden in the BBC Gardeners' World People's vote!

The chance email came from John Cavill, of Simply Gardening. It emerged that John was a successful landscape gardener and garden designer based in Lincolnshire. He shared our ethos that children should be encouraged to grow their own produce. In 2006, John had designed and built a show garden at BBC Gardeners' World Live called the Labyrinth which had won a not unimpressive silver.

Keen to "have another go", and promote school gardening he had come up with his new design – A World Outside The Classroom. It seemed so logical to work together on the project and so, after a staff vote (because of all the extra work it would involve) we agreed – and John and I got down to business.

John had already produced a structural design and planting plan, but recognised there was room for improvement on the planting side and so asked for my input. In under a week I completely re-designed the planting scheme, choosing plants more suited for schools and children (either because of cropping time or colour interest).

Possibly the most radical design change was replacing the originally planned lavender hedge (perfectly acceptable but of no practical use) with a mixed planting of soft fruit – "The Incredible Edible Fence". As soon as the plan was re-drawn it was clear to us both that we had designed something

very special. In recognition of my efforts, John invited Victoriana to be detailed as co-designers of the garden.

On the January 27 – a week after we had received John's email – we roughly marked out the garden with bamboo canes and put empty pots in the places the plants were to be.

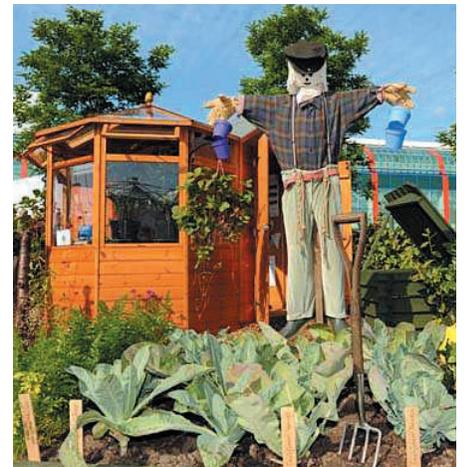
This gave us accurate figures for the number of plants required. Two days later, potting of the fruits commenced. Everything used simply came from stock – the very plants we were lifting and selling at the time – as we thought it important that people would be able to see what could be achieved in just one growing season.

The finished garden needed to look good, but it also needed reflect reality. Due to other work pressures it wasn't until the February 14 that all the fruit was finally potted and stood out in an unheated greenhouse which would help bring things on a little quicker.

With the fruit underway it was now time to turn our attentions to the vegetables. Milly Shirley and Granddad (Jeremy Shirley) made the first sowings on the February 26. Little did we know that the RHS would later recognise her efforts and give her her own RHS medal with HER name on it!

By the March 29 the vegetable seedlings were well advanced and potting up commenced. At the same time, herb plants (once again from our normal stocks) were potted up.

All that remained now was to keep everything watered and clean of pests and diseases. We only had one surprise when the aphids came earlier than anticipated! Later the leaf crops were direct sown into pots, and similarly the radish and onions. As these crops could so easily go past their best, and we had no idea of the weather ahead, successional sowings were made every few weeks. Of course the "waste" plants went to good use and were eaten. On the June 4, John came down with an articulated lorry to collect everything. We were pleased to see it go - not least because by then the spaced out plants were taking up a massive 3,000 square feet of protected space!



■ Green, orange, purple and 'funny white' cauliflowers' grow alongside purple and golden beetroot and little ball shaped carrots

We were all able to relax for a day or so before setting off for the show. John had to look after everything now. He and his team made a great job of the build.

On the June 9 we journeyed up to the NEC and saw the finished garden for the first time.

The RHS had already judged in the morning. Later in the afternoon, we were awarded our silver. I immediately phoned the nursery and heard the shouting and cheering as Jan related we had won silver!

The show week was exhausting. We were overwhelmed by the number of visitors – and everyone wanted to know about the plants and how we had grown them to such a standard. We were also overwhelmed by the number of compliments we had for the garden. Two of the memorable being: "this is the most inspirational garden I have ever seen", and "I saw the garden on television and just had to come and see it for myself and talk to you about starting a garden club at my school". All the positive feedback is of course born out by us receiving The People's Vote as best show garden as well.

Perhaps more importantly than all the complements is that, after the show, the entire garden was dismantled and has now been reconstructed back at Leys Farm Junior School in Bottesford, Lincs – where it is being used and enjoyed by the pupils and teachers – 100% recycling ■



■ Molly and Milly – happy with their final inspection of the garden and happy with what they helped achieve

■ Keep up to date with smallholding issues by logging on to [smallholder.co.uk](http://smallholder.co.uk)