

Case Study:

'Greening the Museum', The REME Museum Case Study Green Grants Programme 2022-23



Creating sustainably can help your grant do so much more

The grounds surrounding The REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) Museum in Lyneham are typical of Ministry of Defence sites, with large areas of mowed grass. The staff at the museum wanted to create more interest in the grounds which contains a playground that is very popular with families.

The ambition to create a Dig For Victory Garden to complement the museums World War 2 collections, was widened to include a wildlife garden and the creation of habitat to encourage more wildlife into the grounds.

Working with sustainability principles to recycle, reuse and reduce their carbon footprint, the museum worked with several local partners to make their grant go even further. The grant which included costs of just over £1,000 to create both gardens was enhanced using free labour, donations of materials and an additional funding from the local ASDA supermarket.



Top Green Tip

Training is a great catalyst for action. Staff who attended the Carbon Literacy training pledged to make a difference and this project was the result.

As The REME Museum, they had the advantage of accessing free labour to build the infrastructure for the gardens from the REME corps. Plans facilitated by Swindon Volunteering to bring in staff from local businesses on a community action day unfortunately had to be cancelled. However, this is a good example for museums to consider where a group of people working for just one day can make a big difference.

Local builders' merchants Wickes donated some free materials for the gardens. Keen to source the timber sustainably, the museum contacted Wiltshire Wood Recycling who provided wood to make animal, bird and insect houses for the site. These shelters were built by the Royal Wootton Bassett Men's Shed. Another local builders' merchants helped the museum to source peat free compost for the gardens.

Involving the whole team in the project was very beneficial for staff as it linked different areas of the museum. Placed next to the playground, both gardens provide additional outdoor space for families. The gardens are signposted from the 2023 temporary exhibition on food in the British Army "Field to Plate", and future signage will encourage people to explore growing their own produce and planting for wildlife. Produce from the Dig for Victory garden will be used in the museum café from 2023 and the garden will become part of the education offer for schools and adults, with an Anderson shelter planned as a future addition.

Top tips for a sustainable garden project

- Use peat free compost / top soil - peat is an important carbon store and rare habitat. It will be banned for domestic garden use from 2024, so get ahead of the curve.
- Go plastic free – the museum sourced plants in hairy pots made from coir which are plastic free and biodegradable
- Shop local – using local sources for wood, building materials, seeds and plants reduces the carbon footprint of transporting them.
- Grown local – plants and seeds for the project were grown and collected in the UK, reducing the carbon footprint. Using locally grown plants and seeds also increases the chance of them surviving and thriving.
- Reuse – a tree stump that had to be removed from the site was reused as an insect habitat.
- Collect rainwater – water butts were an important purchase for the project to provide rainwater for watering the plants. The initial garden work was carried out during a period of extremely hot weather. Plants purchased for the gardens were temporarily planted in shaded areas with better soil, so that they would survive the heat and reducing the amount of watering needed.
- Take expert advice – when positioning the shelters and bird boxes the museum will be guided by experts. A trap camera will be purchased to see if the garden and the shelters are being used by hedgehogs and birds.

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Supported using public funding by
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