

# This is the year of the Vegetable Olympics

More Londoners will grow their own in 2012 – and not just to eat. There's carrot tossing and potato rolling to be done

Pattie Barron



**W**HAT will we be growing in 2012? More edibles – half of all British gardeners grew their own last year. But because we're shoehorning them in among the flowers, we need them to be highly ornamental as well as delicious.

That's why the seed companies are going for glamour with visual delights such as yellow and white-striped courgette Sunstripe (Thompson & Morgan), green aubergine Emerald Isle (DT Brown), purple brussels sprouts Red Ball (Suttons) and snow-white beetroot Red Hawk (Fothergills).

Our increasing concerns about the plight of the bumblebee as well as vanishing butterflies will have many of us turning part of the garden – or window box – over to wildflowers. For how to grow a mini meadow or simulate a cliff-top habitat, look out for Sarah Raven's BBC2 series *River Of Flowers* this spring, in which she shows us how to plant "rivers" of wildflowers to create nectar-rich corridors for bees, butterflies and birds.

Could the rhododendron be making a comeback? Watch out for the rhodo, azalea and other lime-hating plants that thrive on acid soil – and ericaceous compost – that will have their spot in the limelight, forgive the pun, at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, May 22-26. Designer Chris Beardshaw will celebrate this much-maligned group in a large show garden, to prove what we have been missing all these years.

Topiary will be a big trend, promises RHS director Sue Biggs, not just as a major theme in the Great Pavilion, but also in designer Cleve West's emerald-green, clipped-to-perfection show garden. With many heavyweight designers on board – including Andy Sturgeon for M & G, BBC Gardener's World presenter Joe Swift for Homebase, and Arne Maynard for Laurent-



GAP PHOTOS/SUZIE GIBBONS.DESIGN: PHILLIPPA LAMBERT



GAP PHOTOS/JERRY HARPUR.DESIGN: RAYMOND HUDSON



GAP PHOTOS/FRIEDRICH STRAUSS

Perrier, this year's show looks like being one of the best yet. Book tickets now on [rhs.org.uk/shows-events](http://rhs.org.uk/shows-events).

"I want to harness the springtime buzz and energy that surrounds Chelsea Flower Show and spread it all over

**Ripe: St Leonard's Church, E1, will be the location for an Indian citrus garden this summer**

London," says garden critic Tim Richardson, who has created the Chelsea Fringe, a three-week festival of horticultural happenings that will run before, during and after the show.

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**Guerrilla gardener Richard Reynolds and his hit squad will be on the rampage**

**Prize-winning produce: look out for flying vegetables this June in special Olympic heats**

**Blast from the past: this could be the year when the rhodo and azalea make a comeback**

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National Gardens Society, the anarchic Fringe will offer fun and floral frolics that include an Indian citrus garden built at the original oranges-and-lemons St Leonard's Church in Shoreditch; free posies of calming herbs handed out to stressed City workers; green graffiti all over town made from genuine London algae; a permanent pocket park in Southwark and a Wayward Plants nursery for waifs and strays on Borough High Street.

Guerrilla gardener Richard Reynolds and his hit squad will be on the rampage with plants, seed bombs and compost, greening up the city; a grove of sapling ginkgos will pop up amid red-lacquer volcanoes on the King's Road, and, not far from the Chelsea Flower Show site, a mixed-hedge sound wall will whisper sweet nothings as you walk past or, to be precise, each plant will murmur its correct horticultural name. Garden centres, take note.

The Fringe will even celebrate the grow-your-own movement, with its Vegetable Olympics, which will encourage children and adults not just to grow produce but to throw it, too, in events that include carrot tossing and potato rolling, with the grand finale to be held on the lawn in front of City Hall on the Fringe's last weekend, June 9 and 10.

To keep up with the Fringe's antics that will run from May 19, see [chelseafringe.com](http://chelseafringe.com), and watch this space throughout the coming year.

The most sensational show garden of 2012, however, promises to be at the Olympic Park in Stratford, where rising star Sarah Price, just 31, has designed the half-mile riverfront garden comprising 120,000 plants – mostly flowering perennials – divided by bridges into four sections, representing the chief areas of the world from which our garden plants were introduced.

Price, renowned for her painterly approach to plants, describes the garden as a giant painting in three dimensions – and her project is destined to be hugely inspirational, taking us away from overly designed plots and bringing us back to what we British do best: planting gloriously colourful, flower-filled gardens.