



ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH

Plants with Purpose: Growing healthy, connected urban ecosystems for people, climate and nature.

A knowledge exchange event connecting research and practice for urban Scotland.

26 – 27 October 2026 at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

This meeting provides an opportunity to learn about the latest research and developments in creating healthy, connected urban ecosystems through nature-based solutions. Through presentations, site visits, networking and facilitated discussions, participants will explore case studies across Scotland, identify evidence and implementation gaps, help shape future research and practice priorities, and build connections across sectors.

Day 1 – Creating Healthy, Connected Urban Ecosystems

Session 1 – Plenary: Where Are We Now? What Have We Learned?

The morning session will explore how NbS have been integrated into Scotland's urban environments over the last five years and how they have contributed to healthy, connected urban ecosystems. Plenary speakers will provide (inter-)national perspectives bridging research and practice, including case studies from across Scotland's towns and cities. There will be a panel discussion to close, and participant engagement will be central.

'Lunch & Learn' with the Scotland NbS Hub

The Scotland NbS Hub will launch its new Lunch & Learn series with an in-person audience with Dr Husam Al Waer (University of Dundee).

Session 2 – Facilitated Workshops

Through site visits, case studies, and facilitated activities, these workshops will build a detailed picture of current knowledge and best practice from real-world settings, review needs and priorities across sectors and identify opportunities to trial and scale innovative solutions.

- **Planting for Pollinators:** *Building a biome-positive city from the bottom up*
- **Working with Water:** *Restoring the water cycle through healthy urban ecosystems*
- **Seeing the Trees:** *Designing an Urban Forest Observatory for Scotland*

Day 2 – Sustaining and Scaling Healthy, Connected Urban Ecosystems

Session 3 – Plenary: Reflective Panel and Cross-cutting Perspectives

The day opens with reflections from each of the key workshop themes from Day 1. A practitioner panel – spanning horticulture, education, enterprise and community engagement – will respond with real world perspectives on the recommendations and gaps identified.

Session 4 – Walking Conversations & Roundtables

The session focuses on what it takes to sustain, care for, and scale healthy, connected urban NbS through facilitated conversations visiting RBGE's demonstration sites, followed by roundtable discussions.

- **Green Jobs and Skills:** *Building opportunity pathways and horizon scanning.*
- **Community-Based Solutions:** *How do communities engage with and benefit from healthy, connected urban ecosystems?*
- **Urban Ecosystems in Practice:** *How do we design, deliver and measure healthy, connected urban ecosystems?*

Session 5 – Plenary: Where Are We Going? How Do We Get There?

The event will close with speakers reflecting on the establishment and long-term maintenance of NbS and collective next steps for healthy, connected urban ecosystems.



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Facilitated Workshops

Planting for Pollinators: Building a biome-positive city from the bottom up.

A biome-positive city depends on healthy, functioning ecosystems. Insects are crucial connectors that support each thread of the urban nature pathway. As pollinators, decomposers, prey species, and indicators of ecosystem health, insects support ecological processes that underpin resilient green infrastructure and biodiversity recovery.

When water and greenspace management account for the full range of insect needs, we close the gaps in habitat quality, climate resilience and connectivity. Evidence from research and practice highlights the importance of selecting appropriate plants, providing resources throughout the year, designing urban landscapes that support insects across all stages of their life cycles, and connecting the people that influence those decisions.

Participants will co-develop practical guidance, best practice recommendations, and a communication flow chart for decisionmakers from ecological evidence to urban planning and management.

Working with Water: Restoring the water cycle through healthy ecosystems.

Urbanisation continues to increase the impermeability of our towns and cities, disrupting natural hydrological processes and reducing the capacity of the water cycle to manage extreme events. This contributes to both flood risk during periods of heavy rainfall and water scarcity during drier conditions. At the same time, soil sealing limits opportunities for healthy ecosystems to develop both above and below ground, reducing biodiversity and ecosystem function.

Sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS), including rain gardens, ponds, swales and tree pits, offer a multifunctional response to these challenges by managing water, enhancing biodiversity and improving urban amenity. However, their effectiveness is often constrained by challenges related to performance, scalability, long-term maintenance and limited integration with wider ecological and community networks.

This workshop aims to map progress in the delivery of raingarden and water resilience projects across urban Scotland, produce best-practice recommendations for ecological raingarden and SuDS design, and identify key priorities for future action-research.

Seeing the Trees: Designing an Urban Forest Observatory for Scotland.

The urban forest provides important benefits for climate resilience, human wellbeing, and biodiversity. In Scotland, urban tree cover remains relatively low and unevenly distributed, while growing policy ambitions for nature recovery place increasing expectations on urban forests to support biodiversity and ecological connectivity. Despite significant investment in urban tree planting, there is limited evidence on the ecological condition, biodiversity value, and connectivity of urban forest habitats, creating uncertainty about how best to design and manage them for nature-positive outcomes.

This workshop will explore the ways in which an Urban Forest Observatory for Scotland could address these knowledge gaps through long-term monitoring and collaboration, generating the evidence needed to guide urban woodland creation and management.

Contact: naturebased@rbge.org.uk

Register your interest: <https://www.rbge.org.uk/whats-on/plants-with-purpose/67058/>