

Delegate registration for Palmstead Nurseries Soft Landscape Workshop Wednesday 16th September 2015 via Website [www.palmstead.co.uk](http://www.palmstead.co.uk) click on events to register

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## Strictly Sustainable

A stellar line-up of speakers have been booked to debate the topic of 'sustainability' at this year's Palmstead Soft Landscape Workshop including Noel Farrer, Mary Reynolds, Brita von Schoenaich, Tim O'Hare, Ken Trew and Dusty Gedge.

In this newsletter we feature an interview with Dr Alistair Griffiths, the RHS Director of Science and Collections. Alistair will be speaking at Palmstead Nurseries Soft Landscape Workshop on Wednesday 16th September. Alistair would like more representatives from the industry to make a pledge via the RHS Greens Grey Britain campaign:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/greening-grey-britain>

## Strictly Sustainable: The RHS Perspective

### Dr. Alistair Griffiths



#### Why is it important to 'green' grey Britain?

I see Palmstead's drive to raise the profile of 'sustainability' being in line with the RHS's thinking. The RHS revealed that three times as many front gardens are now paved over compared to ten years ago, a total increase of 15 square miles of 'grey', and that plant cover in front gardens has decreased by as much as 15%. Over five million front gardens in the UK now have no plants growing in them (that's one in three for the UK) and four and a half million front gardens (one in four) are completely paved over.

It is vital that we reverse this trend. By 2050 our global population is predicted to reach 9.7 billion, of which 66% will be city dwellers. This will put tremendous pressures on our environment, our species and on the planet's natural resources.

I believe that cultivated plants, domestic gardens, landscapes and horticulture can play a critical and crucial role in finding solutions to major global issues such as, adaptation to climate change; conserving biodiversity; safeguarding pollinators; advancing the control and management of the increasing number of plant pests and diseases; improving the health and wellbeing of our environment (air, water and soil) and improving the physical and mental health and well-being of our ever-increasing urbanised populations.

**Do you think it's important to use sustainably sourced plants? Only 23% of those surveyed in a recent Palmstead poll said they currently did that, while 39% used sustainably sourced water in their builds and designs.**

Defining what is meant by a sustainably sourced plant is a challenge in itself and more research is required to provide a true definition. However, as an industry we need to support UK growers by buying their plants. In doing this we will be directly investing in UK horticulture, thus helping our industry to grow and thrive. With regards to sustainable landscaping we need to look towards designing out negative impacts on resource use and waste (energy, water, materials, plants, people) for the gardens whole life-cycle and to design in new horticultural solutions such as selecting and breeding new cultivated plants that are aesthetically beautiful but also provide us with other benefits such as supporting wildlife and resilience against the increasing extremes in weather linked to the impacts of climate change.

**How successful has the greening grey Britain campaign been in terms of engagement at the shows? At the design and briefing stages for the RHS shows, are designers encouraged to provide a life after for their gardens?**

The Greening grey Britain campaign has been a success in terms of engagement at the shows and collectively we all need to maintain momentum to continue to make positive change. The RHS Community Street (for Greening Grey Britain) at Hampton Court Palace Flower Show was scored as being one of the top individual show gardens. This garden was inspired by a [garden](#) of St Mungo's Broadway Hostel in Kensington Street, Bristol. After the show elements of The RHS Community Street garden were transported to the Kensington Road community space to benefit not just the residents of St Mungo's Broadway, but the wider area. The RHS encourages exhibitors to ensure that their gardens also 'live on' after the show.

**Which sustainably built gardens are your favourites?**

Gardens which are visually alluring and benefit biodiversity, the environment and human health and well-being. I love the Maggie's Cancer Centre - Charing Cross Hospital Garden.

**High profile developments (such as Kings Cross/Olympic Park at Stratford) have shown the industry the way with sustainability, who among the designers do you think have been leading the way with this?**

I particularly like horticultural interventions in cities that improve our environment. I admire the works of Professor James Hitchmough and Professor Nigel Dunnett from the Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield. They have been leaders in innovative approaches to planting design, and the integration of ecology and horticulture to achieve low input, dynamic, diverse ecologically tuned designed landscapes. James and Nigel were the lead horticultural and planting design consultants for the London 2012 Olympic Park.

Other good examples beyond the UK include the Chongae Canal Point Source Park that transformed the urban fabric of Seoul, Korea and The New York City Green Infrastructure Plan. Birmingham has recently declared itself as a biophilic which I am watching with some interest. I also think that Bristol city is doing a lot of great work around greening their city.

### **What are your favourite sustainable plant choices?**

My favourite sustainable plant choices are those that are exquisitely beautiful and provide additional value beyond prettiness such as the Perfect for Pollinators plants. I like plants that shade and cool me in hot weather and on the flip side act as natural umbrellas when it pours down with rain. In the UK we have *circa*. 400,000 different cultivated plant types. I think that with more research our cultivated plants can be selected and bred to remain exquisitely beautiful but can also provide us with many other services to help address some of our environmental, social and economic challenges.

### **Can you give us a pertinent reason why should we be looking at this topic from an industry-wide perspective?**

Billions of people remain afflicted with *Plant Blindness* “the inability to see or notice plants in their own environment, leading to the inability to value the importance of plants which sustain their lives on a daily basis.” I believe that greening grey Britain, horticulture, landscapes and gardening can help to cure this illness by physically and mentally reconnecting people back with nature and plants.

### **Strictly Sustainable, Wednesday 16th September, Ashford International Hotel**

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