

Last year's Master Grower is helping people to connect with nature, plants, and gardening, by disconnecting from the digital world.

Holden Clough was established in 1927 and has a rich history that included plant hunters travelling the world, bringing new species back to the picturesque hamlet of Holden in the Ribble Valley. The nursery was taken over by the Foley family in the late 70's and is now headed by 36-year-old John Foley, who grew up on the grounds and is one of the most experienced plantsmen in the UK. Gaining top accolades at UK flower shows with his dad, he went onto win BBC young gardener of the year, and then took over the business with his wife Kate in 2007. Bringing much change, development and expansion to the nursery, he went on to win numerous consecutive golds at the shows, culminating in the highest honor of all, The RHS Master Grower title in 2023.

Last year's RHS Tatton Show saw Holden Clough launch a new digital product, The Wonder Garden. A digital way to input your garden and space specifications into an online form, detail your aspects, soil type and style preference, and then receive plants that fit that space, with easy-to-follow 'plant by number' instructions, and maintenance guides. It would allow people of all levels to achieve flower beds that not only looked fantastic for the whole season, but came back year after year, whilst following expert style and plant combination rules; helping them become gardeners.

However, just over a year ago as it was launching, John Foley decided to come off his mobile phone, and personally step away from the digital world. Challenging himself to go with the flow, to re-connect to people personally, and carry out the project moving forward without a device. As the launch neared, he came increasingly aware that the plant world and the digital world were in fact opposites, juxtapositions, and he questioned whether offering The Wonder Garden through tech and digital, rather than through people and connection, was in line with his new way of thinking, since reaping the personal benefits of coming off his own phone.

He realised that he wanted to get people into gardening because of the health benefits it produced. He wanted to inspire, educate, and make gardening and planting accessible to all people, all ages, all abilities. He didn't want to simply sell plants that may or may not survive. He wanted to share his vast knowledge to help people achieve gardens and spaces that they were proud of, that thrived, that encouraged, across all generations.

He decided he wanted to concentrate on the connection of plants, people, and nature in the physical real world.

Therefore, The Wonder Garden took a different direction. Instead of filling details in online and generating a digital price, he wanted to go back to a more natural approach. He decided to offer complementary in-person consultations for customers who were willing to make their way to the nursery. This allowed a more personal approach, a tailored journey with each enquiry, connecting John and the Holden Clough designers to each individual client and their differing needs for their space. The premise of The Wonder Garden remained, but the method had changed.... for the better!

We have been heavily concentrating on plant and gardening education, simplifying the planting process for gardeners of all abilities. To teach how to associate, group and position plants in your garden, to get the best out of them, embracing different styles and pushing boundaries.

At the nursery, all plants are grouped into styles & aspects in our Frameyard, to help to advise and aid in plant choices and combinations, that will survive, thrive, and work well together – stylistically, visually, and practically.

We aim to foster a new generation of gardeners and encourage the wonder of gardening, a practice that nurtures not only our minds, bodies, and souls but also our precious planet. As we dig our hands into rich soil, we connect with the earth in a profound way, fostering a sense of grounding and peace within ourselves. This can be called 'earthing' or 'grounding' and its many benefits have much scientific and medical backing around them. The NHS has even started to prescribe it through their 'Green Social Prescribing Programme.'

Gardening is a therapeutic activity that allows us to escape the everyday fast pace of modern life, immersing ourselves in the natural world and reaping the benefits of fresh air, sunshine, the scents and sounds of wildlife and much more. It also helps us step away from the digital world, which is said to be aiding in mass depression, anxiety, lack of confidence and self-worth. The act of tending to plants and watching them grow and flourish brings a sense of accomplishment and joy that uplifts our spirits and rejuvenates our souls, perfect for mindfulness.

Not only does gardening benefit us on a personal level, but it also plays a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability. By cultivating our own fruits, vegetables, plants, and flowers, we reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to a healthier planet. Gardening also helps to improve soil health, conserve water, and support biodiversity, creating a harmonious ecosystem that benefits all living beings.

John and the Holden Clough team want to embrace the transformative power of gardening and honour the beautiful, important connection and synchronicity of all life, for children and the younger generations too. Engaging them in gardening activities helps them to develop physical skills such as hand-eye coordination, motor skills, and strength as they dig, plant, and water. It also encourages them to spend time outdoors and away from devices, getting fresh air and exercise, which is essential for their overall health and well-being. It can also have a positive impact on children's mental health by reducing stress, improving mood, and fostering a sense of responsibility and accomplishment as they care for plants or vegetables and watch them grow. It provides a valuable opportunity for them to learn about nature, science, and the environment, sparking curiosity and creativity.

Gardening is a wonderful way for children and adults alike to connect to the natural world, and step away from the world of digital, understanding the world which was there before and also sits beyond.....

This year's show stand for Holden Clough will aim to put their new ethos into practice. Their stand will aim to educate, as The Nursery does, in terms of style and plant combinations, as well as addressing common issues such as pests and diseases, and how to deal with them.

So, let's take our hands away from our devices, and back into the ground. Let's nurture ourselves and be a part of protecting and preserving our planet, through gardening in a traditional way, educated and lead by Holden Clough.

Holden Clough Nurseries – since 1927 – Holden, Bolton-by-Bowland, Lancashire, BB7 4PF

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Family owned by John & Kate Foley, who have two small children, Rose & Charlie.

As well as plants, the stunning grounds of Holden Clough are also home to a restaurant, and a labyrinth of unusual buildings and nooks, filled with gifts, houseplants, garden accessories & tools, homewares, vintage furniture, and curiosities from around the world.

