



The Octavia Hill Garden



Working in partnership with Blue Diamond Garden Centres, Ann-Marie Powell honours Octavia Hill with her show garden for the National Trust. The pioneering social reformer was a passionate

advocate for the protection of green space and improvements in urban housing, and she helped found the Trust in 1895.

“I had never heard of Octavia Hill,” says Ann-Marie, “so I went away and started researching, and I was blown away. I thought: ‘Blimey, why isn’t she as well known as Florence Nightingale?’”

“She championed urban green space and access to nature in the countryside through footpaths, but I didn’t want her to be seen as a historical figure rooted in the past because she is still very

relevant today. It’s shocking that 150 years later our landscape is in a worse state than it was in her day. We’re losing our wildlife at a faster rate than anywhere else in Europe, and one in three people in the UK don’t have access to nature-rich environments. There’s no legal requirement for developers to include green space, and budgets are being squeezed on caring for parks, so most of them are just grass deserts. If Octavia were around today she’d be on her soapbox trying to do whatever she could to change the situation.”

The Octavia Hill Garden is conceptually set on an urban brownfield site regenerated into a plant-filled community wildlife garden. The planting palette is in rich maroon, yellow and rusty orange, with plants such as *Baptisia* ‘Burgundy Blast’ growing below unusual trees such as shrubby, climate-change-resilient *Maackia amurensis*.

Ann-Marie Powell’s unusual trees

- *Lagerstroemia* ‘Natchez’, a sun-loving crepe myrtle with cinnamon bark and sprays of white flowers.
- *Celtis sinensis*, a deciduous tree in the hemp family.
- *Maackia amurensis*, a deciduous tree with silvery new leaves.
- *Zanthoxylum simulans*, the thorny Sichuan pepper tree.