LEVEL GARDEN NEWS

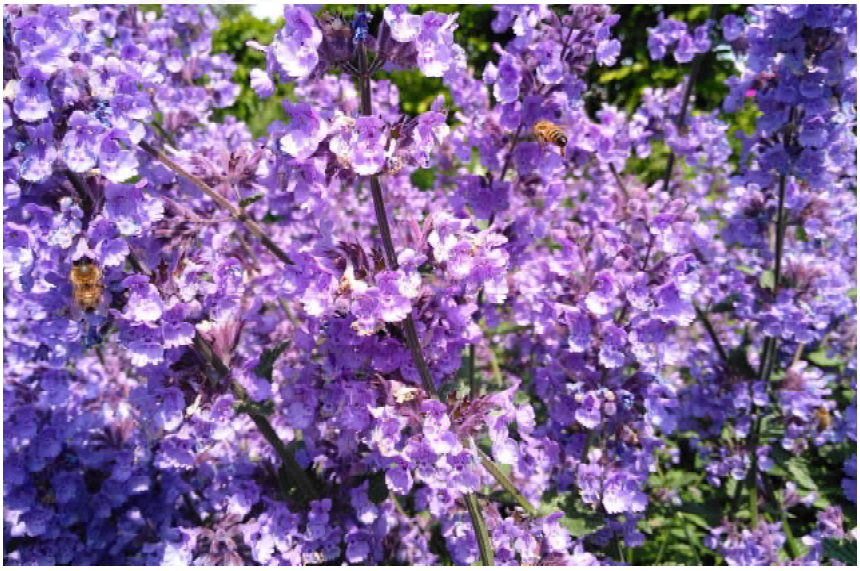
The Level & Conservation

Conservation methods are taken seriously at The Level, to safeguard many species of insects (pollinators) which have declined in many areas, towns and rural areas.

Thus at the Level, measures are taken to increase biodiversity, restore and protect their natural habitats.

This can be done by:

- Good plant selection, such as a wide range of perennials to attract pollinating insects to the park, as well as other beneficial insects.



Honey bees (Apis mellifera) visiting catmint (Nepeta x fassenii)

- No chemicals are used at The Level, such as pesticides, herbicides or fungicides. Instead we use Neem Oil for controlling pests and diseases, such as greenfly or blackspot. Neem Oil comes from a tree in India *Azadirachta indica*, and has been used for years as a form of natural pest control. Another name for this tree is *Margosa*.

- No peat-based materials are used (organic material only) such as leaves from autumn, grass trimmings, spent coffee grounds, as well as tea leaves. All this organic matter (organic mulches) are beneficial, as they add nutrients back into the soil as they slowly decay, as well as improving the soil's structure by creating an environment for organisms that are very beneficial for the soil.

Coffee grounds on one of the borders

Coffee grounds are beneficial to the plants, because they slowly release nitrogen as they decompose, as well as improving the soil's structure; it also encourages more earthworms to be present and keeps pests at bay, such as slugs and snails.

- Designated areas, such as the perimeter of the park have been left to grow so that it may provide another stepping stone for wildlife and wild flowers, *which in turn improves the biodiversity of the park.*

Common Centaury *Selfheal*

These wild flowers and many others provide great habitats for insects.

- Companion planting: Some species of plants have beneficial effects to neighbouring plants, such as Achilleas, which can repel some insect pests but at the sometime encourage predatory ones; the root system also releases a type of chemical which can improve the neighbouring plants defences against pests and diseases.
  Also there are clumps of stinging Nettle (Urtica dioica) which have the same beneficial effects, but also provide food and shelter to more than 40 species of insects, which are completely or partially dependent on nettles.

- Ornamental grasses not only give a living bouquet effect to any border, but also provide a valuable hibernating place for beneficial insects, such as ladybirds.

Fountain grass in winter (a great hiding place for insects)

- Over 95% of green waste is recycled on site, such as grass trimmings, leaves and of course pruning. The prunings themselves are scattered under the native hedgerow, which surrounds the southern side of the park. This provides nitrogen to the hedgerow as it decays, a place for the insects, which in turn provides food for foraging birds - and the remnants of the pruning provide nesting materials for them in spring and summer.

Green waste (prunings) decomposing under the hedgerow (above)

- We also propagate our own plants from The Level to sustain park's diverse planting. This is done through many forms of propagation, such as division, hardwood cuttings, semi-hardwood cuttings, soft tip cuttings and of course from seed.

Young plants being grown on at The Level's yard, such as:

Lychnis coronaria
Stipa arundinacea
Helleborus foetidus
Knautia macedonica
Alchemilla mollis

- Information: Informing the public about the plants of The Level through The Level plant database, which informs them about the plants flowering at that specific time and if they are suitable for pollinators.

Read on … >>>>

The Level
Plant database

Salvia x sylvestris 'caradonna'

Family: Labiatae / Lamiaceae (Sage family)
Common Name: Caradonna sage
More than 800 species are widely distributed throughout the would
(North and South America, Africa, Asia and Europe)

Flowering: Late spring, early summer.

Position: Full sun.

Hardiness: Hardy.

Propagation: propagate by division in spring, or by soft cuttings.

Pests & diseases: Generally trouble free, but low temperatures could cause stunted growth on young plants.

Cultivation: Cut back to ground level in winter.

Many types of Salvia attract pollinators especially bees, plus some sages have medicinal or culinary use.

An example from The Level plant database.

- Herb rock gardens provide a great habitat for insects; due to their diverse planting, such as Basil, Chives, Tarragon, Thyme, Mint, Rosemary, Oregano, Marjoram, Coriander and Sage. The rocks also provide a place for certain insects to hide and for lichens to grow on.

The herb rock garden at The Level, that not only provides a habitat but also gives culinary delight to the café.

Volunteer development at The Level

For the past year we have been running a volunteer garden club each Thursday morning and just recently we have also started Wednesday mornings.
The idea for the gardening clubs is for people to understand more about the world of horticulture.

- This would include a weekly plant identification to build knowledge of the plants we have at The Level.
- Propagation skills, such as hardwood cuttings, plant division, softwood cuttings, layering and sowing seeds. All this promotes a form of sustainability for the park.
- Plant care in which the volunteers learn how to look after the plants, such as pruning skills.
- Planting skills (what plant where and why?)
- Beneficial planting to encourage pollinators.
- Encourage environmental knowledge.

Volunteers working in one of the borders at The Level >

Other benefits of the gardening clubs are:

- To make new friends
- Feel that you are doing you part for the wellbeing of the park
- To become park ambassadors
- An aspect of eco-therapy for all
- To enjoy through learning.

Working with City College students

For the past few months we have been working with the students from City College to promote The Level as a great place to be for them to learn things, such as:

- Encouraging environmental knowledge through guided talks on biodiversity and sustainability of the level.

- Doing regular bee counts throughout May and June for students to identify most commonly seen bees and build up a database with the results.
  For example the flowers which attracted the most bees this year were: Nepeta x fassenii (catmint), Salvia x sylvestris 'Caradonna', Allium schoenoprasum (chives), and a favourite with the bumble bees was Thymus vulgaris.

< *A picture of the elegant Thymus vulgaris***.**

- Teaching the students the importance of sustainability and what they can do at home and at college. (Making a wildflower area for example)

Additionally doing such things in the park as a group, builds their self-awareness, confidence, communication skills and better aware of the environment that surrounds them.

If you would like to know more about The Level,
visit www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/thelevel