

Full Frontal

Fern Alder

From very small beginnings a couple of years ago, a group of neighbours in a small terraced street came together, calling themselves Full Frontal and dedicated to ‘creating a green corridor’ in their tiny front spaces. Some of the magic of what this would lead to was revealed only some months on.



While caring for the now numerous containerised plants along the street, we would meet in the evenings, at the water butts hidden in the streetscape. Then it very gradually dawned on us that the plants had performed an amazing feat: they had turned a road of neighbours into a close-knit community!

In years gone by, front gardens were the subject of great pride, but today, particularly in towns and cities, they are frequently nothing more than hard-landscaped parking spaces, or ‘sofa cemeteries’. The many members of Full Frontal most definitely take pride in their front spaces, and the streetscape has changed beyond recognition. These photographs show how the ‘frontals’ looked before we got together to plant up containers with a matrix of wildlife-friendly, all-year-round perennial planting. We can now while



Before...

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and after

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away happy hours watching bees, butterflies and birds bobbing along our new green corridors – the wildlife most definitely appreciates our efforts!

From the start the project has been really fortunate with donations of money, plants, containers and all manner of support. Following some well-advertised ‘plant swap’ events, the frontals of many streets have been quick to fill. Perhaps one of the toughest tests is the ongoing maintenance required with so much containerised planting. This continues to be a challenge, but many hands make light work, and the spirit of community is only strengthened through our many plant-care events.

Last year, within a year of start-up, we chose to enter the RHS South East in Bloom *It’s Your Neighbourhood* Communities Award. We achieved a level 5 Outstanding Award and as I write we await a judge’s visit to look at our second year’s entry – and it’s not an easy task to maintain such a position!

The Full Frontal project has now spread to many streets in the Medway Towns, including Rochester High Street, where the traders and residents have got together to fill lamp-post planters and display plants around many of their entrances. Our strap line, ‘A Growing Community’, becomes more accurate with each week, and Full Frontal projects are starting in Newcastle and Dover.

The RHS has recently completed a piece of scientific research in their Gardening Matters series entitled *Urban Gardens*. It showed that some 85% of the UK population live in towns and cities, which means that urban gardens are hugely significant. The work concluded that planting helps to control urban temperatures, protecting us from

The street today



extreme heat and cold. It also helps to prevent flooding and provide important habitats for wildlife, as well as improving human health, both psychologically and physically – a simple solution to many complex problems it seems.

As a garden designer and plantswoman, I have had to sit on my hands and not be prescriptive about what people should plant. I am keenly aware of how important it is that people have a real sense of ownership in choosing what to grow in their containers.

The only concession to design has been the annual addition of bulbs and seeds along the road, helping to coordinate the many diverse plantings.

And yes ... whenever possible, my book on *Planting by the Moon* is consulted and adhered to! 🌙



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The corner plot was the site of much fly-tipping. Now it's planted with 20 buddleja varieties.

Fern Alder is a garden writer, lecturer and gold-medal-winning garden designer. See www.fullfrontal.org.uk for more information on this transformation project.