



# We must plant more diversity in the classic English garden

Fariha Karim

From the sweeping pastures of Rosemoor to the delicate detail of Wisley, the influence of iconic English designers on Royal Horticultural Society gardens is unmistakable.

Now, the charity's newly appointed inclusivity ambassador, Manoj Malde, says that RHS classic English gardens should be complemented with horticultural histories and designs from other parts of the world to attract more people from diverse backgrounds.

"As beautiful as RHS gardens are, they're very much in an English style," Malde said. "They're very English country cottage. I would love to see maybe that there is a garden that is actually like a Paradise Garden, a Mughal garden, a Moorish garden, that is built at Wisley that people can relate to, because I think that's really important."

The presenter has been appointed as one of two inclusivity ambassadors by the 200 year old organisation as it tries to increase the diversity of people both within it, and who make use of it.

He told *The Times*: "If we want to attract people from diverse backgrounds, how do we do that? Can we build, say, some kind of a sub-tropical garden that is related to maybe the West Indies or Barbados? It's possible."

"Yes, I realise that many of these plants may not grow in this country. But if we can create things like biodomes, then we are creating an attraction for

people from those backgrounds as well."

Malde, 54, an award-winning garden designer who features on the BBC series *Your Garden Made Perfect*, was appointed alongside the presenter Sue Kent earlier this year.

What he really wanted to do, he said, was "open the doors of the RHS to various different communities", of varying ethnic backgrounds and abilities, so they enjoyed gardening, whether as visitors to gardens and shows such as Chelsea Flower show, as members, or to work as gardeners and designers.

This could include, he suggested, braille for visually impaired people, or headsets where visitors could listen to audio descriptions of the gardens. His



Manoj Malde is the RHS's new inclusivity ambassador. Above, his Beneath a Mexican Sky Garden, seen at Chelsea in 2017

brainchild is the inaugural Festival of Flavours, in September, during which all five RHS gardens will bring together growers and about two dozen chefs including Raymond Blanc, Ching He Huang, Atul Kochar and Mark Diacono, who will cook from a range of cuisines with ingredients picked during live demonstrations.

Malde, born in Kenya to parents of an Indian heritage and who moved to the UK aged four, was a fashion designer before becoming a gardener. "I've often said to the RHS that people from diverse backgrounds, say Afro Caribbean, Indian, Greek and Italian, garden in a different way. To them it has always been about sustaining their family. It's about growing food and putting food on

the table. It hasn't necessarily been about growing ornamental plants. I said to the RHS, 'You've got this beautiful world food garden. Now let's use it. Let's use it to the advantage of bringing people of diverse backgrounds into these gardens because these are the things that they will be able to relate with that they are using in their kitchen, maybe it's okra, aubergine, it might be a certain type of spinach. That will encourage them to come.'

The shows of the RHS, including Chelsea, the horticultural year's highlight, could seem intimidating to some, he suggested. Last year, the BBC

gardening presenter, James Wong, a botanist whose father is Malaysian, said he often felt "out of place in gardening environments" such as Chelsea. Malde said: "There are a handful of people in the industry who are from diverse backgrounds. We need to push them forward. Because they will attract more people, not only into the industry, but into gardening."

A greater range of designers at, for example, Chelsea, could also change the landscape of garden design.

Malde's garden, Beneath a Mexican Sky, seen there in 2017 was one of the first to use blocks of bright colours, with orange and pink on the walls and typical planting replaced by a four-metre agave and triple headed dragon tree.



While figures on backgrounds of the horticultural industry are hard to come by, Chris Moncrieff, head of horticultural relations at the RHS, said the vast majority of workers were white. The organisation is compiling figures on diversity within the organisation. It has spent £150,000 on its Flourish Fund and begun the New Shoots programme, both of which give on-the-job horticultural training to people often unable to access it.

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## RHS membership needs to branch out

Stephen Anderton  
Comment

**M**anoj Malde certainly has a point that the RHS's five gardens have a predominantly English flavour and their sheer acreage means that much of the gardening within them is large scale "country" gardening.

But when it comes to botanical diversity, the RHS reigns supreme. Since 1804 it has led horticulture in

a country and climate where plants have been brought together and successfully grown as nowhere else in the world. Yet when it comes to the diversity of its membership, the RHS struggles. Though its membership has vastly increased over the past few decades, it is still predominantly white, middle class and not young (it used to be known by Kew students as the Rupture and Hernia Society).

For most of these people, gardening is something to be done at home, privately, not socially in

the community as Malde describes. The poor old RHS is going to have to reconcile these traditions if it wants to speak for everybody. The risk is that it throws the baby out with the bath water by running round de-Anglicising its gardens. Heavens — if it were to de-colonialise its plants there would be nothing left! Given time gardeners from the two traditions will experience and begin to enjoy each other's offerings. Stephen Anderton writes on gardening for *The Times*

# Britain is a racist country, civil servants told in training video

James Beal Social Affairs Editor

Britain is a "racist" country and white officials should never contradict people from ethnic minorities, civil servants are being taught.

A training video for staff at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, is reported to say that white civil servants should be aware of their "privilege".

The video also encourages white people to become "allies" of people from ethnic minorities, urging them to

"listen" but not to "contradict". It tells them: "When we become an ally, this primarily means acknowledging that we, ourselves, are part of a society, norm, culture or a system that is racist."

The video on "allyship", revealed by *The Daily Telegraph*, has caused consternation in Whitehall, amid claims that civil servants were being "brainwashed" to believe "divisive nonsense".

It was uploaded to the department's website in 2019, when it was known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It says: "For

many of us who are white or white passing, meaning that we are often identified as white in public spaces, the colour of our skin, our race or ethnicity has not had a negative impact on our lives. We call this 'white privilege'.

"You may experience many other struggles and challenges through life, but they are very unlikely to be related to your race.

"Because of this, adding your voice to anti-racism can help to amplify your message, support your colleagues, and give them time to heal and recover from

a fight they've been having for their entire lives, often for generations."

It adds: "You are an ally if you believe that people who are from an ethnic minority face discrimination and can be socially and economically disadvantaged at work. And that ethnic minority colleagues should enjoy full equality.

"In the workplace, 70 per cent of ethnic minority workers say they have experienced racial harassment in the last five years.

"This can be challenged when colleagues, managers and clients visibly

support a more inclusive workplace." It adds: "White allies can provide a louder and sometimes more impactful voice than those in other communities ... They are more likely to be believed when discussing these issues."

It also urges civil servants to follow commentators "who are not white" on social media.

The Department for Levelling Up said: "This video is nearly three years old and helps staff have important conversations about race. We keep all our material under review."