EAST MIDLANDS IN BLOOM BEST SCHOOL GARDEN AWARD 2027

Information pack for participating Bloom Groups and Schools

INTRODUCTION

East Midlands in Bloom (EMiB) is an annual campaign, organised by the East Midlands in Bloom Committee, open to villages, towns, cities and urban communities in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland, which aims to encourage local people and organisations to improve the local environment through horticulture, environmental responsibility and community participation – including the involvement of local schools.

WHO CAN ENTER?

Any size of school from nursery to sixth form. Schools that are **not** in a Bloom entry area can also enter independently however should you be recommended by a Bloom group to enter please indicate on the application form. Your local East Midlands in Bloom group may well approach you to enter however if you have found out about the award but have not been approached by your local "In Bloom" group, and you would like to enter, you should first find out if you have a local "In Bloom" group and if they have already entered a school in your region.

(If in any doubt contact the secretary at East Midlands in Bloom - secretary@emib.org.uk.)

The earlier the school agrees/decides to enter the more time it has to prepare the garden spaces. If you have decided to enter please complete the application form and return it to be received no later than **April 30th 2027.**

The judges would appreciate receiving your entry as soon as possible as this is of considerable help when organising the judging dates across the East Midlands region. The entry form is available on the EMIB Website.

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

The awards looks to find the schools, across the range of judging criteria, with the best garden space and gardening activities for its pupils at a nursery/ junior and senior level. We are aware that entrants may be probably nervous and concerned about the judging process so we do try to allay any possible fears (particularly for first time entries). We are a very social campaign and do our very best to put our entrants at ease.

Creating lovely garden spaces takes time and your garden space(s) does not have to be complete or perfect. By entering for the award, you can gain an indication of the level you have achieved to date, as well as benefiting from the judge's comments and suggestions during the visit and in the follow up report to help you on your journey.

The assessment criteria cover a wide range of growing and environmental activities, which we hope pupils will be participating in. While we appreciate that adults will need to help pupil in their growing activities and that for health and safety reasons some activities may therefore be carried out by/ with adults. We do expect to see the maximum possible participation by pupils.

Garden spaces created for pupils and maintained for them by adults without their participation **cannot** be entered in the campaign.

Ideas for gardening with pupils in school can be found at RHS Campaign for School Gardening resources can be found at: www.schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk

THE AWARDS

Every school that enters the campaign will receive a copy of the judge's report and a certificate. The levels of awards are as follows:

85% + Gold

75-84% Silver Gilt

60-74% Silver

50-59% Bronze

0-49% Certificate of Achievement

JUDGING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

This is a grid of the criteria used by the judges on the day of the visit.

	Gold 10-9	Silver Gilt 8	Silver 7-6	Bronze 5	Certificate of Achievement 1-4
HORTICULTURE (plants)					
A1 Plant selection	An excellent range of plants are grown involving all pupils. This includes flowers, trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, fruit, vegetables, herbs, bulbs, alpines, succulents, cacti , world food crops as planned and identified by the pupils. There is an excellent understanding of the growing cycle across an extensive range of plants. Many diverse growing spaces enable the growth of different plants indoors and outdoors throughout the year.	A very good range of plants are grown involving most pupils. This includes flowers, trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, fruit, vegetables, herbs, bulbs, alpines, succulents, cacti , world food crops as planned and identified by the pupils. There is a very good understanding of the growing cycle across a very wide range of plants. Growing spaces enable the growth of different plants indoors and outdoors throughout the year.	A good range of plants are grown by many pupils. This may include flowers, trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, fruit, vegetables, herbs, bulbs, alpines, succulents, cacti , world food crops as planned jointly by the pupils/staff/ volunteers. There is a good understanding of the growing cycle across a wide range of plants. Growing spaces enable the growth of different plants indoors and outdoors.	A range of plants are grown by pupils. This may include flowers, trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, fruit, vegetables, herbs, bulbs, alpines, succulents, cacti , world food crops as planned by the pupils/staff/ volunteers . There is some understanding of the growing cycle across a different range of plants at different times of the year. There are a few different growing spaces to enable the growth of different plants indoors and outdoors.	A limited range of plants are grown by pupils. This may include some flowers, trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, fruit, vegetables, herbs, bulbs, alpines, succulents, cacti, world food crops. An understanding of the growing cycle across a different range of plants is beginning to be understood. Some plants are grown indoors and / or outdoors.
A2 Plant quality	Growing the right plant in the right place is evident in all the extensive range of plants grown year round and is understood by all pupils. All plants grown are of an excellent quality. Protecting plants from pests is always done in an environmentally sensitive way and pest predators are extensively encouraged.	Growing the right plant in the right place is well understood by most pupils. Most plants grown are of a very good quality and there are few exceptions. Protecting plants from pests is done in an environmentally sensitive way and pest predators are encouraged.	Growing the right plant in the right place is understood by many pupils. Many plants grown are of a good quality with clear evidence of pest control. There are exceptions.	Growing the right plant in the right place is developing. Some plants are healthier than others and there is limited pest management in place. The pupils understanding of why plants are not heathy is not fully understood or explained/managed.	Growing the right plant in the right place is beginning to be understood. Some plants are not in their right places and are not thriving. Limited pest management is in place and plant quality is variable.
A3 Keeping plants healthy	An extensive range of plants are grown very healthily year round in terms of their specific requirements for watering, soil type, nutrition and weather protection. Their needs are well understood by pupils including evidence of crop rotation.	A wide range plants are clearly kept healthy year round according to their specific requirements for watering, soil type, nutrition and weather. Crop rotation is in place. There is clear evidence of compost making and soil enrichment.	A good range of plants are cared for appropriate to their needs in terms of watering, soil type and nutrition and weather protection. There are few exceptions. Pupils recognise the differing needs. There is some crop rotation taking place. Compost is being made.	A range of plants are being cared for appropriate to their needs in terms of watering, soil type, nutrition and weather protection. There are exceptions evident. There is limited understanding and use of crop rotation. Some compost is being made.	Understanding the differing needs of plants in terms of watering, soil type, nutrition and weather protection is in the early stages and is not yet developed. The health of plants grown is variable. Composting is limited.

	Compost and leaf mould making is extensive and used for mulching and soil enrichment. Care during the holidays is excellent and ensures year round growing.	Care during the holidays is very good and enables year round growing.	Care during the holidays is good.	Care during the holidays is satisfactory.	Care during the holidays adequate.
A4 Horticultural skills	All pupils have developed an extensive practical skills relating to sowing seeds, thinning seedlings, weeding, propagating plants, taking cuttings, pruning, seed saving and safe use of tools and their care. There is excellent evidence of staking plants and making plant protection according to plant needs. All pupils understand hygiene in the garden – from pot washing, plant handling, tool care and personal handwashing.	Most pupils have developed a wide range of practical skills relating to sowing seeds, thinning seedlings, weeding, propagating plants, taking cuttings, pruning, seed saving and safe use of tools and their care. There is very good evidence of staking plants and making plant protection according to plant needs. Most pupils understand hygiene in the garden – from pot washing, plant handling, tool care and personal handwashing.	Many pupils have developed a range of practical skills typically sowing seeds, thinning seedlings, weeding, propagating plants, taking cuttings, pruning, seed saving and safe use of tools and their care. There is evidence of staking plants and making plant protection according to plant needs. Many pupils understand hygiene in the garden – from pot washing, plant handling, tool care and personal handwashing.	Several pupils have developed practical skills which may include sowing seeds, thinning seedlings, weeding, propagating plants, taking cuttings, pruning, seed saving and safe use of tools and their care. There is some evidence of staking plants and making plant protection according to plant needs. Pupils understand hygiene in the garden – from pot washing, plant handling, tool care and personal handwashing.	Some pupils have started to develop practical skills which may include sowing seeds, thinning seedlings, weeding, propagating plants, taking cuttings, pruning, seed saving and safe use of tools and their care. There is limited evidence of plant support and protection. Pupils are beginning to understand hygiene in the garden – from pot washing, plant handling, tool care and personal handwashing.

ENVIRONMENT (PLANET FRIENDLY GARDENING)					
B1 Supporting wildlife	Planet friendly gardening is embedded in all growing activities and plans now and in the future. Creation of habitats for birds, vertebrates and invertebrates is excellent and there is very strong evidence that they are effective. The garden is pollinator friendly in every sense. The pond/ water feature is mature and is integral to habitat creation. The school grounds are extensively used in the curriculum	Planet friendly gardening is a strong feature in all growing activities and plans. Creation of habitats for birds, vertebrates and invertebrates is very good and there is clear evidence that they are effective. The garden is very pollinator friendly. The pond/ water feature is well developed and the school grounds are well used in the curriculum	Planet friendly gardening is a feature in a range of growing activities and plans. Creation of habitats for birds, vertebrates and invertebrates is good and there is evidence that they are effective. Making the garden and growing areas pollinator friendly is developing well. A simple pond / water feature exists to improve biodiversity and some areas of the school grounds are being used in the curriculum.	Planet friendly gardening is becoming a feature in growing activities and plans. Creation of habitats for birds, vertebrates and invertebrates is developing. Evidence that they are effective is limited. The garden is starting to become more pollinator friendly. There is not yet a pond/ water feature but options of school grounds development are being considered.	Creation of habitats for birds, vertebrates and invertebrates is in early stages. Consideration is given to making the garden pollinator friendly as well as how best to develop the school grounds to incorporate features to support wildlife.
B2 Sustainability	Reduce, reuse, and recycle is integral to plans and all activities. Water collection and storage is exemplary.	Reduce, reuse and recycle is very well established both in gardening and environmental activities across the whole school.	Reduce, reuse and recycle is established in gardening and environmental activities but more can be done.	Reduce, reuse and recycle is a feature of some gardening and environmental activities. Water collection and storage is limited or planned.	Some steps have been taken to reduce, reuse, and recycle in gardening and environmental activities.

	Peat free and / or home- made compost is used throughout. The whole school engages and is aware with the sustainability agenda	Water collection and storage is advanced and sufficient to meet all watering needs. Peat free and / or homemade compost is used throughout.	Water collection and storage is in place but needs supplementing. Homemade composting is developing well and peat free compost is used.	Some use of peat free compost and homemade composting is in place.	Water collection and storage is in early stages of planning. Peat free and / or homemade compost is not yet well established.
B3 Understanding the benefits of gardening	The benefits of gardening for emotional and physical wellbeing being are fully understood by the senior management team, staff, volunteers and pupils alike. Life skills development is a key feature of all growing activities and all pupils spend time outside in the garden/ growing spaces/ wildlife areas for active learning and relaxation. Produce grown is used to support healthy eating.	There is a very good understanding of the benefits of gardening for emotional and physical wellbeing and spending time outside and connecting with nature is valued. Most pupils spend some time outside on gardening and environmental activities and for building life skills through active learning as well as relaxation. Most pupils are aware of healthy eating.	There is a good understanding of the benefits of gardening for emotional and physical wellbeing and spending time outside and connecting with nature. Learning new social and practical skills through gardening and environmental activities is recognised. Many pupils spend some time outside on gardening and environmental activities and for building life skills through active learning as well as relaxation.	There is some understanding of the benefits of gardening for emotional and physical wellbeing and spending time outside. Only some pupils have the opportunity to spend time outside on gardening and environmental activities and for building life skills through active learning as well as relaxation.	The benefits of gardening on emotional and physical wellbeing are just being understood and applied. The opportunity for a few pupils to be involved in growing activities in the school day.
COMMUNITY (Friends and Neighbours)					
C1 Planning, funding, accessibility	Pupil led year round curriculum integrated gardening plans are in place and all pupils and all staff have the opportunity to contribute to those plans through surveys, suggestion schemes, assemblies etc. The senior management team are supportive and the school garden has a clear sustainable future. The plan is fully inclusive and the growing areas are fully accessible for all pupils with additional needs and from all communities. The garden is self- funding and also receives considerable financial and in-kind support from parents, donors and local businesses.	There is a very good year round plan for the school gardening and pupils and staff have actively contributed to it. The growing spaces are accessible for pupils with additional needs. Easy reach growing spaces exist and there is useful signage eg in community languages. The pupils have plant and produce sales to raise funds for the gardening activities. Funding and in-kind support from parents, local donors and businesses is well established.	The school growing spaces have a year round plan and many pupils have contributed to it. Funding from parents, and funding and in-kind support from others has enabled the growing spaces to develop. The growing spaces and environmental areas are accessible for pupils with additional needs and include a seated area.	There is a simple plan for the school growing spaces and it reflects financial, resource and support capacity. Some growing spaces are fully accessible for pupils with additional needs. Funding for growing activities exists but is limited and the school is actively making contact with parents, donors and local businesses for financial or in-kind support.	The development of the growing spaces are limited by funding. Funding and in- kind support beyond the current year is being actively sought. Growing activities are ad hoc depending on resources available. A start has been made on making the growing spaces are accessible for pupils with additional needs.

C2 Engagement – school wide, local community , communication	All staff and pupils are engaged in growing activities throughout the year. There is ongoing pupil consultation that informs activities. Growing activities and outcomes are shared with the school/ wider community. As a matter of course intergenerational gardening eg with allotment groups, residential home residents, nurseries, or other groups is well established. Growing activities are widely publicised in school, on social media and in the press.	There is a considerable range of contacts with the wider community linked to gardening and growing eg this may involve seed sharing, or plant sharing events. Most pupils are engaged in growing throughout the year and there is evidence of their involvement in planning the years growing activity. Information about the schools growing is shared with locally eg with families, on the school website/ social media.	There are many growing school wide growing events in which pupils are involved. This may include taking plants or seeds home to grow with their families or collaborating with other growing groups. Information about growing activities is regularly shared across the school to all pupils eg noticeboard, school council meetings , newsletter, assemblies etc	Some pupils have started to share their gardening activities and produce with the wider school and / or their families Gardening successes are shared with other pupils. Links with wider community are being made.	Growing edible or ornamental plants is a fairly new activity in the school. Sharing news of growing activities is beginning to be shared in school / with families. Links with wider community are being planned.
C3 Curriculum links	Growing plants and caring for the environment are a year round activity fully integrated into the whole curriculum for all pupils, all year groups and involving all staff and the senior management team.	Extensive links to the curriculum for example in science, literacy, maths, geography, art and design. Staff and volunteers work together to integrate growing and environmental activities to the curriculum. Most pupils across all year groups are involved in growing activities throughout the year	Good links to several areas of the curriculum. Many pupils are regularly involved in growing and environmental activities. Some staff and volunteers support planned school growing initiatives.	Some links to the curriculum are in place. Growing plants and environmental activities are a regular activity for some pupils. Growing and environmental activities are supported by staff and volunteers.	Growing plants and an awareness of environmental activities have started in school and a few links to the curriculum are made. Support for curriculum linked growing activities is limited. Volunteer/ staff involvement has started.

JUDGING

An East Midlands in Bloom Schools judge will visit your establishment at a pre-arranged and agreed* date during the judging period which is from **June 7th -June 18th 2027.** *The judge will contact you before the judging weeks to arrange a suitable time for the visit. We appreciate that there will be times when a visit is not convenient during the 2 weeks judging so please liaise with your judge to find a mutually convenient date and time when they get in touch.

As a guide the judge will allocate approximately one hour to view your school garden space(s).

YOUR GARDENING YEAR

As the judging can only take place on one day during the judging fortnight in June- it is a snapshot, so we ask you to provide the judge with information about your garden space(s) and environmental activities at other times of the year. This can be provided in several different formats or a combination of these.

The following are some suggestions:

• The pupils taking the judge(s) around the garden can talk about projects and activities in which they have been involved during the current academic year. They could also read from prepared notes they or other pupils have written.

• If you have a current, or recent, display in school showing some aspects of your gardening or curriculum work linked to the garden, show this to the judge.

• Show the judge a series of photos you may have saved on a computer/ in a portfolio / on a display board or as a short slide presentation if you wish.

• Collect together some examples of pupils' work where you have linked the curriculum to the garden space(s). One example for each subject would be sufficient. The more variety you can showcase the more help it is to help the judge, rather than the work of the whole class for one subject.

• Put together a scrap book , diary or file with photographs, notes about your gardens, projects and environmental activities form throughout the current academic year that the judges may not see on the day.

• Please only show the judge material that relates to this year's award i.e**. from September 2026 to June 2027**, unless you are showing some before and after photos of a developing garden project.

PREPARING FOR THE JUDGE'S VISIT

It is very important to note that the Judges expect to be accompanied on their tour by pupils who are involved with work in the gardens, so they can demonstrate their understanding and knowledge. However, we are mindful of safeguarding measures in school and to keep within guidelines we would expect to have an appropriate adult from school, and linked to the project, to accompany the EMIB school judge on the day throughout the tour.

We would suggest a minimum of four to six pupils who would be ready to talk about a specific part of the garden space or they could also prepare information to read out at various points throughout the visit.

THE JUDGE'S VISIT

The judging will need to go ahead at the pre-arranged time regardless of the weather however should an unexpected event arise eg a visit from OFSTED please contact your judge to re- arrange to a more mutually convenient date and time.While viewing the garden spaces, with your permission, the judge would like to take photographs and at least one with the children. However, we are mindful of safeguarding measures in school and to keep within guidelines we would ask for appropriate parental permission to have been sought prior to the visit. Photographs can help the judge afterwards when writing up their report (reminders) and photos of the winning school categories will be shown at the East Midlands in Bloom Presentation of Awards, which will be held on **September 2027** at a venue to be confirmed within the East Midlands region.

It is possible that your local In Bloom group may also want to include your school on their route when your local area is being judged, in July, although this is likely to only be a brief visit as part of their tour to showcase work in the community. They would arrange this directly with you.

Please note; this will be on a different date to that planned for the Best School Garden judging

We require your completed entry form by **April 30th 2027** please at the latest to enable it be shared with the schools judging team to organise their visit to you.

RESULTS AND AWARDS

The overall winning school in each category and the winners of any judges' discretionary awards will be invited to send representatives to the Awards Presentation in September 2027. No details of the awards will be announced before this event. Every participating school will receive a certificate and an informative judge's report either from their local In Bloom group following the Awards Presentation or it will be sent directly to the named contact and address on the entry form.

Soon after the awards ceremony all the reports are made available on the East Midlands in Bloom web site. (www.emib.org.uk)

HELP AND ADVICE

If you would like any more information or advice about the EMiB campaign or to locate your local 'In Bloom' group, please contact: EMiB Secretary by email: secretary@emib.org.uk

For advice on school's judging, please contact Lead School Judge at: schools@emib.org.uk

We look forward to hearing from you!