



Garden Museum

Shortlisted for the Family Learning to Support Early Years Award

About the Garden Museum

The [Garden Museum](#) explores and celebrates the art, history and design of British gardens and their places in our lives today. Visitors discover the stories of great gardeners through the museum's permanent collection of artefacts and tools from gardening throughout history alongside botanical art, photography and paintings exploring how and why we garden. The museum is home to the Archive of Garden Design, as well as a sheltered courtyard garden of rare plants.

Exhibitions, events and community projects delve into art, architecture, plant science, food, sustainability, well-being and more, all through the lens of gardening. Since 2023, the museum has offered family learning sessions. These are planned and delivered by a dedicated Family Learning Officer and, for specialist food learning, by the museum's Food Educator. They focus on the seasons, exploring food, growing and art and involve creative activities, cooking and seed planting. To make the sessions sustainable and accessible to all, wherever possible they use seasonal produce, recyclable materials and natural items, such as leaves and flowers from the gardens, as well as resources from the Work and Play Scrap store in Tooting.

Family Learning Early Years: Tuesday Tots

Tuesday Tots' is the Garden Museum's free, drop-in sessions for parents with children aged 0-5 years. Before Tuesday Tots, there wasn't a consistent family learning offer and sessions were aimed at children aged 3 years plus. The museum wanted to introduce families with younger children to the museum's collections and sessions through a consistent offer, accessible to all local parents and those farther afield.

As an organisation, it is important for the museum to be part of the community and support young people to be introduced to gardening and cultural settings at a young age for the benefit of them and the sustainability of the museum. The sessions are always run by the Family Learning Officer in order to build key relationships and trust with families.

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The museum realises the importance of shared activity at this age and the need to bring parents and children together to share experiences, especially sensory experiences and those involving the natural world. Prior to developing the activities, the Garden Museum worked with an EYFS specialist to support neurodiversity and discuss provision, texts, sensory needs and the physical space. Tuesday Tots is embedded into the museum's core work and is planned alongside the museum's curatorial programme, gardening team and front of house.

The link to gardening is key for the sessions and involves venturing into the gardens as often as possible. Each week in term-time, a story is read linked to the seasons including 'The Leaf Thief', 'Hello Winter' and 'Anansi the Spider', followed by two craft activities. The stories are chosen to cover different cultural backgrounds, multigenerational relationships, tales of kindness and friendship.

The activities have different schemes of learning, so there is something for everyone. They are designed to be multi-sensory and multi-disciplinary, challenge skill development and encourage shared activity between parent and child. Activities include insect plasticine modelling, creating collage flower crowns and shakers, and printing with natural objects. The sessions also include walks and exploration in the gardens to collect natural items, or to look for insects and birds from the stories; as well as play with dressing up and role play with toys.

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To develop critical thinking and inspire exploration, lots of questions are asked: 'Do we cut, tear or scrunch? How do we mix pink?', 'What does our seed need to grow?' and 'Where will we find spiders in the garden?' By linking the story, activity and the natural objects, the museum creates memorable experiences. They also link the sessions to exhibitions for a cultural element, such as the Frank Walter exhibition which introduced Caribbean heritage and stories as well as vibrant colour, pattern, music and food.

As well as digital promotion, the museum circulates hard copy flyers to reach parents without the internet and those who may not usually visit the museum's sites. These have been delivered to local shops, nurseries and schools, Ronald McDonald House and Evelina hospital school to reach different parts of the community. They have also worked with their local primary schools, who are culturally diverse, and a bi-lingual nursery who bring small groups of children each week.



Impact and next steps

The families attending Tuesday Tots have benefitted from a consistent approach which offers a comfortable space and enjoyable, multi-faceted and high-quality activities. Parents and children have the opportunity to work and build experiences together. Through observation, children are noticeably developing their skills, and adults are increasing their confidence, learning about activities they can do at home as a family, including gardening and planting seeds. Families can see exhibitions free of charge, meet other families, build relationships and swap and share local information and experiences with each other.

The Garden Museum is using feedback from families to continually improve their offer and find out what families would like to learn in the future. They are also able to see where there may be gaps in terms of groups that aren't currently attending and address this through different promotions and outreach.