

PRESS RELEASE

‘THE SEAWILDING GARDEN’ DEBUTS THE OCEAN’S ONLY FLOWERING PLANT AT RHS CHELSEA 2025 SITE NUMBER: 341

For the first time in the show’s history, seagrass will take centre stage in a garden designed by Ryan McMahon of MUSA Landscape Architecture for marine restoration charity Seawilding, supported by Project Giving Back with additional funding from The William Grant Foundation

19th May 2025 - For the first time, seagrass, the ocean’s only flowering plant with the appearance of an underwater meadow, will take centre stage at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

The Seawilding Garden design has been inspired by the landscape found at Loch Craignish, located on the west coast of Scotland, and the vital work of marine restoration charity Seawilding in reversing lost biodiversity by reintroducing keystone species seagrass (*Zostera marina*) and native oysters (*Ostrea edulis*) to their sea loch.

At the front of the garden, a saltwater pool, planted with seagrass, emerges from sandstone rocky outcrops. The seagrass comes from two sources: from a meadow of national importance on the west coast of Scotland that is currently threatened by marine coastal construction and cultivated seagrass grown by The Ocean Conservation Trust at laboratories in the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth.

A stone path leads past a pebble beach area and the saltwater environment, separating it from a freshwater bog area that leads to an informal seating space. Framed by native trees at the rear of the garden, a 2.5m high seagrass sculpture made from recycled scrap metal rises from the landscape and gently flows over the seating rocks, visually connecting the land-based garden to the seagrass at the front. The garden planting is wild in character with native species that are found in or should be found around the loch. Shells and pebbles from local beaches have been collected by Seawilding’s Youth Group ‘The Seawildlings’ who have also grown some of the plants in the garden. After the show, the garden will be relocated back to Loch Craignish for community use and maintained by local volunteers.

Ryan McMahon said: “We have worked with Rare British Plants to include a number of rare native plants, some only found at one location in Scotland, bringing one of the core objectives of Seawilding to the garden: restoring lost biodiversity.”

“We are excited to bring marine restoration into the spotlight at RHS Chelsea,” said Danny Renton, Seawilding Founder and CEO. “This is not just a garden; it’s a story of how coastal communities can lead the fight to restore lost marine biodiversity and combat climate change; it’s also a call to action for people, communities and businesses to recognise the degraded state of our coastal and marine ecosystems and to work together to restore ocean health. The garden serves as a symbolic reminder that restoration efforts must extend from land to sea if we are to successfully address the climate and biodiversity crisis.”

Hattie Ghau, CEO of Project Giving Back, said: "Project Giving Back is thrilled to support the Seawilding Garden at RHS Chelsea 2025. Biodiversity loss is a critical global challenge, and seagrass, the ocean's only flowering plant, plays a key role as a habitat for marine life and a vital carbon sink. Sadly, approximately 95% of the UK's seagrass meadows have vanished due to disturbance, pollution, and disease. Seawilding's groundbreaking restoration work at Loch Craignish empowers communities to restore coastal waters by reviving seagrass and native oyster beds, delivering lasting, measurable impact. We hope this garden inspires others to help protect and restore our precious marine ecosystems."

While The Seawilding Garden celebrates coastal biodiversity at its best, attention must be drawn to the ongoing destruction of coastal marine habitats around the UK coastline and particularly in Scotland. Protected species such as seagrass and native oysters are part of the complex tapestry of marine life which once supported abundant commercial fish stocks. However, on the west coast of Scotland over-fishing and habitat destruction by bottom-trawling and scallop dredging continues within metres of the shore. Now approximately 95% of seagrass and native oyster reefs have disappeared and are functionally extinct.

As David Attenborough says in his new film, Ocean, "the idea of bulldozing a rainforest causes outrage, yet we do the same every day. Surely you would argue it must be illegal". Danny Renton added "Seawilding urges everyone who has appreciated The Seawilding Garden to vote with their wallet and not to buy bottom-trawled or dredged species, and to join us in calling for protection of the inshore seabed against destructive fishing so we can restore biodiversity for the benefit of the environment, coastal communities, and future generations."

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For more information including high resolution photos go to: www.seawilding.org/chelsea

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Relevant Facts & Figures

About The Seawilding Garden:

- This is the first time that seagrass - *Zostera marina* – the ocean's only flowering plant, has featured at RHS Chelsea Flower Show. The garden features a saltwater pool with a viewing window to observe the seagrass
- The garden includes rare and unusual native coastal plants including Sticky catchfly *Silene viscara*/*Viscaria vulgaris* (only found in 20 locations in the UK), and String Sedge *Carex chordorrhiza* (only found in three locations in Scotland)
- The garden is inspired by the landscape found at Loch Craignish, Argyll, which is home to marine restoration charity Seawilding
- The garden aims to highlight the importance of keystone species such as seagrass and native oysters to ocean health and how community-based projects, such as Seawilding, are pioneering active marine habitat restoration

About Seagrass:

- Seagrass forms dense underwater meadows and is the ocean's only flowering plant. It is an essential keystone species which provides food, shelter and protection for fish, enhances water quality by natural filtration, protects coastlines from erosion, storms and flooding, and sequesters and stores carbon
- Seagrass is threatened globally and 95% of seagrass habitat in the UK has been lost in the last 150 years. Scotland has around 31% of the UK's recorded seagrass habitat, although more remains to be surveyed and mapped
- There are 72 types of seagrass across the world. In the UK there are two species – *Zostera marina* and *Zostera noltii*
- Seagrasses are biodiversity hotspots. In Loch Craignish, seagrass meadows account for 0.4% of the habitat, but host 68% of the biodiversity. Seahorses can be found in seagrass meadows.
- In the UK, while seagrass occupies only 0.1% of the seabed habitat, it is responsible for up to 18% of the organic carbon buried in the ocean

About Native Oysters:

- Native oysters (*Ostrea edulis*) are "ecosystem engineers", filtering and cleaning water, sequestering carbon and contributing substantially to inshore biodiversity by creating reefs that become fish spawning grounds and nurseries
- Native oysters once existed in giant marine reefs that covered 1.7 million hectares in Europe, but now they're so rare scientists call them "functionally extinct"
- Once native oysters were the food of the masses and in the Firth of Forth, outside Edinburgh, 30 million were harvested annually in the 1800s
- As a result of human predation, pollution and disease, globally, an estimated 85% of native oyster beds have disappeared
- The native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) is distinct from the oysters which you normally buy in fishmongers and restaurants. These are non-native Pacific oysters (*Crassostrea gigas*) and are grown commercially in farms
- Oysters are filter feeders, and a single adult oyster can filter up to 240 litres of seawater per day improving water quality and increasing light penetration

About Seawilding:

Seawilding is a Scottish charity based in Loch Craignish, Argyll and is the UK's first community-based seagrass and oyster restoration project. The charity employs 6 full time members of staff and is supported by hundreds of volunteers, from the local community and further afield. Seawilding is restoring 1 million native oysters and planting hectares of seagrass in Loch Craignish, initiating similar restoration projects around the Scottish coastline and training other UK marine conservation groups in best practise restoration methodologies.

Seawilding is an advocate for better protection of the seabed and the ocean generally. Only 5% of Scottish waters are protected from the most damaging forms of fishing – bottom trawling and dredging – and Seawilding campaigns for a ban of these destructive practises in inshore waters, and for eco-system scale restoration to bring back lost biodiversity, sustainable fishing jobs and hope for the ocean.

About MUSA Landscape Architecture:

MUSA Landscape Architecture, established in 2013 is an award winning garden and landscape design studio based in Falkirk, Scotland. Founder Ryan McMahon has a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture from Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland and has 2 decades of professional experience designing landscapes and gardens throughout the UK and Australia. Awards include: Bronze medal for the Alzheimer's Research UK garden 'Connections' at 2022 RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival and Gold medal for the Beyond Blue garden 'Journey' at 2019 Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show.

About Project Giving Back:

Project Giving Back (PGB) is a unique grant-making charity that provides funding for gardens for good causes at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. PGB was launched in May 2021 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its devastating effects on UK charitable fundraising - effects that have since been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. PGB will fund 10 gardens at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2025 and intends to fund a total of 60 gardens inspired by a range of good causes from 2022 to 2026. PGB aims to boost UK-based good causes by giving them an opportunity to raise awareness of their work at the high-profile RHS Chelsea Flower Show, as well as supporting the relocation of the gardens to permanent homes after the show where they can continue to benefit the charities and their communities. Find out more at www.givingback.org.uk.

About The William Grant Foundation:

The William Grant Foundation is a non-profit association established to support charitable causes in Scotland. Its work is funded by William Grant and Sons Ltd. www.williamgrantfoundation.org.uk.