

1. Title Slide

PATRICK'S PATCH, RACHEL FOSTER

Bonjour! Hello from Hampshire. It is an honour to speak to this group and I really hope the information I share is helpful to you.

I have had a long career in horticulture but can honestly say my current role at Patrick's Patch is the most rewarding and 'best-fit' for me personally. I started my career a long time ago after taking science A-levels when I went to study horticulture at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

2. Trebah Garden and Exbury Gardens

In my late twenties I took on the role of Head Gardener at Trebah Gardens on the Helford Estuary in Cornwall and from there moved to become Head Gardener for the de Rothschilds at Exbury Gardens here in the New Forest. Both are beautiful woodland gardens with important plant collections, notably rhododendrons. Exbury brought me to the New Forest and I have never left.

3. Patrick's Patch

In 2014, ten years ago, I took on the role as Head Gardener at Patrick's Patch, a one hectare productive garden linked to Fairweather's Garden Centre in the village of Beaulieu.

4. Location

So, I am speaking from the New Forest, a National Park in the middle of the south coast of England. It's an area of significant natural beauty and wildlife, predominantly lowland heath vegetation with areas of mixed forest and coastal marshes. It is the oldest remaining example of a royal hunting forest in the UK having been established by William the Conqueror. It is also one of the few remaining places in the UK where Commoners Rights are practiced, inhabitants of the New Forest are allowed to graze their animals on the common land. There is huge local pride in these customs.

5. Donkeys on Beaulieu High Street

This makes living and working in the New Forest unique – a drive to work will inevitably involve slowing down for some livestock which could be ponies, cows, pigs, donkeys or deer which all wander freely. So, our gardens have to be particularly secure and we have to be very vigilant about keeping gates shut

6. Beaulieu

Up until Henry III's dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530's Beaulieu was a village serving a huge Cistercian abbey. The Abbey's estate was sold to the Earl of Southampton in 1538 and has remained in this lineage to the present-day management of the estate by the Montagu family. It is managed with much thought given to maintaining the Forest Traditions and being in harmony with the natural surroundings. The land on which Patrick's Patch is sited is rented from the Beaulieu Estate and as such subject to the ethos of the Beaulieu Estate.

7. Aerial view of Beaulieu

Patrick's Patch is located on the main street in Beaulieu and is opposite Fairweather's Garden Centre.

8. Fairweather's Garden Centre family picture

Fairweather's is an independent family run business. This is a picture of three generations of the Fairweather family. It was established by Patrick Fairweather's parents in the early 1960's. Mrs Fairweather is still very hands-on in the business in her 90's. Patrick joined the business in 1991 and later his wife Steff, with their daughter Nina willing to help out when she can.

9. Steff's Kitchen

Patrick and Steff's passion for good, home-cooked local food led to the establishment of Steff's kitchen, the garden centre café and subsequently Patrick's Patch to supply Steff's Kitchen with year-round seasonal produce.

10. The paddock

In 2007 Patrick negotiated with Beaulieu Estate the rental of the paddock and outbuildings opposite of the garden centre. The buildings had been piggeries which served a butcher's shop on the High Street.

11. Susan Campbell's Design

Patrick was lucky enough to have Susan Campbell as a neighbour and he asked her to design the site with a nod to tradition but also to create very much a practical working plot.

12. The build – heather bale wall

The initial construction costs of the garden were part funded by a grant from the National Park with the condition that the project remains active and sustainable. The build began in 2008 with willing local volunteers and college students. A wall using heather bales from the national park was constructed on the north perimeter.

13. the build – log pile wall

And internally a dividing wall was built using logs from the Beaulieu estate. Well aerated these logs have not needed replacing.

14. Opening

Patrick's Patch was officially opened by local resident Chris Packham, a well know wildlife broadcaster and environment campaigner.

15. The site layout

The growing area is divided into quarters, three of which are further divided into quarters to facilitate crop rotation. The fourth quarter is a fruit cage. We use locally quarried binding-gravel as the main path surface and bark chips for the paths within the growing beds.

16. Outbuildings

Our outbuildings are really charming and enhance the site as well as providing great work spaces. We use them as a potting shed, an office and as classrooms.

17. the teaching shed

We converted our tool shed into this more open classroom space in lockdown. This is now our main sheltered teaching and activity space. It has a lovely atmosphere and really show cases the work we do.

18. What do we do? Patrick's Patch has multiple roles which make it both challenging and fulfilling to work in.

- Maintain the garden to a high standard for visitors – the garden never closes.
- Produce year-round produce for Steff's kitchen
- Host school groups
- Host special needs groups: adults and children
- A monthly children's gardening club
- Provide adult education sessions
- Carry out wildlife surveys
- Seasonal self-guided trails and seasonal crafts activities.

19. How we do it

One part-time head gardener (ME!) working an average of 21 hours a week – usually 28 hours a week in busy months and 16 hours a week in less busy months. My working days are Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturday mornings but I am prepared to be very flexible depending on the weather and any events. The part-time Head Gardener position and running costs of the garden are entirely funded by Fairweather's Garden Centre. The project would not be viable without the dedicated team of around 20 volunteers. The volunteer team is divided into sub-groups depending which activities they help with. Let's look in more detail at the different activities.

20. Supply produce to the cafe

Steff's Kitchen is a busy café open 7 days a week serving breakfast and lunch. Everything we grow is used in Steff's Kitchen, though they also supplement their supply with locally grown produce. Dialogue between myself, the chef and Patrick and Steff refines the growing list each year.

21. The food.

Steff's Kitchen serves hearty home-cooked food such as this fish pie served with courgettes and green beans from Patrick's patch and this Greek salad decorated with cornflowers, marigolds and pea shoots from Patrick's Patch.

22. Salad leaves is the most important crop we grow. From May to August we supply the majority of the salad leaf to the cafe. This helps keep the project 'Patrick's Patch' financially viable. I am equally as proud of the delicious salad we produce as I am of the community work we do.

Spring salad – it starts off in April with salad spinach as the base and moves to a lettuce base by mid-May. For extra flavour and colour in the spring we add: pea shoots, purple orach, red veined sorrel, chervil and golden marjoram

23. Autumn Salad – the base is mizuna and rocket with mustard leaves, radicchio and endive

24. Herbs and edible flowers bring the garden to the plates of food and it's great fun to grow them and they really enhance the look of the garden.

25. But it really comes down to maintaining a continuous supply of lettuce which I have become more efficient at over the years. My go-to cut and come again mix is now green and red salad bowl, Bolero (dark red), oak leaf and Cancan.

26. Second most important to the salad is a supply of greens. The chef likes greens he can cook quickly to order and these also are vegetables which are hard to buy because of their short shelf lives. Chard and the quick kales like Red Russian are ideal and also easy to grow. This slide from gives an idea of the quantities required. For the greens to be viable on the menu we have to supply at least two large black crates per week

27. In the summer months lots of the dishes revolve around courgettes thank goodness as they are so productive.

28. The supply of vegetables is very challenging and requires skill and expertise and a realistic approach. This table shows how we plan year-round supply. This part of my job I do consider my responsibility I do not involve the volunteers in the planning process.

29. Maintaining the Garden

There is a Monday morning team and a Wednesday morning team who come and help with gardening tasks between 9.30am and 12.30am.

30. the Wednesday team

There are 7 volunteers in each team but not everyone will be able to attend each week. No volunteering in the cold months of January in and February or terrible weather!

31. I write a 'menu' of jobs for the volunteers to choose from and explain which tasks have been designated for school groups or a special-needs group it's important the volunteers don't do these jobs which are usually the easier more straight-forward tasks.

32. The gardening teams work mostly on the maintenance and presentation of the garden – preparing the beds for the crops and carry out a lot of WEEDING. They are all incredible positive, pleasant people who support one another and take pride in the project.

33. the new Compost Heaps

Some volunteers bring particular skills. Monday volunteer Martin carries out handy man tasks such as constructing new compost heaps which is incredibly helpful

34. School Groups

We invite groups of school children to Patrick's patch in the Summer and Autumn terms. Beaulieu Village Primary School visit once or twice a week for hour long sessions. Beaulieu School is just down the street so they can easily walk up in their high-vis jackets. There are 7 year groups with an average of 15 children per year. Each child will get three visits a year to Patrick Patch- spring, summer and autumn. We also invite other local schools for longer sessions which are often more curriculum based. I feel the strength of our sessions with the children is that they are in a real working garden.

To help with this there is a different set of volunteers. I have a 'pool' of 7 helpers to draw on.

35. Longitudinal Studies

The repeat visits by Beaulieu School mean we can carry out longitudinal studies – activities which span the seasons. So, if a group planted potatoes in the spring they can harvest them later in the year. We can add some maths into the activity by weighing our harvest and making comparisons.

36 lesson plans

You cannot be too organised with children but also you have to be prepared to abandon the plan and go with the flow! I have developed this flexible lesson plan from which works for us. Our sessions are usually one hour. We'll start by gathering in the yard and whilst they have clean hands I will offer them some salad leaves, pea shoots or fruit to taste. Sometimes the chef may be free to say hello. They then split into groups of 4/5 children to do a rotation of activities; one gardening based, one making something to take home and one learning about nature.

37 Garden based activities

I am particularly keen that the children learn real seasonal garden skills. The tasks that they do will always be what needs doing anyway from our job list. I let the children know that they are being genuinely helpful. They also use proper tools and emphasis is put on learning names of the tools and using them properly and safely which I am explaining in the left-hand picture. On the right we are sowing a row of sunflowers. Because we are a genuine working garden who have to produce quality crops, I cannot let the groups 'have a go' at everything, but they get the benefit of seeing a real working environment

38. Seed cleaning and fruit picking

The children love podding beans fresh or dry. This and picking fruit are genuinely helpful jobs. They are simple activities where the children can be autonomous.

39. Craft based activities

Likewise, our craft-based activities allow the children to make their own choices. They can collect their own petals to make these collages. On the right is our new activity for this year based on the Japanese craft of 'hapazome' it involves getting dye from petals and leaves by bashing them with a rock!

40. Flower posies are a lovely way to share the garden with children. We grow a lot of flowers alongside the vegetables and have plenty to pick and share.

41. Christmas Crafts give us the opportunity to invite back our special needs groups who come in the summer months. And also we have an open shed for 2 or 3 days for the wider public to 'drop-in' to make something festive out of natural materials.

42. Nature based activities – hoverfly lagoons.

We are particularly keen to teach natural history to our groups. The volunteers who undertake our wildlife surveys will come and share their knowledge with the children. We have a very good session learning the life-cycle of flies and make these hoverfly lagoons for the larvae out of milk bottles.

43. We have strong links with The Bumble Bee Conservation Trust. This group of volunteers survey the bumblebees once a month in Patrick's Patch and lead a great session with the Year 5 (aged 9-10) children in the summer term.

44. Soil – I think the most important thing to teach the children right now is the value of soil. I have never met a child who isn't absolutely fascinated by worms so make a good starting point for learning.

45. and adults too. We hold compost making workshops. This year it was over subscribed and we had to do 2 sessions. Good to know people are interested in composting.

46. wildlife garden

Last year we created a designated wildlife area on a poor bit of the garden.

47. We can use it to learn about butterflies

48 and the names of common wild flowers.

49. Self-guided trails

We put out self-guided trails at Easter, October half-term and Christmas. They will have a nature or gardening theme and can also re-used with the school groups. They are popular with local families.

50. Potting Shed Club is our monthly children's gardening club and I have four designated helpers for this two of whom are young adults gaining great experience themselves. It's for children aged 5-11. It is different to the school groups because there are more adults – a one-to-one ratio so a lot more detailed tasks can be attempted and parental permission is on hand.

51. Apple pressing. I would not attempt this with a school group.

52. We invite local community groups to speak to the children. This was the local hedgehog hospital. The New Forest bee keepers are particularly generous and will bring their observation hive and different honeys to taste.

53. Welly days

In the colder months of November, December, January and February we host Welly Days on Saturdays where all the family can join in with vigorous gardening tasks like leaf-raking or compost spreading. They are free and we provide hot drinks and cake. I find these particularly rewarding sessions. The families socialise with each other, it's intergenerational – there are no upper or lower age limits, families get to spend time outdoors at a time of year when they might not otherwise, they can ask questions and learn from what we are doing in the garden, it's very relaxed and yet lots of work gets done as well. For me these Welly Days sum up all the positive elements of Patrick's Patch.

54. Thank you and question time