



BGEN CONFERENCE – 2027

DAY ONE: TUESDAY

Programme Schedule

Arrival – Registration Tea & Coffee	09:00
Welcome – BGEN / University of Leicester Botanic Garden	09:45
Keynote Speaker Dawn Sanders – University of Gothenburg Talk : Revealing the Lives of Plants in Botanic Gardens: A place for art-based education and interpretation? Botanic gardens “stage nature” in “presented worlds”. Educators in such settings are often presented with the dual challenge of revealing the lives of plants beyond specimens as spectacle and narrativizing their ecological relationships. Here, perhaps, is a place for art in the botanic garden: a place that provides diverse apertures into Life as Plant in ways that reveal qualities of “plantiness” through revelatory sensorial, emotional, and conceptual invitations. Through such artistic portals, plants can be transformed from “strangers in our midst” into enigmatic others, appreciated for their difference rather than their resemblance to humans. Being an educator in these contexts means becoming sensitized to the ways in which both plant and human are represented, translated, and spoken of in relation to the frames we bring to bear. This talk will explore these questions and discuss what role art-based practices might play in these spaces?	10:00
Garden Tour of Leicester University Botanic Garden	11:00
-LUNCH	12:30
Workshop Session 1 (choose one) 1) Dragons and Rainforests : Maths in Botanic Gardens Rose Griffiths - University of Leicester 2) Mindful Garden: Fading Plants & Forgotten Words Samantha Cooper - University of Liverpool 3) Art as a Way of Knowing Dawn Sanders - University of Gothenburg	13:15
-BREAK	14:15
Workshop Session 2 (choose one) 1) Mindful Garden : Fading Plants & Forgotten Words Samantha Cooper – University of Liverpool 2) Sharing the World's Most Variable Flower and its Pollinating Fly a Narrative for Younger Generations Josh Kestel – Cambridge University Botanic Garden 3) Explore, Discover, Learn: A Self-Led Visits Workshop Ellen Whitby, Chris Meakin – Westonbirt, The National Arboretum	14:30
Networking Session	15:30
BGEN AGM	16:15
-CLOSE	17:00
Arrival at Herb Restaurant (optional)	18:30
Conference Dinner (optional, pre-purchase required)	19:00



BGEN CONFERENCE – 2027

DAY TWO: WEDNESDAY

Programme Schedule

Arrival – Registration Tea & Coffee	08:45
Welcome – BGEN / University of Leicester Botanic Garden	09:00
Plenary Leicester Spotlight Speakers Nick Bailey, Dr Josh Smalley, Ruth Godfrey In this plenary talk, the team at the University of Leicester Botanic Garden share their experiences and approaches to managing a small garden, the challenges and opportunities for growth and how gardens small in size like Leicester can deliver meaningful impact. Nick Bailey, Director of the Garden, from Gardeners World, shares successes and lessons learnt from developing Chelsea Physic Garden and his future plans for Leicester. Dr Josh Smalley, Chemist, Science Communication Champion and Great British Bake Off finalist, shares some practical approaches to engaging secondary students with chemistry and biology in a small botanic garden setting. Finally, Ruth Godfrey, Botanic Garden Education Officer looks at the growth of Leicester’s education programme offering from very small beginnings.	09:10
Workshop Session 1 (choose one) 1) Forest School Sessions Sarah Freer – University of Leicester 2) Winter Tree ID Louise Marsh – The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) 3) Nature Notebooking Melissa Davie – Hey Nature	10:10
–BREAK	11:10
Spotlight Member Talks - Gail Bromley Award - Spotlight on Small Gardens (Biggest Challenges)	11:30
–LUNCH	12:30
Networking Session	13:15
Workshop Session 2 (choose one) 1) Winter Tree ID Louise Marsh – The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) 2) Nature Notebooking Melissa Davie – Hey Nature 3) Natural History GCSE – Is your Garden Ready? Lauren Daly (BGEN Chair), The University of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum	14:00
–BREAK	15:00
Panel Session Beyond the Heatwave Panel Session: Building Resilience for a Hotter Future Chair Nia Crouch – Forestry England What can we learn from this year’s extreme heat? This panel will explore how organisations adapted to protect staff and volunteers, maintain services and reshape programming in response to challenging conditions. Through shared experiences and practical examples, we’ll discuss how climate adaptation is becoming an essential part of organisational planning and resilience.	15:15
–CLOSING & FINISH	16:45 – 17:00

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

BGEN CONFERENCE – 2027

DAY ONE: TUESDAY

SESSION ONE

Workshop 1: [Dragons and Rainforests : Maths in Botanic Gardens](#) | Rose Griffiths – University of Leicester

Rose is a Professor of Education at Leicester, specialising in mathematics education. This session will explore two cross-curricular practical workshops for primary children. 'Rainforests' gives children opportunities to learn more about measurement, data handling and using maps – including having the chance to measure an anaconda. 'Dragon Stories' starts when we get a letter from a wyvern in Australia about coming to visit us in Leicester. This dragon likes big trees, having baths and playing games that begin with D. Activities using pattern, number, shape and symmetry help children think about what would make Dragon enjoy their visit and feel at home in our Botanic Garden.

Workshop 2: [Mindful Garden: Fading Plants & Forgotten Words](#) | Samantha Cooper – University of Liverpool

Join us for a relaxed, hands-on workshop exploring the connections between plants, medicine, conservation, and creativity. Through an introduction to herbarium techniques, participants will discover how plants are carefully documented and preserved through a combination of art and science, while also taking part in a creative poetry activity inspired by "lost" nature words. The session will explore the importance of plants in our daily lives, their role in biodiversity and historical medicine, and why protecting plant knowledge and natural habitats is increasingly important in a changing climate. Attendees will gain practical insight into plant preservation while developing new ways to engage with and appreciate the natural world through art and poetry. Led by Samantha Cooper, PhD researcher at Liverpool John Moores University and volunteer at the World Museum Herbarium.

Workshop 3: [Art as a Way of Knowing](#) | Dawn Sanders – University of Gothenburg

In this workshop we will explore art-based approaches to plants as ways of knowing. This workshop will follow on from Dawn's morning plenary session by exploring practical ways to reframe the botanic garden experience through art-based practices

SESSION TWO

Workshop 1 : [Mindful Garden: Fading Plants & Forgotten Words](#) | Samantha Cooper – University of Liverpool

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Workshop 2 : [Sharing the World's Most Variable Flower and its Pollinating Fly a Narrative for Younger Generations](#) | Josh Kestel – Cambridge University Botanic Garden

Take on the role of a primary student and see how this specially designed session brings together required curricula learning on pollination, with storytelling and effective engagement with research – helping us to understand how we as botanic educators can mitigate low plant awareness in primary students. Adaptable to your own content, this workshop will show how we as educators can measure our impact on plant education.

Workshop 3 : [Explore, Discover, Learn: A Self-Led Visits Workshop](#) | Ellen Whitby, Chris Meakin – Westonbirt, The National Arboretum.

Join us for a practical workshop exploring the opportunities for self-led school visits at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum. Learn how schools are using the arboretum to support curriculum outcomes, share ideas with fellow educators, and take a rummage in our activity backpacks available to hire.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

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DAY TWO: WEDNESDAY

SESSION ONE

Workshop 1: [Forest School Sessions](#) | Sarah Freer – University of Leicester

Experience examples of Forest School Sessions that can be run in any setting in any season. Hapa zome leaf/plant printing, bird feeders. whittling to make a wand, mud painting of mud monsters and tree sprites. Led by experienced Forest school practitioner from the freelance company 'Into the Woods' and a Botanic Garden teacher. Sarah started delivering forest school sessions in 2009 coming from a background of primary teaching. She has delivered Forest school sessions to children from over twenty-five schools within the city and county, family sessions and pre-school children.

Workshop 2 : [Winter Tree ID](#) | Louise Marsh – BSBI

Introduction to conifer identification

This workshop, offered by a small team of Leicester botanists and tutors, aims to provide an introduction to identification of some of the groups of conifers found most frequently in British parks and botanic gardens. Specimens and resources will be provided and techniques demonstrated, based on Poland & Clement's 'The Vegetative Key to the British Flora'.

Workshop 3 : [Nature Notebooking](#) | Melissa Davie – Hey Nature

Join illustrator and natural science communicator Melissa Davie (Hey Nature) to explore the University of Leicester Botanical Garden through the eyes of a naturalist. We will create beautiful field notes by slowing down, looking closely at the plants and recording our observations. Watercolours, botanical reference books and other materials will be provided.

SESSION TWO

Workshop 1: [Winter Tree ID](#) | Louise Marsh – BSBI

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Workshop 3: [Natural History GCSE – Is your Garden Ready?](#) | Lauren Daly (BGEN Chair), The University of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum

Preparing botanic gardens and arboreta to support the next generation of naturalists

Workshop outcome

By the end of the hour, participants should:

- understand where BGEN organisations can contribute to Natural History GCSE delivery;
- have audited their own organisation's existing assets and opportunities;
- have explored a real case study of translating a botanical collection into GCSE learning;
- have considered provision beyond traditional school visits;
- leave with practical next steps for their organisation;
- contribute ideas about what BGEN could develop collectively.