

Olympic Connections

Gardening ideas inspired by London 2012



The 30th Olympic Games will be hosted by London, and other UK venues, from 27 July to 12 August 2012. There are many ways of bringing an Olympic theme into gardening activities, and you can take inspiration from the Olympic symbols, Olympic gardens, competing countries or, of course, the sports themselves. For more information on the Olympics consult these two websites:

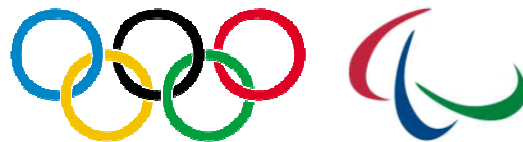
www.olympic.org The official website of the Olympic movement. The best place for historical information and an overview of the movement.

www.london2012.com Official website for the 2012 games. A good source of information on the sports included.

Also check-out the education programme at <http://getset.london2012.com/en/home>

Olympic symbols

The five coloured rings, representing the world's five continents, are the most familiar symbol. It would be quite a challenge to recreate this just with plants, but you could represent the rings using

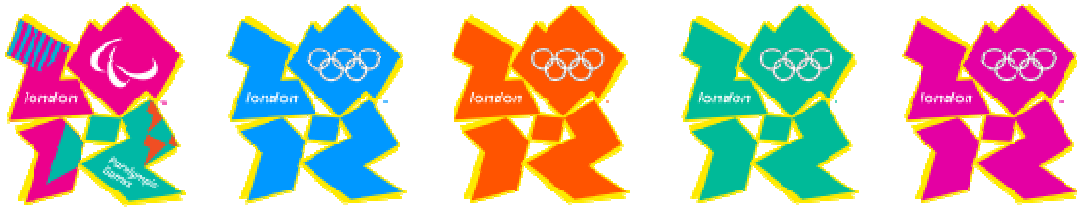


painted tyres then plant them up with flowers in matching or contrasting colours. The three arcs of Paralympics symbol are a more achievable planting design.

The official colours of the London 2012 games are blue, green, orange, pink, purple and yellow. Following the London Organising Committee's advice to gardeners to use equal proportions of each colour might produce a rather gaudy effect but individual containers, each with a single colour, could look very stylish.



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Find all the Olympic symbols, including Team GB's red, white and blue logos, at www.london2012.com/documents/brand-guidelines/guide-to-protected-games-marks.pdf. See the end of this factsheet for colour-coded plant suggestions.

A laurel wreath, actually made from bay (*Laurus nobilis*), was an important symbol in the Ancient Greek Olympics and was awarded to all the winners. Botanic gardens across the world are running a competition to devise a modern-day wreath, reflecting the biodiversity of individual countries. This would be a nice activity to try, even if you don't enter the competition. See www.bgci.org/education/fair2/

Olympic gardens

Within the Olympic Park, a riverside garden stretches for half a mile between the Aquatics Centre and the Olympic Stadium and celebrates centuries of British passion for gardens and collecting plants. Over 120,000 plants from across the world have been arranged into four regions: Europe, Americas, Asia and the Southern Hemisphere. The riverbanks around the Olympic Stadium will bloom with meadows of wild flowers especially designed to flower gold just in time for the Opening Ceremony (see image on page 1). Follow this link for more details:

<http://www.london2012.com/press/media-releases/2011/09/olympic-park-gardens-and-meadows-in-bloom.php>

Overlooking the Olympic Stadium is a small garden (below) created via an RHS competition to design a Great British Garden. This has elements that could be copied in schools including spiral paths inspired by running tracks and the use of bronze, silver and gold plants. These would be particularly suited to a permanent ornamental planting which could include herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees with foliage in the appropriate colours. Follow this link for more details:

<http://www.london2012.com/press/media-releases/2011/05/olympic-gold-medallist-joins-amateur-garden-designers-ha.php>



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Competing countries

A total of 204 countries are expected to compete in the 2012 Games and schools are being encouraged to develop links with individual teams by the Get Set Goes Global initiative. (<http://getset.london2012.com/en/get-set-goes-global>).



Flags can make a good basis for a planting scheme, though it's a good idea to make a clear outline first with strips of wood, narrow bricks, edging tiles or similar so that the shape remains clear even if the plants get a bit fuzzy round the edges. Complex badges or symbols can be produced in other materials, such as oil paints or mosaic tiles, and positioned within the planting. Coloured granular materials including coal for black, limestone or chalk for white, and naturally-coloured gravels, dyed bark chips, marble chippings or rubber granules, can also be incorporated. A simpler alternative is to plant up a bed or container just using the colours of the flag, which will often be the team colours too. Wikipedia has a comprehensive list of competing nations, with all their flags. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Summer_Olympics#Participating_nations)

Another way to introduce the international element would be to look at foods that come from the various competing countries either historically, or as modern-day imports. For example French beans originating in South America are now imported into the UK from Kenya and Morocco. For a guide to the origins of many fruit and veg see the RHS poster in the Resources/Posters section of the Campaign website.

Olympic sports

With a bit of lateral thinking, you can also incorporate Olympic themes into growing vegetables. Runner beans would be an obvious place to start, especially the variety 'Achievement'. Other veg with sporting overtones include squash 'Harrier', calabrese 'Marathon', leek 'Oarsman', parsnips 'Archer' and 'Javelin', potatoes 'Athlete', 'Record' and 'Swift', pumpkin 'Racer', spinach 'Triathlon' and swede 'Best of All'. You could also create experiments that take inspiration from the Olympic motto: Faster Higher Stronger. Find the fastest germinating seeds, the highest growing runner bean or the strongest material to use in plant supports.

Once your crops are ready you could use courgettes or carrots as batons in a relay race, or swedes for shot put. Children could create miniature gardens on an Olympic theme, or make vegetable sculptures to represent different sports.












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Planting for colour

To create a design, such as a flag, choose compact, low-growing bedding plants that produce lots of small flowers over a long period. If you are colour-theming tubs or baskets then you can also include plants that grow taller, or trail, to add interest.

| | Short bedding plants (under 30cm) | Taller bedding plants (over 30cm) | Trailing plants (choose trailing varieties) |
|---|---|---|--|
| white  | alyssum begonia (fibrous-rooted) lobelia pansy pink (<i>Dianthus</i>) | cosmos geranium (<i>Pelargonium</i>) petunia snapdragon verbena | begonia geranium (<i>Pelargonium</i>) lobelia petunia sutera |
| pink  | begonia (fibrous-rooted) gazania pansy pink (<i>Dianthus</i>) viola | bedding dahlia cosmos nicotiana snapdragon zinnia | begonia geranium (<i>Pelargonium</i>) petunia |
| red  | begonia (fibrous-rooted) gazania pansy pink (<i>Dianthus</i>) salvia | bedding dahlia geranium (<i>Pelargonium</i>) snapdragon verbena zinnia | geranium (<i>Pelargonium</i>) mask flower (<i>Alonsoa</i>) nasturtium petunia |
| orange  | French marigold gazania pansy tagetes | bedding dahlia calendula diascia rudbeckia snapdragon | begonia black-eyed susan (<i>Thunbergia alata</i>) nasturtium |
| yellow  | French marigold pansy tagetes viola | bedding dahlia begonia (tuberous-rooted) calendula petunia snapdragon | bidens creeping jenny (<i>Lysmachia nummularia</i>) nasturtium petunia |
| green  | frilly lettuce helxine parsley salad leaves | amaranthus coleus grasses and sedges nicotiana zinnia | ground ivy (<i>Glechoma</i>) ivy plectranthus |
| blue  | ageratum echium (dwarf) lobelia pansy viola | cornflower Swan river daisy (<i>Brachyscome</i>) blue pimpernel (<i>Anagallis monelli</i>) | isotoma lobelia morning glory (<i>Ipomea</i>) nolana scaevola |
| purple  | ageratum alyssum lobelia pansy viola | heliotrope nicotiana petunia salvia verbena | lobelia morning glory (<i>Ipomea</i>) nolana petunia scaevola |
| black  | black grass (<i>Ophiopogon planiscapus</i>) pansy viola | coleus 'Palisandra' | |

