

WINNER

GARDENER: Andrew Barnett
LOCATION: Wilsden, Yorkshire
NOMINATED BY: Alexandra Barnett



My dad was a head teacher for many years. He was deeply committed to his job and loved working with the local community. Unfortunately, in 2000 dad suffered from a 'nervous breakdown' and a psychiatrist told him that he would not be well enough to continue working as a head teacher, and would not be well enough to work in the future. He was 50 years old. Many dark days followed, with dad suffering from depression caused by the breakdown, and also frustration from being cooped up in our house. Throughout this time dad took comfort in reading articles by Monty Don and I would often find articles from Monty's 'Observer' articles lying round the house as dad tried to explain to me what was wrong.

Shortly after mum found a new house with half an acre of land. It needed a lot of work, but she felt it was just the project dad needed to get him back on his feet. My dad set about transforming the garden, however this was not without its problems. Only part of the garden had been cultivated and much of the land was water logged. Everything had to be done at little or no cost. Most of the plants have been grown from seed or from cuttings and roots from friends, the brick paths in the 'formal' garden come from outside toilets which dad helped to demolish and the stone for the waterfall from an old demolished farm building dumped nearby. Dad would be in the garden before I went to school and still there when I got back, through sun, rain and even snow!



The 'formal' garden (four colour beds of perennials in shades of red, white, yellow and blue) has been created on a boggy grass area. The whole site has been raised using soil from the pond that he built further down the garden. The paths act as drains. The vegetable area feeds us, our family, friends and the neighbours all year round! The pond now has many frogs and newts and attracts a lot of wildlife and in the nearby bog garden the gunnera is still growing. Then there is the waterfall and woodland walk with its snowdrops and bluebells.

This isn't just about a transformation of a garden however. It's about the transformation of dad as well. I have watched both of them grow and develop from what seemed like a muddy, dark disaster into something which keeps growing and giving. On days when my dad couldn't even bring himself to speak to anyone, I knew that he would get up and immerse himself in the garden. Although the negative thoughts that accompany any depression still remain (the garden is never ready for public viewing), I can see how proud dad is of his creation and my favourite part of coming home is having a tour round the garden. Not only has my dad saved this garden from a boggy existence, I really believe the garden has saved my dad!