

# GARDEN MUSEUM

## PRESS RELEASE

### **New exhibition at the Garden Museum looks back at our love affair with grow your own and suggests we've always been a nation of 'good lifers'**

From *Landshare* and allotments to community gardens and window-boxes Britain is caught up in a 'grow your own' revolution. A new exhibition at the Garden Museum - *The Good Life: 100 Years of Growing Your Own* - is the first in the UK to explore Britain's passion for growing its own and to ask what it means to live 'The Good Life' today. It brings together over 150 historical and horticultural items that let us into the private world of some of the people who grow their own food and reveals the economic and social events behind the nation's love of growing its own over the last 100 years.

In spite of all the current media interest, growing your own is nothing new. Its story is one of continuity and change and despite some noticeable periods of decline as well as the pressures of two world wars it has constantly re-emerged as a celebrated national pastime. Starting with the Allotment Act of 1908, through extensive photographs, personal memoirs, paintings, gardening literature and the odd home-spun sweater from the 1970s, *The Good Life* revisits key moments in the story of growing food in Britain.

Speaking about the exhibition Christopher Woodward, the director of the Garden Museum said: "we have a great tradition of grow you own in this country and we felt the time was right to look back at its fascinating history. *The Good Life* exhibition tells the story of the many different fashions and trends that have influenced our growing habits over the years. It also looks forward and asks what the future will be as we tackle the challenges of climate change and increased food prices."

During the Great War of 1914-18 Germany's blockades caused food shortages so 'home-grown' was necessary. In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s and resulting mass unemployment the Land Settlement Association was created to provide unemployed industrial workers and their families with a plot of land to work. During the Second World War the government launched the 'Dig for Victory' campaign which encouraged Britons to plant their gardens with vegetables to assist the war effort.

During the 1970s there was an upsurge in interest in self-sufficiency epitomised by the television series *The Good Life* which saw Tom and Barbara Good convert their back garden into a farm with pigs, chickens and crops – all to the annoyance of their neighbours Jerry and Margot Leadbetter. At the more serious end the Middle East Oil Crisis of 1973 caused panic-buying of petrol, strikes and mass disruption and prompted many to question how the country would survive should oil supplies dry up. Many found inspiration in the writings of John Seymour (1914-2004) who advocated a new way of life - one lived as close to nature as possible. His book, *The Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency* published in 1976, was *the* manual for all those planning to downshift.

Just like *The Good Life* sitcom made it fashionable for people to grow their own in the 1970s now the credit crunch and concerns over climate change encourage others to do the same in the noughties. Self-sufficient communities, growing schemes and energy-efficient housing developments are springing up all across Britain. Home improvement stores report a massive growth in seed sales and everyone from the Queen to Jamie Oliver is growing their own. Britain's grow your own landscape looks very different today from the allotments first established in 1908.

***The Good Life: 100 Years of Growing Your Own* is at The Garden Museum from 6 October 2009 to 7 March 2010**

**One packet of free seeds for every visitor\* –donated by Thompson and Morgan [www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com) \* while stocks last**

**Associated events:**

**Debate: *What is the Good Life?* - Monday 5 October 6.30pm for 7pm**

An evening of debate with well known figures from the gardening world exploring what it means to live the 'good life' today. Speakers include BBC gardener Alys Fowler, Bob Sherman of Garden Organic and vegetable expert Joy Larkcom. The evening will also provide an opportunity to view the exhibition before it opens to the public on 6 October. **£10/£5 Museum Friends**. Pre-booking recommended: please call 020 7401 8865 ext \*822 to reserve a ticket

***Plants for the Produce Garden: Nursery in residence - Saturday 24 October - Saturday 25 October***  
**10.30am - 5pm**

To celebrate *The Good Life* exhibition Pennard Plants will become 'Nursery in Residence' displaying and selling heritage vegetables and fruit trees. London gardeners will have the opportunity to buy vegetable plants, seeds, and young fruit trees, and learn more about growing and harvesting produce at home or on an allotment. Talks and advice sessions will run throughout the weekend. **Usual Museum charges apply/free to Museum Friends**. Please note that advance bookings cannot be taken for this event

The Garden Museum, Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB

[www.gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk)

Admission: £6.00 (includes exhibition, museum and garden), Concessions: £5.00

Open daily 10.30am – 5.00pm (excluding first Monday of the month)

Public information: 020 7401 8865

- ENDS -

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#### NOTES TO EDITORS

- The Garden Museum is Britain's only museum dedicated to gardening and garden design
- It was founded by John and Rosemary Nicholson in 1977 in the churchyard of St Mary-at-Lambeth following the rediscovery of the tomb of the 17<sup>th</sup> century plant hunters the John Tradescants
- In November 2008 the museum re-opened following a re-design by the architects Dow Jones. The newly designed interior includes individual spaces for exhibitions, the permanent collection, education, café and shop
- The Museum holds over 9000 objects representing British gardens and gardening

## **THE GOOD LIFE: Key exhibits**

### **Bench, Manor Garden Allotments, East London**

Once on the Manor Garden Allotments site before they were bulldozed to make way for the Olympic Park, it is one of the few objects to survive the upheaval to the new, temporary allotments site in Waltham Forest. Manor Garden Allotments was created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Major Arthur Villiers, a local philanthropist.

### **Medal for the British Expeditionary Forces Vegetable Show at Le Harve, 1918**

The intermittent nature of trench warfare meant some British soldiers found time to grow vegetables behind the lines of the Western Front. This medal suggests there was even the occasional vegetable show.

### **Dig For Victory Poster, c. 1941**

Probably one of the best-known propaganda images of the Second World War. It was issued by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1941 and printed in various formats.

### ***Cloches Versus Hitler* by Charles Wyse-Gardner, c. 1940**

A World War II advice booklet to intensive gardening.

### **Homemade Rake, 1940s**

A Wartime rake made from bent nails by Maurice Browning. Materials shortages during the War affected all aspects of life.

### **Home-grown Tobacco and *Grow Your Own Smokes* article, 1950s**

Grown by blacksmith Rob Holley in his garden in Frome, Somerset.

### **Home-spun Jumper and Beret, Cleveland-Peck Smallholding, 1970s**

Established in 1971, the Cleveland-Peck family's smallholding in Sussex included Jacob sheep, two cows, pigs, horses and fowl. All five family members had a home-spun and hand-knitted jumper, made from wool from their sheep.

### ***The Good Life*, 1975-78, playing episode 'Just My Bill' from 1975**

One of British television's best-known sit-coms the story centres on characters Tom and Barbara Good's decision to give up paid work in favour of a self-sufficient life in the suburbs.

### **Vegetable patch, front garden 225 Brixton Rd, London, 2009**

Established this summer, thousands of bus passengers see this urban vegetable garden every day. Photograph by Alexander Page.

