

PRESS PACK

RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2026

STAND GPD051

DESIGN CONCEPT

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LECTURER IN HORTICULTURE

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

SPARSHOLT HORTICULTURE STUDENTS



WASHDAY HUES PRESS RELEASE

JOIN US ON A JOURNEY OF COLOUR – FROM PLANTS TO PIGMENTS

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE WILL PRESENT WASHDAY HUES AT THE 2026 RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW, EXPLORING THE FASCINATING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURAL DYES AND TEXTILES.

Sparsholt College will be showcasing Washday Hues at the 2026 RHS Chelsea Flower Show (19-23 May 2026). The garden will delve into the relationship between fabrics and plants, demonstrating the wide range of beautiful and vibrant colours that can be achieved when using natural plant-based dyes.

The 2026 garden is designed by Sparsholt's multiple-medal-winning team including several full-time and part-time mature horticulture learners. The exhibit will be staged at GPD051, inside the Great Pavilion, and will explore a variety of plants, many of which can be grown in the UK climate, that can be used as natural dyes and scents.

Lucy Lewis, Horticulture Lecturer at Sparsholt College and designer of Washday Hues said: "This year's garden is exciting, we have had so much interest already and it turns out loads of people have a curiosity for these old crafts. I'm excited to see the things that the students and I will learn along the way."

"This year's theme is looking at the relationship between plants in our garden and how they dye fabrics with a little bit of a laundry theme as well. We're looking at plants that people can grow very happily in the UK climate and that produce wonderful colours when processed properly."

The design aims to lead visitors through the steps involved in taking colour from plant to pigment, flower to fabric and garden to garment. The eye-catching washing machine signifies the first step of the dyeing process and the garden itself will feature many plants which can be used to produce dyes.

ELKA, a weaving and natural dye studio based in Hampshire, have been working with Sparsholt College to share their specialist knowledge on the topic of natural, plant-based dyeing. Part of their support included facilitating a natural dyeing workshop for the learners involved in the RHS Chelsea Flower Show project.

Ellie Fisher, owner of ELKA, stated "During our workshop, the students learnt how to practically naturally dye with plants, the differences between animal and cellulose fibres, and the different plants that they could use in the UK to naturally dye their own textiles."

"It's lovely seeing the reaction from the students because it is like magic really, you can take a plant that looks one way and get an incredibly vivid colour from it and one of the things that I love the most about the naturally dyed colours are the way they all tone beautifully together"
"I can't wait to see everything and mostly to see how the garden is put together and the finished display"

Sparsholt College has a long history of success at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and each year students are at the heart of the project. From full-time further education courses to part-time horticultural courses for adults, Sparsholt College has a wonderful reputation for education in horticulture. For many learners this is their first experience of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, and the project allows them to fully immerse themselves in the process from start to finish, gaining key skills to support their careers.

Cam, T Level Ornamental Horticulture learner and member of the 2026 RHS Garden Plant Team at Sparsholt College, said:

"I am excited and there are lots of opportunities involved with this experience. I have learnt a lot already, particularly in the dye workshop and it's nice to know all the different plant materials that can be used to dye fabrics."

"Last year I was lucky enough to go to the 2025 RHS Chelsea Flower Show to see all the gardens. We went on lots of tours around the various gardens and spoke to some amazing people who were all inspirational. Being part of the 2026 RHS Chelsea Flower Show team is going to open lots of doors for me"

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Sparsholt College

Sparsholt College Group, which includes Sparsholt College, Andover College and University Centre Sparsholt, started in Old Basing, Basingstoke in 1899 as the Hampshire Farm Institute. Moving to Sparsholt village near Winchester in 1912, the college, its students and alumni have been influential within the horticulture industry for many years. Well-known former students include Charlie Dimmock.

- Sparsholt College has a national reputation for excellence in horticulture and garden design, the selection of courses provide students with valuable knowledge and training to launch them directly into industry or higher study at university.
- As part of the T Level, our part-time and RHS courses, students work with our experts on the garden displays entered into the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.
- Sparsholt College has previously achieved ten Gold medals, seven Silver-Gilt medals, four Silver Lindley medals, two silver medals and three Bronze medals, alongside seven 'Best in Category' awards.
- In previous years, Sparsholt College have submitted entries including Rustic Recipes Reimagined 2023, Plants, Routes & Branches 2024, and The Ugly Bug Ball 2025

Website: www.sparsholt.ac.uk/

Facebook: @SparsholtCollege

Instagram: @sparsholt_coll

TikTok: @SparsholtCollege

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/school/sparsholt-college-group

About ELKA

ELKA is a Hampshire-based weaving and natural colour studio founded by textile designer Ellie Fisher, working closely with her mother, Claudia Gosse, a natural dyer. Together, they form a mother-and-daughter team combining complementary skills in growing, dyeing and working with natural colour.

With over 20 years' experience in textiles, ELKA specialises in plant-based dyeing, weaving, and education, exploring the relationship between materials, colour and process.

Through workshops, courses and collaborative projects, ELKA supports both beginners and established makers in learning traditional techniques in a contemporary, accessible way. The studio places a strong emphasis on sustainability, encouraging the use of natural fibres and locally available plant materials to create colour.

ELKA works across education, collaboration and consultancy, sharing practical knowledge of natural dyes, inks and pigments with a focus on what can be grown and used within the UK.

Website: www.elkatextiles.co.uk

Instagram: @elka_textiles

Facebook: @elkatextiles

YouTube: @elka

Pinterest: @elkatextiles



Sparsholt College is excited to be showcasing Washday Hues which has been created to explore the historical relationship between fabrics and plants. The garden aims to demonstrate the wide range of beautiful and vibrant colours that can be achieved when using natural plant-based dyes, including how to achieve these results at home.

The design plans to lead you through the steps involved in taking colour from plant to pigment, flower to fabric and garden to garment, sharing the knowledge and expertise our staff and students gained from working with ELKA, a weaving and natural dye studio based in Hampshire. From solar dyeing to mordants, our garden is designed to bring traditional dyeing techniques back to life.

The garden features many different plants which can be used to produce both fast dyes – those that are permanent and colour-fast, and fugitive dyes – pigments which fade over time but can be fun for beginners. Look for the symbols around the garden for inspiration.

Be bold with colour!

Our display includes a variety of plants, many of which can be used as natural dyes. Selected for their bold colours, all the plants can be grown in the UK climate. We hope our exciting and fiery colour palette inspires you to be creative with colour in your own garden as you journey around our exhibit and experience the whole dye cycle.



“It is like magic really; you can take a plant that looks one way and get an incredibly vivid colour from it”

Ellie Fisher, ELKA

Our kitchen area features a sink where the dyeing process is actively taking place.

Dried plant samples for future dyes are displayed in the pantry, along with mordants and modifiers which can be used to create a wider array of colours

A washing line displays finished items of clothing, demonstrating the spectrum of colours which can be achieved through natural dyeing



Our eye-catching washing machine symbolises the start of the process, washing and preparing fabrics and fibres

RHS Plant of the Year 2026 Finalists



***Pittosporum tobira X heterophyllum* GREEN MOUND ('JULE1')**

Exceptionally free-flowering and fragrant, this hardy, compact evergreen shrub is sun loving but happy in part shade and drought resistant. The size makes it perfect for small gardens – excellent in a border or large patio container, with the additional benefit of sweetly scented white flowers fading to yellow.



***Anisodonteia capensis* CARNIVAL LIGHTS® CANDY APPLE ('IB201-7')**

Flowering from May to Christmas, it is perfect as a patio/bedding plant or a short lived shrub in mild areas. It has superb heat and drought tolerance making it ideal for the changing climate, with a unique dark red flower colour.



***Petunia X hybrida* 'Allegra Orchid Vein' F1**

A unique upright *Petunia* which can grow up to 1.5m tall and can be used as a cut flower as well as a bedding plant. Large double orchid-like lilac flowers bloom for up to five months and it requires no deadheading. Striking, elegant and versatile, it can work well in containers, borders and floral arrangements.



***Clematis X hybrida* MOCHI ('Minamo-no-Yousei')**

Clematis MOCHI offers unique spray-like blooms that change in form from single to double over an exceptional 120-plus day flowering season. Its compact habit makes it suitable for small gardens and containers in sun or partial shade.



***Salvia X jamensis* MALABAR® ('Mighty Pink')**

A new *Salvia* with large (up to 2.5cm across) bright pink blooms with pale throats. With a long flowering period, it attracts bees and other pollinators and is a great addition to mixed borders or pots. Great drought and heat tolerance makes this an excellent low maintenance, climate resilient option.

PHOTOGRAPHY



**please email
press@sparsholt.ac.uk to
request download link**

PLANT LIST AND ONLINE PRESS PACK

please scan the above or visit
sparsholt.ac.uk



RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2025

STAND GPB018

WITH THANKS TO:



Hazel, Keith
and George Smith