

# British Gardens

What are the most popular hobbies in your country? Swimming, fishing or skiing, perhaps? Of course the British are different and one of the most popular hobbies in Britain is gardening. Why? And what's it all about?

## A Green Love Affair

The British love their gardens; and British men and women spend hours and hours every week trying to make their garden look as perfect as possible, competing with one another to produce the **flattest**, greenest **lawns** in the neighbourhood. Deep down, they **despise** anyone who has a better garden than them; and they **look down on** anyone who **doesn't bother** to look after their garden at all. Working in the garden provides the British with hours of fun, work and activity. The garden is the perfect place to relax and contemplate life, and to be in touch with nature, or to have a cup of tea on one of those rare English sunny days.

## Cats and Fish

So what can you find in a typical British garden? The average garden has a lawn and a **flower bed**. Others may have vegetable patches, where the British can pretend they are self-sufficient by growing their own food. The fact that the only thing they produce consists of a few potatoes and a bunch of tiny tomatoes is politely ignored.

Another typical addition to the garden is the **pond**. These are small areas of water that are designed to look like authentic rock pools, with running water, fish, and vegetation. They are very popular with cats, who eat all the fish; and children, who enjoy throwing the cat in the water.

## Little Men

One particularly popular item of decoration for the garden is the garden gnome. Garden gnomes are strange creatures made of plastic or porcelain and with pointed hats on their heads. For many people, the gnome is the perfect adornment for a garden. But a gnome is much more than just decoration as the British like to think of their garden as a little fantasy world, peopled by funny looking men in pointed hats where they are the gentle, loving giants.



## The British Man's Retreat

One of the most unusual objects to be found in a garden is the **shed**. This is a sacred place, particularly for British men. Sheds are little wooden or plastic constructions filled with **gardening tools**, and any other **junk** that finds its way there. The shed is a place where British men are truly at home. It's a refuge from the harsh reality of the outside world, and a place where hobbies can be pursued in peace. Psychologists have been studying men and their sheds for centuries, but they still remain a mystery to modern science. No one is really sure what goes on in those sheds, but one look inside a British man's shed will tell you all about his personality, his passions and his obsessions. So now you know what to do when you want to discover the truth about a British man.

## Garden Activities

So what do the British do in their gardens? Most of the time is devoted to hard gardening work. This may involve **mowing the lawn**, cutting roses, moving pots from one part of the garden to another (for no apparent reason), **picking fruit**, **digging** holes, **laying paths**, planting **seeds**, and watering things with the garden **hose**.

Of course, not all gardening activities consist of hard work. The garden

is also a place for relaxation and entertainment. The British love to organise barbecue parties in their gardens, and have their meals on garden furniture whenever possible. On particularly hot days they may even bring out the **paddling pool**, which is a plastic pool filled with water where the British can cool off their **aching feet**. Other garden activities include sitting, drinking tea on a white plastic chair, and killing insects.

## Why?

The big question is: why are the British so obsessed with their gardens? One of the main benefits is that being in the garden means dealing with plants, and not people. After all, plants won't criticise you, be rude to you or laugh at the way you dance. Gardening is also a way of exercising power and control. It's all about being the master and watching as your creations begin to grow. It's also connected with the cycle of life, and about being in touch with nature.

Having a garden is also a territorial thing. It's a British person's own private property and they are proud of this. "Everyone has a sense of territory," the philosopher Roger Scruton once said, "and the more **uprooted** life becomes, the stronger the desire to beautify the home." Frankfurters

Gardening is also an essential part of being British. As ex-prime minister Mrs Thatcher once said, "Whether it is our character which makes us gardeners, or gardening that shapes our characters, I'm unsure." And as the French commentator Juscard Destang once said, "You may know a Frenchman by his baguette; the German by his Frankfurter; the Belgian by his chocolates; and an Englishman by his garden." So now you know.



## GLOSSARY

**flat** *adj* smooth and with no high areas of ground

**a lawn** *n* an area of ground with grass on it

**to despise** *vb* to hate

**to look down on** *phr vb* to think that someone or something is inferior

**not bother** *exp* if you "don't bother" to do something, you don't do that thing because you are too lazy

**a flower bed** *n* an area with flowers in it

**a pond** *n* a man-made area of water in the garden

**a shed** *n* a small building with just one room for keeping tools, pots, etc

**gardening tools** *n* objects that you use to do gardening

**junk** *n* rubbish; old things you don't want

**to mow the lawn** *exp* to cut the grass with an electrical machine

**to pick fruit** *exp* to take fruit from trees so you can eat it

**to dig** *vb* to make a hole in the ground

**to lay a path** *exp* to put pieces

of concrete on the ground and to create a path (a little road for people to walk on)

**a seed** *n* an object you put in the ground. A tree or plant grows from it

**a hose** *n* a long tube. Water comes out of it

**a paddling pool** *n* a small, plastic object that you fill with water and play in on hot days

**aching feet** *n* feet that are hurting you

**uprooted** *adj* if you are "uprooted", you have no established home, and you are constantly moving



# Gardens Interview

This is a fascinating interview with Dr Horatio Earthling, a British gardening and gnome expert. Find out why gardening is so popular in Britain, and what Dr Horatio has to offer.

- Jane: Hello and welcome to Cult 2005. The show that brings you all the best in British culture. This week we're talking to Dr. Horatio Earthling about the gardening **craze** in Britain. Dr. Horatio, I understand that 75% of people have a garden or an **outdoor space attached** to our homes. And 66% of us considered gardening as a hobby, making it the most popular **pastime**. Why are we so obsessed with this hobby?
- Dr. Horatio: Yes, it's, it's fascinating. We spend 3 million pounds a year on our gardens, including 80 million pounds on **gnomes**. 25% of women recently said they prefer gardening to sex. And people visit **garden centres** all the time. In fact, they're more popular than visits to **theme parks** and the **National Trust**. In fact the industry is growing by 25% a year. This is just incredible.
- Jane: So, apart from gardening shops, who else is benefiting from this cultural obsession with gardening?
- Dr Horatio: Well, there's things like book sales. In fact the second biggest selling author of the past decade is Dave Hessian, the author of the *Expert Gardening* guides that have sold more than 42 million copies world wide. Incidentally, the most popular in the series is *The House Plant Expert*, which has sold more than 11 million copies.
- Jane: So, do you think this is a **class thing**?
- Dr Horatio: Well, many people think so. For example there is the **Chelsea Flower Show**, which is quite a **posh** event, isn't it really? But apart from that, it's just about everyone who does gardening; and British gardening has been **going on** for centuries and centuries. You know, you go to any village and they have village **garden shows** where people are choosing the best **leek** or the largest **aubergine**. It's just incredible!
- Jane: Yes, erm, so what do you see as the future for gardening?
- Dr. Horatio: Well, these days they have lots of gardening holidays. They have holidays to, erm, Tuscany to see the secret gardens there; or to the Azores to see plants that don't grow anywhere else in the world. Incidentally, I'll be organising tours of my very own garden, where you can admire my **lawn**, **poke at** my pots and converse with my gnomes. Can you think of a better way to spend a Sunday afternoon?
- Jane: Well that sounds great. I'd like to come along. That's all we got time for. Thank you Dr. Horatio.
- Dr Horatio: No problem.



## GLOSSARY

- a craze** *n*  
a fashion
- an outdoor space** *n*  
an area outside
- attached** *adj*  
fixed to, joined to
- a pastime** *n*  
a hobby
- a gnome** *n*  
a small plastic or porcelain (ceramic) man that British people put in gardens
- a garden centre** *n*  
a large shop that sells things for your garden
- a theme park** *n*  
a park (like Disney World) with lots of fun things to do
- the National Trust** *n*  
an official organisation that is in charge of famous buildings, parks, etc
- a class thing** *n*  
something related to the class system (working class, upper class, etc)
- the Chelsea Flower Show** *n*  
a large flower show that is held in London once a year
- posh** *adj*  
sophisticated, upper-class
- to go on** *phr vb*  
to happen
- a garden show** *n*  
an event in which people show their best flowers, and there are prizes\*
- a leek** *n*  
a long, green vegetable. It is used to make the cold soup vichyssoise
- an aubergine** *n*  
a large, purple vegetable
- a lawn** *n*  
the area of grass in your garden
- to poke at** *phr vb*  
to touch with your fingers as a way of investigating something

