

The eco garden

How to go about creating an outdoor space that has sustainability at its heart

WORDS JAYNE DOWLE

An eco-friendly garden makes use of low carbon footprint ideas for design, planting and landscaping. Many of us are already familiar with permaculture principles such as using food waste and plant refuse to make compost for mulch and to improve the soil, and replacing synthetic fertilisers and pest controls with companion planting and natural deterrents.

revolution

And when it comes to landscaping, there are plenty more eco-friendly options using natural, recycled and plastic-free materials. 'Gardeners are tuned into the

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weather – we plant trees, we love nature, we're already ahead of the game when it comes to sustainability,' says landscaper and garden designer Mark Gregory, owner of Landform Consultants (landformconsultants.co.uk).

Mark's design for The Savills Garden at the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Chelsea Flower Show 2023 (rhs.org.uk) included cement-free concrete, straw block walls, upcycled zinc planters, repurposed catering trays, and a water feature with a channel made from sugar cane waste.

**ABOVE** Designed by Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg of Bugg Harris Studio, the accessible Horatio's Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023 featured a permeable Cemfree terrazzo floor. (harrisbugg.com)

## Sourcing new materials

Eco landscaping product innovations are evolving rapidly. Cemfree (cemfree.com) is a cement-free alternative to traditional concrete, which is made by heating limestone, clay or other silicate mixtures at high temperatures, and has high embodied carbon. It's made from alkali-activated cementitious material (AACM) with ingredients including industrial byproducts. It's used in the same way as cement, and to make cementfree blocks. Clay earth and chopped straw Strocks (hgmatthews.com) are a sustainable alternative to concrete breeze blocks and can be used to build features such as internal retaining walls in garden buildings.

For outdoor structures, Geoweb Geocells (prestogeo. com) are meshes made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE), a kind of elastic resin that holds together and stabilises piled-up soil. Similarly, geotextile Envirolok (envirolok.com) bags form walls of earth when filled with soil and sand then secured together. They can be planted with grasses, sedges or ivy to create a living barrier – often used to stabilise riverbanks. Prices for all these products are calculated on a project basis.

Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg from landscape design practice Bugg Harris Studio (harrisbugg.com), created Horatio's Garden, which won the Best Show Garden prize at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023. It included an outdoor room designed by architecture and design practice Mcmullan Studio (mcmullanstudio. com), which was built from FSC-certified timber, cork and sheep's wool insulation. >>

RIGHT A bug hotel in the Turfed Out garden at the RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival 2022. Designed by Hamzah-Adam Desai of Tone & Manner, it incorporated wire caging, bricks, logs and earthenware piping that would have otherwise been waste materials. (toneandmanner.co.uk)

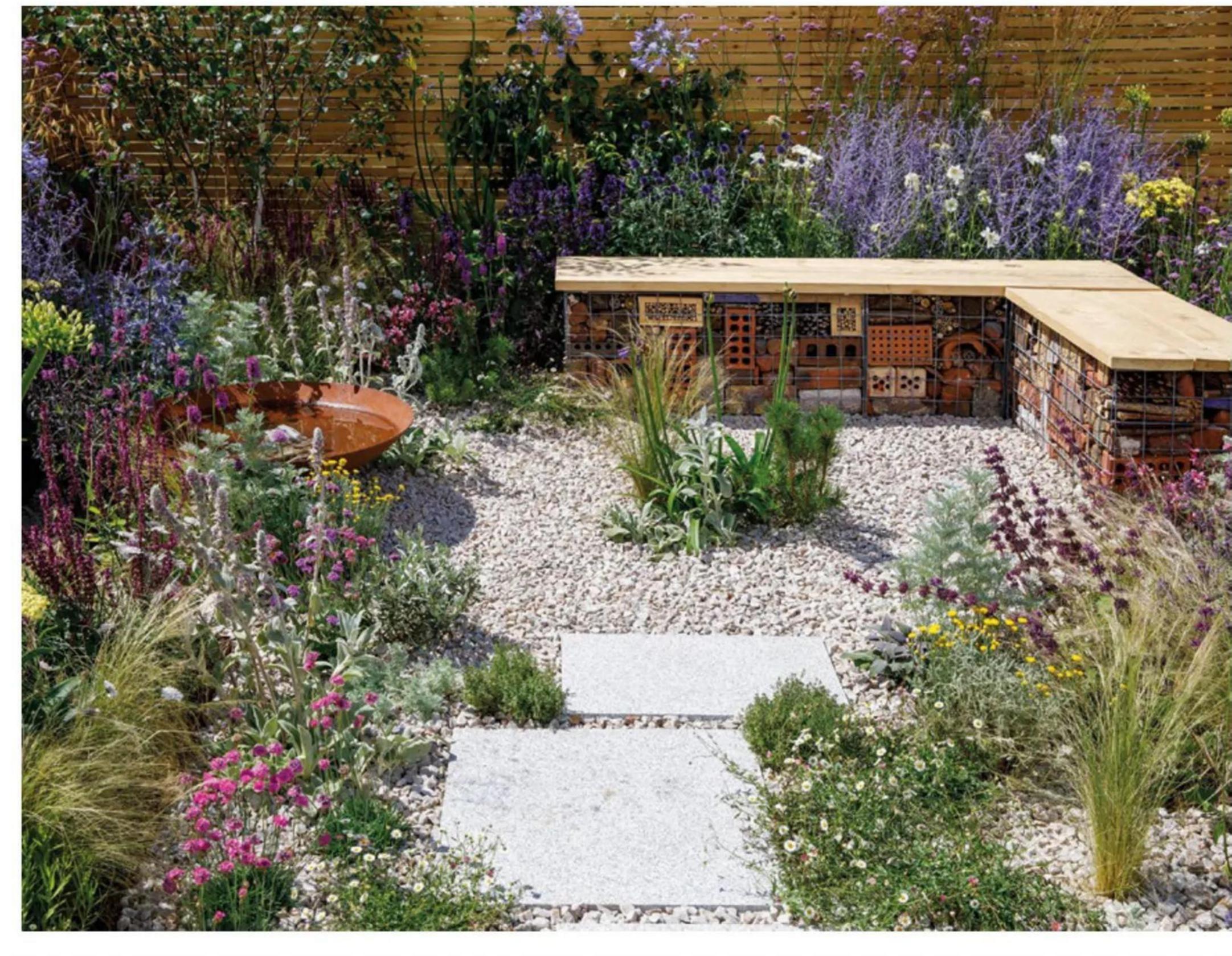


ABOVE Producing drifts of pollinator-friendly flowers, this turf is grown on biodegradable felt instead of plastic matting and features 27 species of wildflowers, perennials and herbs, all native to the UK, including yarrow, toadflax and common thyme. Wildflower Turf, from £25 per sqm, Lindum Turf (turf.co.uk)



BIO-FRIENDLY IDEAS

- designer Jilayne Rickards offers her planning advice (jilaynerickards.com) Try to replace some hard landscaping with
- planting. Even removing a paving slab helps with attracting pollinators and water permeability.
- Always work with the environment, rather than against it. Can you plant a nedge rather than a wall? Plant up sloping ground to create interesting level changes rather than removing soil, which uses up precious energy – and will involve costly disposal.
- Check what turf backing you're using. Always opt for one which biodegrades into
- Ask your landscaper to use a more planet-friendly electric generator rather than a diesel or petrol model.



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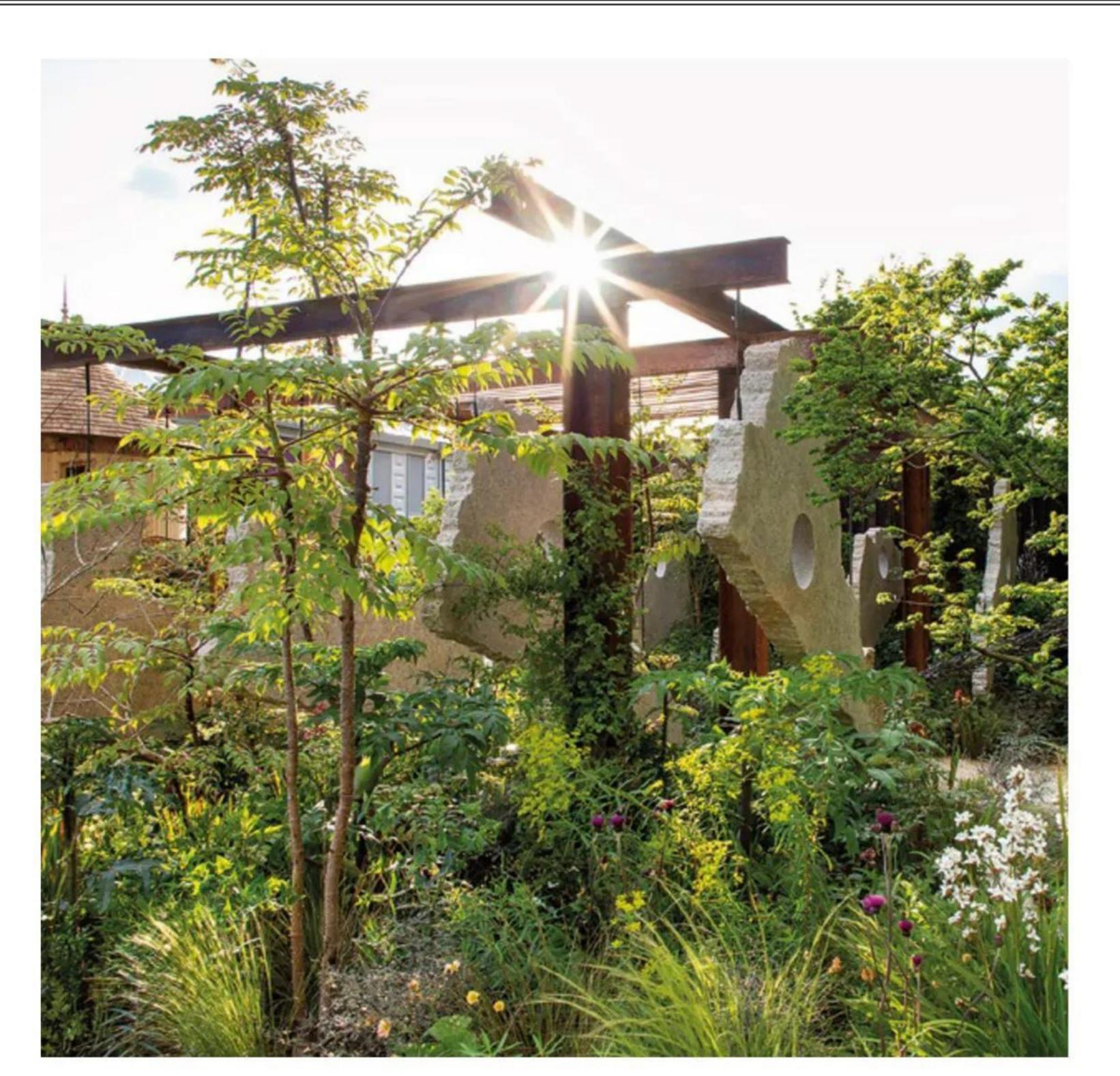
## GD PROJECTS OUTDOOR SPACES

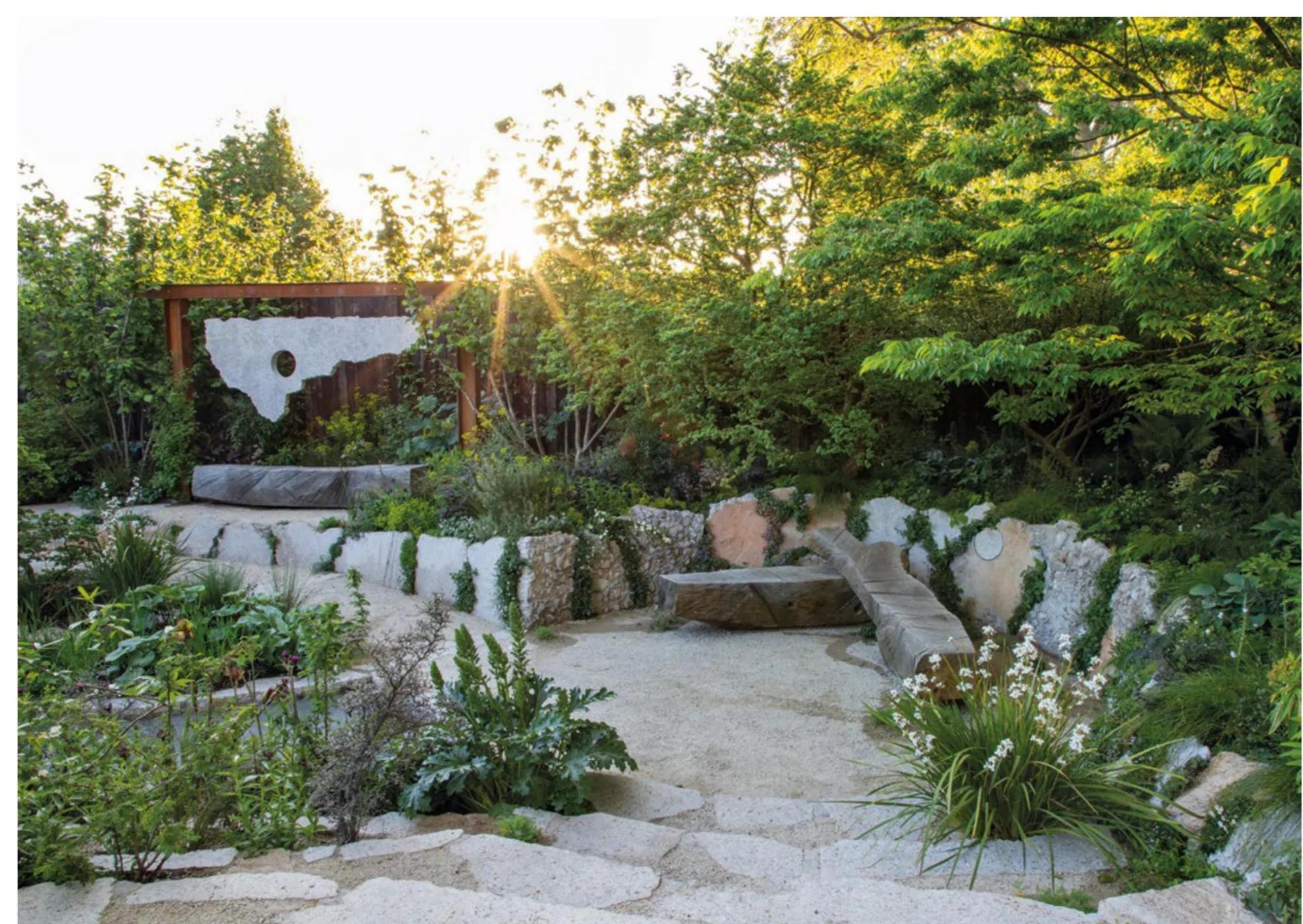
## Prioritise recycling

There are many possibilities for repurposing unwanted objects and recycling materials. Turn kitchen and garden waste into your own compost, the RHS has a downloadable Making Compost Masterclass guide. Some councils offer free or low-cost compost, available at recycling depots or landscape merchants. Call the local authority and ask what happens to composted household waste in your area.

At the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023 garden designer Cleve West (clevewest.com) created a rewilded garden for the homelessness charity Centrepoint (centrepoint.org.uk) based on a decaying house and using reclaimed bricks and pavers. Landscape designer Darren Hawkes (darrenhawkeslandscapes.co.uk) turned eco-friendly ideas into art with the Listening Garden for emotional support charity Samaritans (samaritans.org). Sourcing 85 per cent of his landscaping materials through recycling, Darren devised a seating area of reclaimed concrete from a farm. 'It was difficult and awkward to handle, but I wanted to take something discarded and breathe new life into it,' he says.

BELOW AND RIGHT Darren Hawkes' design for the Samaritans' Listening Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023 made a virtue of recycled materials. Steel girders found in a scrapyard form a striking and durable pergola. (darrenhawkeslandscapes.co.uk)







Find an expert

In 2022 the Society of Garden Designers (sgd.org.uk), led by its lead for sustainability, Rachel Bailey, created a groundbreaking manifesto with the aim of reversing the damage to UK biodiversity of the past 50 years. Its website has a searchable directory of its members so you can find a designer who's local to you.

Reducing areas of hard landscaping, avoiding impermeable artificial turf, incorporating rainwater capture and storage, and sourcing plants locally to reduce transportation carbon emissions are just some of the key points responsible garden designers will consider when putting together a scheme. GD

ABOVE AND RIGHT Strock block walls, a water course made from sugar cane waste and a secondhand pine dresser all feature in The Savills Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023 by Mark Gregory of Landform Consultants (landformconsultants.co.uk)



Incentives

must drive sustainability, explains Mark Gregory, landscape ambassador, RHS (rhs.org.uk)

A GREEN AGENDA

- On average, a garden built entirely on sustainable lines costs about 40 per cent more than one using standard materials.
- I would like to see the government give designers, developers and builders tax breaks and incentives to use sustainable materials.
- I believe green taxation works. For instance, when the government put up the cost of landfill and skip hire, landscapers and homeowners started designing with what they had and upcycling instead of throwing things away.
- Our industry would benefit from support to go green, and so would developers. We could put buildings more carbon neutral, with rainwater harvesting and more opportunity to grow
- Our industry can show the way to do things and be more creative, but the government must push the change with green taxes and tax breaks that will drive a surge in sustainable design and build.