DIYSOS The Big Build Ireland – Wexford Residence
New Ross, Co. Wexford, Ireland
Motive Television (on behalf of property owner)

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Habitat Creation: Project of the Year (<5ha and below)*

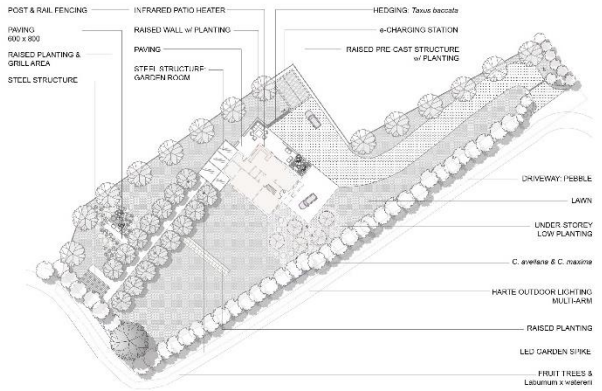
Project overview
This project involved the transformation of an empty field into a private home and garden for a family with additional mobility needs due to the recent diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease. The brief called for a wheelchair accessible design that was sensitive to its surroundings and enhanced biodiversity on site.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?
The site consisted of a 0.35Ha field of improved grassland, previously used for grazing by livestock. The north-east and south-east perimeter feature a mature mixed species hedgerow, predominantly of *Crataegus monogyna* and *Fraxinus excelsior*. This boundary was maintained as an established attractant for wildlife, supporting over 300 species, including locally resident Light Emerald, Lackey, Vapourer, Coronet, Brick , and Centre-barred Sallow moths. Planning permission was predominantly concerned with the treatment of the boundary, specifying a native tree mix of oak, ash, and hazel along a post and rail fence.

What were the reasons behind this project ?

As part of the DIYSOS Ireland series, the house and garden were to be constructed in nine days, providing the client and his family with a home that is wheelchair accessible while necessary and engages with the surrounding natural landscape. We very much wanted the garden serve as a distraction for the hardship that the family were facing and felt that this should be done by introducing colour and joy to the natural environment and enhancing biodiversity on site, a far cry from the empty field of improved grassland that existed before.

Site, before intervention, showing little ecological value



Proposed Design Plan

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The majority of the plants were chosen in consultation with the RHS Perfect for Pollinators list and/or the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, published by the National Biodiversity Data Centre and strategized in the National Biodiversity Action Plan. They are beneficial to a variety of wildlife, from larval and nectar food plants for bees, butterflies, and moths, to food and shelter to resident and migratory birds, as well as small mammals. Included in the planting were perennials such as *Nepeta gigantea, Achillea, Lamium maculatum, Salvia nemorosa, Scabiosa 'Butterfly Blue', Verbena bonariensis, Hebe 'Wiri Mist', Lavandula angustifolia, Leucanthemum spp., Geranium spp*., and fruiting trees such as *Pyrus* 'Conference', seven varieties of *Malus domestica, Ficus carica*, three species of *Ribes*, and *Vaccinium corymbosum*. A grove of *Coryllus avellana*, with mixed variety to ensure cross-pollination and successful development of nuts in Autumn, was also included.

Replicability is a key feature of this residential project. The planting was provided by Glanbia Countrylife, who have published the planting selection as an educational tool to allow the general public to recreate this project within their own gardens. This public engagement was extended to the neighbouring community as all construction and implementation was achieved by volunteer staff. Due to the narrow timeframe and scale of the project, each day 123-178 volunteers arrived on site, allowing the project to be realised within nine days.

Installed, mixed-tree lined avenue with wildlife-promoting planting

Installed, planters with mixed-species and wildlife-beneficial perennials

Further information

The narrow build time ensured that quick, methodical installation was at the forefront of our design considerations. Any structures were manufactured off site and craned into place on installation day. These included a treehouse, steel pagoda, and a steel piano shaped planter with outdoor kitchen. Their placement on site was carefully considered as the primary objective of the client was the preservation of the views of the surrounding natural landscape. With the house construction at a stage that would not impede the garden, excavation for tree planting began. These were planted as root balls, with trees of 10-14cm girth as it was important that the clients have a strong visual image of the garden on completion. A substantial 2050m^2 of lawn was laid, followed by the planting of 450m^2 of herbs, perennials, and shrubs. A significant achievement for this project was the inclusion of a wide variety of planting and the retention of established biodiversity on site. Conscious that the clients are not avid gardeners, planting was selected based on minimal maintenance as well as their ecological value. It was agreed by all involved that the planting design was successful in celebrating the surrounding landscape while creating intimate spaces immersed in nature and flora.

The assistance of 123-178 volunteers per day was critical in the execution of this time-restricted build. Many volunteers had committed to one day of service but by end of day had resolved to return for the week due to the atmosphere of both camaraderie and urgency.

Project Team

- Client: Motive Television (on behalf of property owner)
- Peter Donegan and Chloe Quinn, Peter Donegan Garden Design

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

A myth we are keen to dispel is that planting for biodiversity is either time consuming or unkempt. The inclusion of 450m^2 of wildlife beneficial planting that requires minimal maintenance allowed us to highlight that contemporary design can be both ecologically valuable and conventionally attractive. This was a great medium in which to showcase these values in a way that is replicable in many residential gardens.

Steel piano shaped planter and outdoor kitchen, with tree-lined backdrop

Tree-lined avenue, wildlife-friendly planting, and installed steel structures