



The Octavia Hill Garden



Designer Ann-Marie Powell.

Sponsors Blue Diamond with The National Trust.

Theme A colourful community garden for people and wildlife on an old brownfield site.

Contractors The Landscaping Consultants; soft landscaping by Location Landscapes.

Plants Hortus Loci.

After the show Blue Diamond's Bridgemere Show Gardens, Cheshire.

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- Find out more about Ann-Marie's garden in our *Talking Gardens* podcast, available from mid May.

What would Octavia do? That's the question Ann-Marie Powell asked herself in October 2022, when the National Trust chose her to create an exuberant, contemporary show garden inspired by Octavia Hill (1838-1912), a founder of the charity. "She was a pioneer – a forward-thinking, energetic, positive, amazing woman who was leaps and bounds ahead of her time," says Ann-Marie. "Way back in the late 19th century, she was championing green space for heart and mind for people who needed it."

With this in mind, the scheme is a community garden created for an urban brownfield site, providing a place for people to come together and experience nature, as well as boost biodiversity in the city. Built around the concept of 'open-air sitting rooms', it features seating areas with views across colourful, bright, pollinator-friendly planting, including foxgloves and geraniums.

The main focal point is a large metal canopy – the one element keeping Ann-Marie up at night. "The structure is completely without foundations, so we are not using any concrete in the sub-base – it is cantilevered. There's a canopy for shade and we're going to grow climbers up it for wildlife habitat." It's an adventurous garden in other ways too, being split-level, with sloping paths accessible for wheelchair users or parents with a buggy, and it also features audio experiences for the visually impaired.

Ann-Marie returns to the show after a hiatus of eight years. "I've done Chelsea before but never had a large show garden, so that makes me nervous," she admits. "I hope that if Octavia were alive today she would give our ideas a big tick."

5 KEY ELEMENTS

1 A steel-lattice canopy Designed in the pattern of a dragonfly wing by architect Giles Jollands (jollands.com) and fabricated in recyclable steel by Richard Weaver (richardweavermetalsmith.co.uk), the self-supporting structure offers shade and operates as a habitat for wildlife.

2 Hand-carved wooden seating Created by master carver Kate Hanrahan (@kate_hanrahan_carver) from storm-fallen oak from National Trust woodlands.

3 Wildlife features Ann-Marie has designed both a contemporary wildlife pond and 'walkable' stream, which provides a gentle sound of running water, as well as bird boxes in the trees.

4 Secret edimentals The planting includes good-looking edible plants that have been chosen for wildlife and foraging possibilities. They form just one part of Ann-Marie's vibrant, adaptable, resilient community of plants.

5 Reclaimed materials Brick, stone and timber sourced from National Trust properties around the UK are being used throughout the garden in what Ann-Marie describes as a giant jigsaw.