

## Gardening Competitions

### Encouraging civic pride and recognising ethnic community achievement

Saltley, Small Heath and Sparkhill Gardening Competition is a unique activity run by *CSV Environment* in Birmingham. It began in 1998 and is steadily growing in popularity. The gardening competition is multi-cultural, reflecting the diverse communities in the local area. It has categories for community groups, schools' gardens both new and established, allotments and individuals' flower and vegetable gardens.

#### Everyone's a winner

*CSV Environment* is well known within *Black Environment Network (BEN)* for having established the Concrete to Coriander project in 1999, primarily to enable women from ethnic communities in East Birmingham to take action to improve their local environment. Members of Concrete to Coriander are

now regular entrants to the Gardening Competition and their expert knowledge of Bangladeshi plants ensures that they do very well on prize-giving day.

*CSV Environment* encourages schools to involve staff, parents and pupils in planting vegetables, herbs and flowers as

well as wildlife areas within the school. Even small school yards can offer spaces for planting. For example Parksfield Primary School has a roof top garden planted in pots and containers, St Bernadette's School cultivated an allotment patch and Adderley School created beautiful organic raised beds. Nine different schools have been involved in the Gardening Competitions in the last seven years.

Individual residents are increasingly encouraged to get growing in their own gardens. As well as the intrinsic benefits of greening the environment, the chance of a prize gives budding gardeners added incentive and recognition for their efforts.

#### Making it happen

During the Summer, Project Manager Irena Iwegbu visits all the community projects, schools and residents to





see for herself the good gardening practice and to take photographs. Then in October there are meetings to allocate prizes. In February there is a 'Prize Giving Day' which is really a festival for all the entrants. The Lord Mayor of Birmingham presents prizes and certificates to everyone, and there is lots of delicious food prepared by the competitors using their garden produce.

### The Future

The group would very much like to expand the work to other areas and to involve even more local residents.

### FACTFILE

- **Funders:**  
project finances and various amounts from different sources such as local businesses, garden centres and small grant-giving organisations.
- **Partners:**  
NHS, local voluntary organisations, Birmingham City Council.
- **Target Group:**  
Local gardening groups, schools and individuals
- **Numbers:**  
9 schools, various community groups and countless individuals have entered the competition over the last 7 years.
- **Resources:**  
Bangladeshi Women's Gardening Club was one of the projects featured in BEN's Urban Green Spaces project (2002-2005). You can find it under Small Heath Park Community Garden in the pdf of the publication Green Spaces and Ethnic Communities - Guidance for green space managers, on the BEN web site at [www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)
- **Key points:**
  - a gardening competition can bring different people together to share experiences, skills and cultures around the plants they enjoy growing. It strengthens awareness of what is going on in a locality, and stimulates the sharing of good practice. It motivates people to make a greater effort and nurtures a sense of pride through the public recognition of the skills needed for caring for plants
  - gardening activities help to improve mental and physical health
  - a key worker can support novices and link them with other community members to participate in a shared project
  - networking opportunities and widened informal learning is important for ethnic communities



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