

Scotland's **GARDENS** Scheme OPEN FOR CHARITY

Trails & Circles Information

Organisers sharing “How to” Advice

Highlights

Planning a garden trail or circle can really boost your District's garden income and also is an excellent way to bring more visitors to gardens. Generally, they include a number of gardens which are open for multiple dates and are visited using a pre-paid ticket. Being open over several dates helps mitigate against bad weather and also offer flexibility. The pre-paid ticket helps guarantee income. There are many ways to approach trails and the following article provides some general tips as well as experience from the East Lothian trail.

First, explore the idea...

- Get a small group together to plan and manage (eg: 2-3 people)
- Start planning in late spring / early summer
- Decide how many gardens you want to participate (eg: 7-12) and what, if any, qualities to look for in these gardens. Remember that Trails can be a good way to promote visits to beautiful, yet underutilised, “by appointment” gardens.
 - *Tip: Consider whether you might like a theme to your trail...*
- Identify charity(s) to support (to help promote your trail and also appeal to visitors).
- It can be helpful, but not mandatory, to find a local sponsor(s) to help cover administrative costs such as leaflet printing.

Then, look for buy-in from your gardens...

- Speak to your earmarked gardens and seek willingness to participate in your trail.
- Decide when you want your trail to run. You might decide this first and look for gardens which look good at this time, or decide your gardens and then choose the opening date(s) of when they look their best.
- Think about whether you'll offer tea. This could be in one of your gardens, offered as a DIY set-up, or you might recommend a local tea room. Also consider whether to offer extras stalls and/or a plant stall.
- Once you have decided to go ahead with your Trail, please let the office know. They can offer general help, but you'll especially need them to help create your promotional materials.

Prepare your promotional materials...

- Decide how much to charge for tickets. Consider the amount for a basic ticket to all gardens and also how much to charge to visit any one garden individually. See the table on the next page for examples of past trails and circles.
 - *Tip: Consider offering an “early bird” ticket price to help push early sales.*
- Decide, with your garden owners, when each will be open. You want it to be convenient with them and also offering a good spread of availability for your visitors.
- Think about what you would like your leaflet to look like, and also how many you would want to print. The office can help by providing examples of past materials / experience.
 - Gather up content from your garden owners (normally a write-up about their garden and photographs).
 - Ask your charity(s) to provide material, such as how the money will be used, and their logo.
 - Also include your sponsor if you have one.
- Consider whether to have/sell advertising in your leaflet, and for how much. Again the office can make suggestions on price and format.
- Provide all this to the office to provide draft materials and also to obtain a printing quote. They will manage your printing process for you.
- Run drafts of your promotional materials by your relevant stakeholders, eg: charity(s) and sponsor(s).

And finally, promote your Trail and sell your tickets

- Make a plan for selling tickets and getting your promotional materials out and about.
- Remember that your gardens will need some signs for their open days.

Table: Overview of Past Trails, Festivals and Circles

Event	When	Ticket Price	Total Takings
The Fife Diamond Festival 12 gardens	2012, 18 - 20 May Fri-Sun	£20.00	£19,168
The Fife Garden Trail 9 gardens	2013, 4-6 & 11-13 Jun Mon-Sun	£15.00	£11,869
East Lothian Garden Trail 10 gardens	2014, 17 - 21 Jun Tues - Sat	£20.00	£23,238
Orkney Garden Trail One 6 gardens	2014, 22 & 29 Jun 6 & 13 Jul, Sun	£10.00 repeat £2.50	£7,868
The Fife Garden Festival 10 gardens	2014, 7 - 8 Jun Sat/Sun	£20.00	£12,863
Orkney Garden Trail 5 gardens	2015, 7 & 14 Jun Sun	£10.00 repeat £2.50	£1,656
Orkney Garden Trail Two 6 gardens	2015, 12 & 19 Jul Sun	£12.00 repeat £2.50	£4,681
The Angus and Fife Garden Trail 12 gardens	2015, 5 May -25 June Tues, Wed, Thu	£25.00 early bird £20	£10,323
The Herston Garden Trail 6 gardens	2015 28 Jun & 5 Jul	£12.00 repeat £2.50	£4,420

Humbie Garden Circle 5 gardens	2015, 20 May, 3 & 17 June Wed	£15.00 day £5	£3,972
Traprain Garden Circle 3 gardens	2016, 25 May, 15 & 29 June Wed	£15.00 single £5	
The Peeblesshire Garden Trio 3 gardens	2016, 28/29 May, 22/23 Jun, 21 Jul, 25 Aug, Sat/Sun, Wed/Thu	£13.00 £5 large £3 small	

Trail Notes from East Lothian's Experience by Mark Hedderwick

Stage 1 – Exploring the idea...

My experience is that a small core team of either 3 or 5 gets things done more quickly than a larger group. In East Lothian we had a team of three of which two of us were garden openers; with one participating in the trail itself. We started planning our trail in August 2013 ; we should have begun a month or two earlier.

At the first meeting of our team we agreed that we would explore the idea of a Trail before committing to actually organising one. We agreed that we wanted to have not less than 7 gardens opening for us and not more than 12. Fewer than 7 wouldn't be attractive and more than 12 would be unwieldy. We eventually settled on 10. The gardens had to be those that are not usually open and should range from being "large and pompous" to relatively "small and cottagey". In short, a spread of gardens and styles but each had to have its own merit in terms of landscape or planting.

We identified two local charities as our potential beneficiaries and we identified a small boutique investment manager based in Haddington as a potential sponsor.

We agreed to draw up a short list of candidate gardens and divide amongst ourselves responsibility for enquiring about assistance from our potential beneficiaries and potential sponsor and to report back at our next meeting.

Stage 2 – Making a plan...

Having identified the gardens, approached their owners and identified when the gardens would be at their best, we agreed when the trail would take place. We were careful not to dilute other SG garden open days. We settled on a week so as to dilute the weather risk and to promote the idea of visiting the gardens opening for us over several days.

We agreed that we would not get involved in teas/ catering. We believed that parking would not be a problem as gardens would not all be assaulted all at once. We asked the garden owners if they would like to include stalls in their gardens. Some did whilst others did not. We had a good sculpture stall and a good artist with original work and prints in one garden. We explained to Garden owners that they had nothing to do other than be at home when their gardens were opening. We reassured them that there would be no need to check tickets etc. Most people are honest ...

We got sign off from our potential sponsor that they would give us £1,000 to pay for our advertising leaflet and garden booklet printing costs. Our beneficiary charities also committed themselves to helping us with promoting our Trail. We went with 2 charities and split their share 20%/ 20%.

We discussed for the first time how we should price our tickets and how we should sell them. We settled at £20 for a season ticket which would give access to all gardens for the whole week. Season tickets could only be bought in advance via a website (which the office organised for us) or by post with a cheque to a committee member. Entry to individual gardens, without a season ticket would be £5 per garden at the gate. We told each garden owner of our plans and sought their approval and commitment.

Stage 3 – Preparing your promotional materials

We agreed that we would proceed with the Trail supported by our initial homework.

We asked each garden owner for some text about their garden and for some photographs for incorporation into our Trail leaflet and flyer. Our flyer was a single half page sheet which replicated the Guidebook entry and the booklet included details and commentary/photos of each garden as supplied by the owners.

We also agreed with the garden owners when their gardens would be open during the week. We wanted to make sure that gardens were open throughout the week but that individual opening times were convenient to each owner. These times would be incorporated into the booklet. We started planning our promotion and writing up the booklet and flyer.

We identified who apart from our main sponsor might benefit or be interested in appearing in the booklet/ flyer. Then we started trying to sell advertising in the booklet to selected plantmen, nurseries, tearooms and hotels at £50 per page or £25 per half page.

We approached printers to get quotes for printing off 10,000 flyers and 500 booklets. Fiona also provided us with a quote from a head office printer. We asked head office to approve the draft layout of the flyers and booklet which included the SG logos and details of our sponsors and, very important, our charities. We sought approval for printed matter from our sponsors and charities.

Stage 4 – Selling your Trail tickets...

We launched our sales propaganda just before Christmas in 2013 as we felt a couple of Trail tickets would be good stocking fillers. In March, we began distributing leaflets/flyers around the county at every location we could think of but concentrating mostly on nurseries and plantmen supporting us and the tearoom and hotel supporting us. We supplied our promotional material in PDF format to our sponsors and beneficiaries for them to share with their “friends”. We gave our materials to all our garden owners for distribution to their friends.

Stage 5 – On the day...

In the run up to our week we encouraged as much social chat as we could about the Trail and its benefits. We found that word of mouth was very important. We stopped selling tickets on the website a week before the Trail itself so that we could be sure that tickets were sent in the post in

good time. At this stage we also agreed that Owners could sell season tickets if they wished for £20 at the gate but take up was very slight.

In the end we distributed about 10,000 leaflets and we used up nearly all our booklets as our visitor numbers were higher than we expected (we had a brilliant week of warm dry weather). We raised over £30,000 with the vast majority of our costs funded by our core Sponsor (McInroy and Wood) and by selling selected adverts in the booklet/ flyer. All the garden owners enjoyed the experience, one was subsequently visited by the Beechgrove Garden. Our charities were thrilled by the result and SG also benefitted very considerably.