



Back to Nature The Play Garden at RHS Garden Wisley

Final Report for the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation March 2025

Introduction

In October 2019, The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation awarded a grant of £50,000 to the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to create a new play garden at RHS Garden Wisley. The 'Back to Nature Garden' was part of a five-year transformational plan to address the barriers people may face in visiting Wisley. The new play garden was designed to address a clear need for a purpose-built play area to fit alongside the wider development at Wisley.

The grant from the Foundation has helped us to ensure that all children visiting Wisley can reconnect with nature and plants, and spend more time outdoors.

Project Review and Feedback

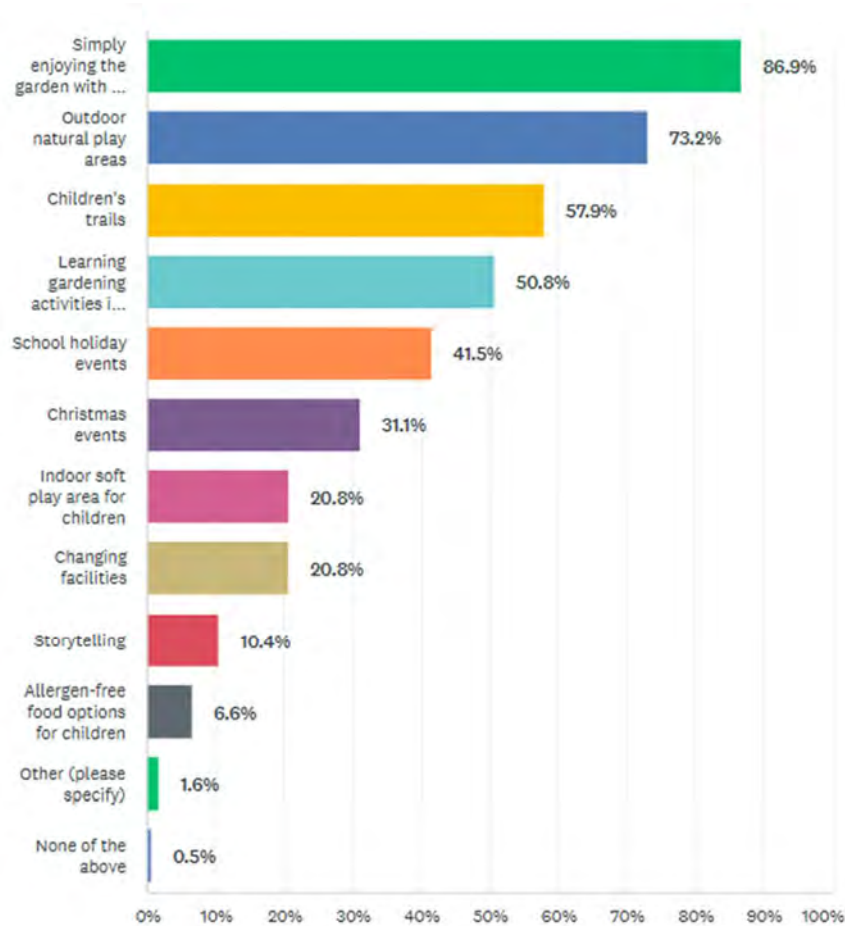
"I like the children's play area, which encourages families to come, and we can talk about growing plants with them at the same time"

From responses to our most recent Annual Members' survey, where we asked members if they visit RHS Gardens with children and if so what features are important to them, it was very clear that play areas are a key priority. Over 30% of the members who responded said that they visit our gardens with children, and the play areas were the second most important feature for them when they visit – 73.2% of visitors said that the outdoor/natural play area was important to them (which is up from 69% in 2024).



Bridge and slide in the Back to Nature Garden, taken out of hours

Thinking about when you visit with children, of the following features which would be important to you?



Since we reported in 2021 we have had a consistent increase in visitors, including children, since the end of the pandemic. The slight downturn in 2023/4 reflects the start of the roadworks around the garden, which as you may be aware from our recent campaign, significantly impacted on our visitors at the end of 2023 and throughout 2024. We are already starting to see a reversal in this trend with a combination of targeted campaigns and marketing and the return of our previously faithful visitors and members.



Play tunnel, Back to Nature Garden, taken out of hours

Children Visiting RHS Garden Wisley 2022-24

	2022	2023	2024
Member Child >5	108,850	96,539	77,041
Paying Child >5	25,550	21,579	17,827
Free Child >5	1,217	3,937	4,319
Child <5 (free)	157,076	145,666	125,032
Total Children	292,693	267,721	224,219

Thank you

Over 780,000 Children have had the opportunity to use the garden since it opened, up until the end of 2024. We would like to once again thank the Trustees of The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation, on behalf of all at the RHS and all the families and children who use the Back to Nature Garden, for their generous support. It continues to be a valuable asset to the Garden, and one which is much loved by all who use it.

If you would like any further information please contact:

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Stilt Houses in the Back to Nature Garden, take out of hours

Please note that images for this report were taken out of hours to ensure recent photos and avoiding the need for permission from any children and individuals caught in the images. They in no way reflect the popularity of the play area.