

English for Life in the UK

Episode. 30 - Gardens and Gardening in the UK

September 2020

(Mark) Welcome to episode 30 of the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need and particularly to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The aim of this podcast is to help anyone wanting to improve their English and at the same time learn more about life in this country.

For those who were listening last week, you will know that we have just launched a survey. We want to know what you think of our podcast, what you like about it, how you think it could be improved, and what subjects you would like us to tackle in the future. You can find this survey on our website : at

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

That's spelt: s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x

If you go down to the bottom of the home page and click on the link that says "survey here" - it will only take a few minutes to complete.Or - if you prefer you can email us.

Our email address is englishforlifeintheuk@gmail.com

That's spelt: e-n-g-l-i-s-h-f-o-r-l-i-f-e-i-n-t-h-e-u-k

We'd be very grateful to hear from you, in any of these ways, and we will use your comments to help to design the next phase of this podcast.

Meanwhile - today's episode is about gardens and gardening and is brought to you by Christine and Mark, but also includes an interview with another one of our colleagues, Sue.

(Music) (3 minutes:10 seconds).

(Christine) OK - welcome, everyone and this week we are going to talk about gardens and gardening in the UK, and you're going to start us off, Mark, by telling us what's in the citizenship "Life in the U.K. Official Guide" about gardens and gardening.

(M) Yes. Thanks, Christine. There's not very much, but there is a little bit, and it follows on from last week, because last week, if you were listening, we did about architecture and buildings and then there's a section after that, that also ... that says the UK is famous for its landscape architects and its garden designers. So landscape architecture is basically the planning and designing of gardens. And there are two landscape architects that are mentioned in the *Guide*: one is called Capability Brown - unusual name, I know - and he was a landscape architect in the 18th century and was responsible for planning and developing a number of gardens, one or two of which I'm

going to talk about later. The other one is a woman, who I hadn't heard of before, she's called Gertrude Jekyll - and she's described as a horticulturalist - which, I think, just basically means somebody who is an expert in gardening and growing things and she worked in the last part of the 19th century and into the twentieth century, on a number of gardens in big houses around the United Kingdom.

So I'm going to pick out five of the better known big, grand gardens in the United Kingdom and just say a little bit about each one.

So the first one I'm going to pick on is Blenheim Palace which is somewhere

(C) Well, I've heard of that one

(M) somewhere I've been, because it's in Oxford and I used to live in Oxford, at one stage. So, Blenheim Palace is a huge palace with some formal gardens that were designed by Capability Brown, and it includes: a rose garden; what's called 'a secret garden', which I think just means it's kind of hidden behind walls and hedges; and, it's also got water terraces, water falls and a lake.

And then the next one is up in the north east of England in Northumberland and I've also visited here - and this is called Alnwick¹ Gardens. Have you ever been there?

(6:15)

(C) Oh! I have, I have - and it was beautiful.

(M) It's absolutely beautiful, and it's the Duke of Northumberland's property and garden but it's open to the public and it's got a number of water features, ornamental gardens one of the largest collection of European plants anywhere in Europe. What I remember from it, when I visited there, was the cherry trees that were out in blossom at the time - absolutely spectacular.

(C) It's lovely - I think it might have - does it have a poison garden?

(M) Yes, it does indeed. What would you .. what's a poison garden?

(C) Well, I think it's a garden or an area of a garden that is full of plants that are poisonous. That could kill you, some of them, if you were to eat them.

(M) Yes, I remember it. Then, not so far from here, south of Yorkshire, we've got Chatsworth, in Derbyshire, and that is another Capability Brown-designed garden, which is which has got the largest fountain in the United Kingdom, which is 200 feet high or 61 metres. It's got lots of old glass houses and sculptures and a maze. I wonder whether people know what a maze is. That's usually a hedge of some sort in a pattern where you can go into the hedge and you have to find your way to the middle and you can get lost in it.

¹ Note: the letters "L" and "W" are both 'silent' - not pronounced.

- (C) Sometimes, yes ... I mean, traditionally, it's made of hedging, but more recently they are often made of plants like maize - and they're replanted each year - but it's basically, somewhere to get lost in, with kids².
- (M) Actually in Yorkshire, there's a place called Studley Royal, which is 'next door' to Fountains Abbey, which is an old 20th century [error, see below] ruin of an abbey - absolutely beautiful - and the gardens there include a number of ornamental lakes, and ponds and a deer park. The whole of that site is actually a UNESCO World Heritage Site.³
- (C) And did you say it was a *twentieth* century ruin?
- (M) No - a *twelfth* century ruin -
- (C) I heard a twentieth century ruin ..
- (M) I may have said that, by mistake, but it is **twelfth** century.
- (C) Yes, I have been there and it looked quite a lot older.
- (9:02)
- (M) And then, finally, another UNESCO World Heritage Site is the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew in London, Kew spelt K-e-w, not the other kind of 'queue' and Kew Gardens, which is what it's usually known as, is an absolutely spectacular place. They have got more than 60,000 different plants and trees, including some of the rarest plants anywhere in the UK and, indeed, probably in the world, actually. They've also got a very large "Palm House", so that'll be a glass house, in which they grow palms and, in that area, you can go through ten different climate zones - so ten different kinds of climate or weather - all inside the same building.
- So, fascinating.
- Anyway, those - that's my choice of 5 - there are lots of others but those are ones that I thought would be interesting to our listeners. And Christine, I think you're going to tell us a bit more about what we might call the ordinary, everyday garden and gardening.
- (C) Yes - I am, Mark, because really, gardening is a very popular pastime in the UK and many houses - a quarter of all the houses in this country have a garden - have a front garden - and I think it's 27 million people are involved in gardening, in this country - that's ... that's 41% of the population - I mean, that's a large number. In fact, it's rather surprising, that neither you, nor I, nor Sheena, are keen gardeners. I'm certainly not and, I believe, you're not either, are you?.
- (M) That's right - when we were planning this, we discovered that, didn't we? - We said we'd talk about gardening, and then we found that none of the three of us are

² Kids : informal word for children.

³ These are places of outstanding value to the world and are identified to be protected for future generations by UNESCO which is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

particularly keen gardeners, although I do do a bit of gardening. I know you have got a garden, haven't you, Christine?

- (C) I do have a garden - I have a very nice garden, thank you very much, but I am not the one to keep it nice, but I do like sitting in it. I do enjoy it very much. And - but really, it is ... it's quite a big business, as well as a big pastime, gardening, in this country. There are over two thousand (2,000) garden centres, which are places where you can go to buy plants, to buy equipment for gardening and they've really taken off⁴ in the last 20 years or so. And they're not only places to buy plants, but they're almost destinations for a day out - they almost always have a cafe, they have somewhere for children to play often, and at .. they have different things at different times of the year - many of them are very busy at Christmas time, because they will sell Christmas trees, and mistletoe and holly wreaths; all the things that we like to have in the UK, at Christmas time, and of course, fairy lights. So, they're very popular places and I think over half a million people in this country are employed in horticulture and landscaping, so it's a big industry and I mean I live in a street of houses that were built post-war - that means, in about the 1950s, these houses were built - they were built by the Council - they were council houses, that were built after the war, because so many people needed housing, and they have substantial gardens and that was very, very normal, then. In fact, in the 20th century most of the houses built in the 20th century, have gardens.

(13:36)

Of course, just after the war, the main reason behind that was encouraging people to grow their own food because, during the war, we'd been through a period of hardship - when it was difficult to get food - but these days, many people do grow vegetables but there's also a great interest in growing ornamental plants and shrubs and recently, the last few decades, people are very keen to encourage wildlife in their garden. I know we have, we have a hedgehog that visits sometimes: we have a wildlife camera in our garden, and we do get visits from a badger, as well. In fact, the very first night we put our wildlife camera out, the star of the show was a badger.

- (M) That's fantastic! That's fantastic!
- (C) Yes - and occasionally we get a deer, and I do live - we do live - on the edge of the country, so that's not so surprising, here.
- (M) So, tell us about your garden, Christine. What do you have in your garden?
- (C) Well, I live in a place that's very exposed. It's on the top of a hill, it's overlooking a valley and that valley is a wind tunnel, and we get huge winds and storms that come to the garden. I'm looking out of the window, now, as I talk to you, and we have a very, very bent and battered apple tree at the bottom of the garden and the apples are just clinging on, because, of course, very recently, we've had big storms. And we have a lawn - most gardens have a lawn.

⁴ 'taken off' in this usage means 'done well', done lots of business

(M) What's a lawn, Christine?

(C) An area of grass, usually cut short, and - you know - it's useful: children can play on it - sometimes when you visit - in fact, in most other countries, when there is a lawn, you're often not allowed to walk on the grass - there's often signs "Please keep off the grass". But typically, it's the area for playing - for children to play - in people's homes. Traditionally, you would have a very well-manicured lawn - that means, very neatly trimmed. Our lawn is not like that, but that's because we're very ... very fashionable, we're keeping up with the trends, because these days there is a trend to ... for gardens to be more naturalistic - instead of lawns, to have more of a meadow⁵.

(16:34)

(M) Yes. It's interesting, you know - because in a way that's the development from when I was talking about these grand, big gardens that Capability Brown and other people designed, they were very manicured⁶ and carefully designed and kept, and I think, at one stage, people thought it was good to have their own little gardens a bit like that, but - as you say - I think the trend more recently, has been to make them more natural.

(C) There was - I was reading about gardening, and in fact came across a survey on what people use their gardens for and - by far and away the largest answer was "as a place to relax"; 77% of people said that they use it as a place to relax and that was followed by nearly two-thirds (64%) who said it was to grow plants and trees and flowers and then, after that, more than half of the people who answered (52%) said it was to feed, watch or encourage wildlife, as I was talking about. Then, of course, there's "to entertain, to grow food, and to play in", and a few people said "to exercise", but not many. Talking about my garden - what about yours, Mark?

(M) Well - I'm in a lucky place where I've actually got two gardens - because I've got two houses, as some of our listeners may know, from earlier episodes. Erm - I have one house here in the UK, in Yorkshire, and we have a small garden with an area where we grow vegetables and we've got some fruit trees, apple trees and a plum tree and a fig tree, which is quite unusual and we - when I say we - largely, Janice, my wife, does quite a bit of gardening and plants lovely different flowers and plants, and we have a little pond, where we have tadpoles and frogs, this year, we've had in our pond. And we also have an area where the grandchildren can come and play football, so that's But at my house in France - where my other house is - has got a huge garden on terraces, so on different levels. A lot of it is just wild - it has to be - because I haven't got time to do the work on it, but it does have some lovely Mediterranean plants, because it's in the south of France, including a very small vineyard. So we've got about - it's only about twenty vines - so it doesn't produce enough grapes to make wine, although the people in the area where our house is - it is a very famous

⁵ a meadow is an area of grassland and wild plants

⁶ the word manicure is more often used for a beauty treatment for hands but in the case of a garden it means well looked-after, carefully cut and weeded to look beautiful

wine-growing area - so the vines grow well, but it's really just for show as much ...
rather than to make wine for us. So that's it, for us.

(C) Sounds lovely, I have to say.

(M) Yes - that's a bit about our garden, in the two different places.

(Music) (20:12)

(C) OK, so in this episode we're talking about gardens and gardening and one aspect of gardening, in this country, are allotments. These are small pieces of land that are often owned by the Council, in towns, and divided into quite small parcels ⁷ and rented out to people, to grow their own fruit and vegetables or to keep bees or sometimes, chickens. And we're lucky enough to have Sue with us today, and Sue is an allotment-holder in Halifax. So welcome, Sue.

(Sue) Hello,

(C) And I'd love it if you could tell us about your allotment, please.

(S) I have an allotment quite close to my house - I can just see where it, out of the window. I love my allotment - it is just the best - I really, really like food and that was my motivation for getting an allotment. I had to wait quite a long time - I was on the waiting list for, I think, two or three years, before I got the plot and I actually bought the house next to the allotments, before I got the allotment. It's very dear to my heart is my allotment. I try to get out every - every day in the summer - I'm out for a few minutes in the morning, before I go out to work and then when I come home in the afternoon, it's the first place I go. I just love it.

(C) Very nice, very nice. Now is that ... do you have an allotment as well as a garden, at your house or is this *instead* of a garden?

(S) I've got a very small garden, but I have chickens in my garden, and they eat all the plants so (*laughing*) my back garden is not very productive, in terms of flowers and vegetables - my allotment is where it all happens.

(C) Ah - ha! So what does happen on your allotment? what do you grow there?

(S) I grow all sorts of fruit and vegetables and herbs, basically, because I like eating. I like food. I'm really interested in food. It's nice to be able to grow things that I like to eat. So, at the moment, I'm eating lots of beans: I've got runner beans and French beans and dwarf beans; I've got sweet corn that's almost ready at the moment; lots of kale, *Cavolo Nero*⁸; different sorts of salads. I've got a greenhouse with tomatoes and chillies and basil growing in it. And I also grow fruit, as well - so, I've got strawberries, raspberries, loganberries, red currants, rhubarb.

(C) Wow - sounds really productive your allotment, Sue.

(S) It is - it keeps us well fed.

(C) Very good - now - on your allotment, do you have neighbours? Is it one of a series of allotments?

⁷ parcels of land = sections, sub-divisions of a larger plot

⁸ *Cavolo Nero* = Italian kale

- (S) Yes - there's erm ... I think there's about 15 on our plot, that I'm on - and that's one of the nice things about it - there's that community - you've always got someone to talk to - and if you plant some seeds, and you've got too many seedlings, you can give some plants away, you can swap with someone else. If you've got something weird happening on your plants, you can ask somebody 'what's happening with this one? what should I do?' So it's a good way to get advice and it's just a very social space; people are very happy to stand and chat, while they're gardening.
- (23:44)
- (C) And do you have a bonfire or a barbecue? And have parties there? Or is it just a working environment?
- (S) It's more of a working environment - but there's space - I've got a bench and a little table - so there's space to sit and just watch it all and chat.
- (C) It sounds lovely.
- (S) It is, yes.
- (C) It sounds very nice - you've told me a lot about what you like about your allotment and why you have it. Are there any things that are difficult for you?
- (S) Erm ... when you are really looking forward to something and it doesn't grow - that can be quite frustrating! Or when the weather interferes ... so yesterday there was a really, really stormy day - and the runner beans I'm growing up tripods - they're up on a frame of sticks - they blew over in the wind, so I spent two hours today, trying to rescue my bean plants. That was frustrating - and all the slugs and snails eat things when they're planted out too soon.
- (C) I bet - I bet! Did you manage to rescue your beans, today?
- (S) Yeah - they look a bit sorry for themselves - we'll have to see.
- (C) You say that you bought your house so that it would be next to the allotment, before you had an allotment - so are they difficult to get hold of the allotments? How do you get one?
- (S) You have to apply to the Council and then ... er - stay on a waiting list, so I was 'phoning the Council every week saying "am I at the top of the list, yet?"
- (C) So how long were you on that waiting list for?
- (S) A couple of years -
- (C) Oh goodness ... and is it expensive? I presume you have to pay for it.
- (S) Yes - you have to pay rent for the plot and then you also have to pay some rent for the water, as well, because there's taps on the site - so it's about £50 (fifty pounds) a year.
- (C) £50 a year ... Well, that's not expensive when you think of all the vegetables you're going to get from it, I'm sure.
- (S) Yes, it's - it works out as good value, I think, because we do get a lot of vegetables from it and a lot of the things we grow in the summer, if we grow too much, they go in the freezer, for the winter time - or we make jam out of it - or chutney - or give things away, as well, so in the summer time, when anybody comes to visit, they always go away with a carrier bag full of food.

- (C) Oh, very nice, very nice! - I must call round.
- (S) You must do.
- (C) So, it's clear that, erm ... you were very keen to get this allotment but can you explain why - why was it important to you? - why does it matter to you, this allotment?
- (S) Well - I did ... I said that I really like food but it's important to me that I know where my foods come from. So it's nice to be able to have food that hasn't travelled all the way round the world, it's organically grown, it's fresh. I like the seasonality of it - I like to be able to go out and pick something and know that it's really, really fresh when I bring it back into the house and I cook it. It's nice to have things like .. things that only have a short season that you ... - like asparagus, for example - I've got a bed of asparagus and I can only eat it for three or four weeks a year - but I look forward to it and I watch for it coming out through the soil and then, I'm really excited to pick the first spears of asparagus and cook them. Things like that - it's the seasonality of eating things when they're really fresh and when they're really good and ripe.
- (C) Mmm ... Sounds lovely. Thank you, Sue,
- (S) You're very welcome.

(Music) (27: 40)

(M) Language Support

Today, I'm going to talk to you a bit about how to start a conversation with somebody and then how to keep it going, on any subject.

I chose this because, in today's episode, there were a few examples of these.

So early on, Christine said to me

"I'd love it if you tell us about ..." then, in my case,
it was about gardens. And then later on, she said

"tell me more about .." and then she said

"what did you mean by ...?" And then, she said

"why is that important to you? Why does that matter?" and

"are there any things that are difficult for you about this?"

Now those are all examples of ways in which you can either start or continue a conversation. So whatever the subject - you might say ...

"I'd love it if you could tell me about ..." and then let the person talk back to you ..., whatever the subject is.

Or, you might just say

"tell me something about ... your experience of ..."

and then whatever the subject is, or

"what do you like about ... ?" or

"why is ...(whatever the subject is) ... important to you?"

"why do you think that?" and then you can always say,

"tell me more" - or - "what did you mean by .. ?"

and then, if you want to come in on the conversation, you might say:

"that's very interesting - my experience is" or,

"I think...",

"I believe ,,,"

"what I like is ..."

So those are all examples of how you might begin or continue a conversation, whatever the subject might be.

I hope that's useful. That's it for this week. A reminder again, please, if you are able to complete our survey, we would find that really helpful. Also on our website is the transcript of this - and all other - episodes and the links to other episodes, as well. All of that is available on our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Or you can email us at :

englishforlifeintheuk@gmail.com

Thanks very much for listening and we'll be back again with a new episode, very soon.

Goodbye for now.

(Music) (31:10) (end)