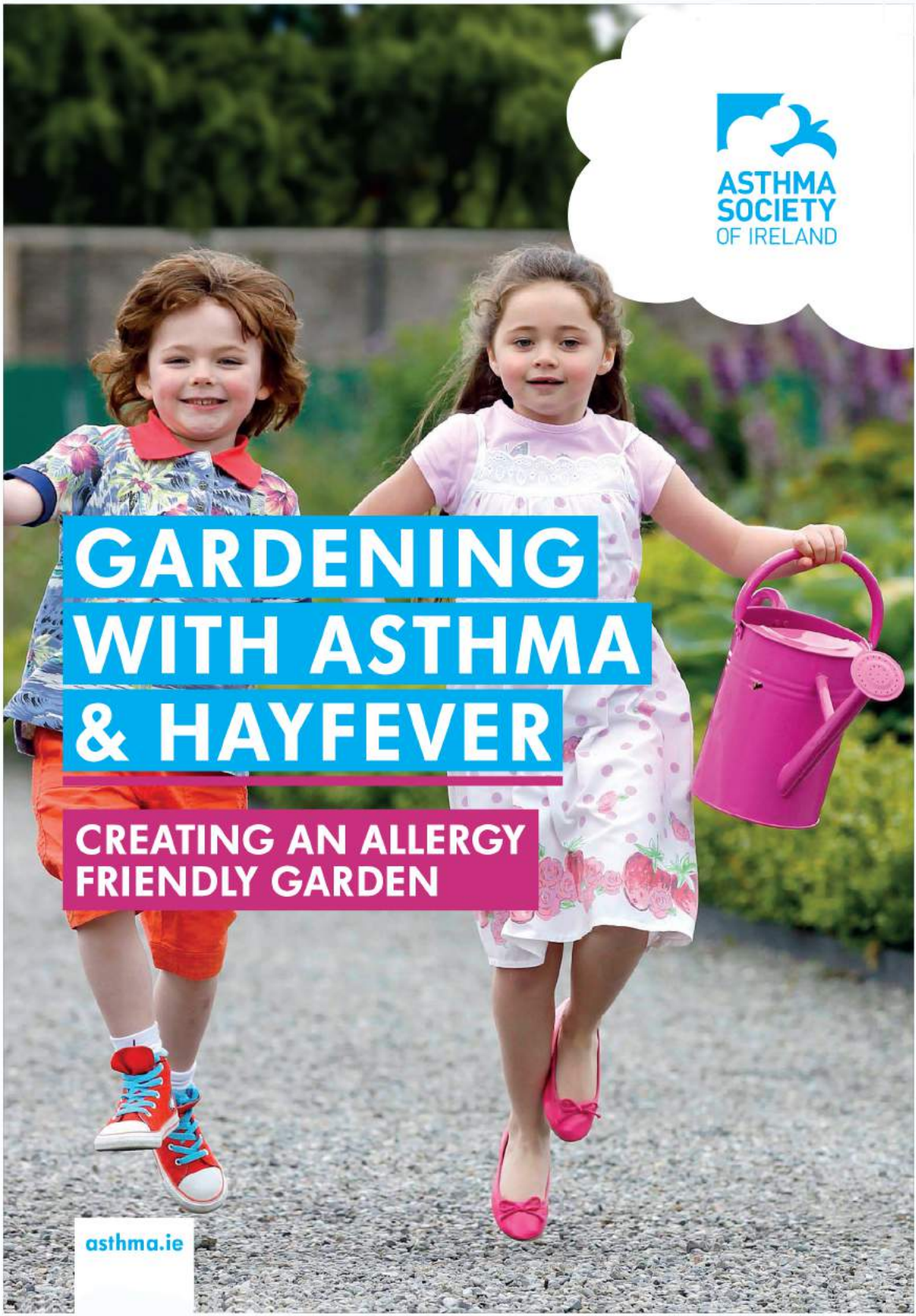


ASTHMA SOCIETY OF IRELAND

GARDENING WITH ASTHMA & HAYFEVER

CREATING AN ALLERGY FRIENDLY GARDEN

asthma.ie

In this booklet the Asthma Society of Ireland shows you a few simple measures that can be taken to reduce exposure to allergens in the garden. This can help with limiting the severity of asthma and hayfever symptoms. This booklet will also advise you on creating an allergy friendly garden.

ALLERGIES & CREATING AN ALLERGY FRIENDLY GARDEN

An estimated 470,000 people in Ireland have asthma. Of these, 60-80% also have hayfever (allergic rhinitis). In general, 1 in 5 people in Ireland have hayfever and allergies of all kinds are on the increase.

Asthma and allergic rhinitis (hayfever) can be triggered by a reaction to many different allergens including:

- Pollen grains
- Mould spores from decaying vegetation
- Dust which may originate from the garden
- Perfume from certain flowers

Allergies often prohibit people from enjoying their garden and participating in outdoor activities. Allergies vary from one person to another, and different plants will affect different people. It is better to buy a small number of plants at a time until you have identified which plants are suitable for you to use.

There is no cure for asthma despite continuing research however we now know much more about what triggers asthma and hayfever and the benefits to be gained from trying to avoid some of these triggers.

Typical allergy symptoms are:

- Sneezing
- Impaired sense of smell
- Itchy, blocked or runny nose
- Red, itchy or watery eyes
- Itchy throat, inner ear or mouth Headaches
- A loss of concentration and generally feeling unwell.

Management is key in allergy relief. The fewer allergenic plants in the garden, the less chance of triggering allergies.

WHEN SHOULD I GARDEN?

It is best to try and get the garden in order in the early spring, when the pollen count is low. In the summer on hot, still days the pollen grains are released. Most pollen is released in the morning and rises skywards with the heat of the day. It then gets blown overland by winds and breezes. The pollen then sinks back to earth late afternoon or early evening as the temperature starts to drop.

Practical Allergy Friendly Gardening tips:

- Shut all your windows before gardening to keep dislodged pollen and dust out of your home.
- Check the pollen forecast before venturing outside. This will give you an idea of how high or low the pollen count is in your area.
- Try to stay indoors if there is a high pollen count. It is advisable to stay in on hot, windy days, as wind will increase pollen in the air.
- Wear wraparound sunglasses, these will help stop pollen blowing into your eyes.
- Smear Vaseline inside your nose. This can help to stop pollen and spores from settling on the lining of your nose. It might sound horrible but it really does work.
- Keep your asthma under control by taking your preventer medication regularly as prescribed. If you suffer from hayfever (allergic rhinitis) consult your doctor about the best medication to keep this under control. Your community pharmacist can also advise you on over the counter products.
- Wear a hat to protect your hair from pollen and brush your hair after gardening. It is advisable to shower and wash your hair after gardening if allergic rhinitis is particularly troublesome for you.
- If you have a skin allergy keep your arms, legs and hands well covered.
- Do not wear your garden clothes in the house. It is advisable to remove shoes before entering the house and to change immediately before or as soon as you enter the house.

Other Recommendations

- Keep cats and dogs outside. This will stop pollen being taken into the house from outside on the animal's coats.
- After gardening or being in the garden, it is recommended to use a saline nasal rinse to clear nasal passages of pollen and dust, to prevent triggering allergies.
- For those with allergies it is advised to use a tumble drying machine to dry clothes. Clothes hung to dry on clothes lines can get covered in grass pollen.
- Picked flowers should be shaken well to rid them of allergens. It is advised to wear a mask while doing this or ask someone else to shake picked flowers before bringing them into the house.
- Don't smell flowers directly. Not all reactions are immediate and many flowers only cause allergy if you directly inhale their fragrance.
- Limit ferns as houseplants. If you have more allergies in winter, you are probably allergic to moulds and spores, and should not keep ferns in the house.

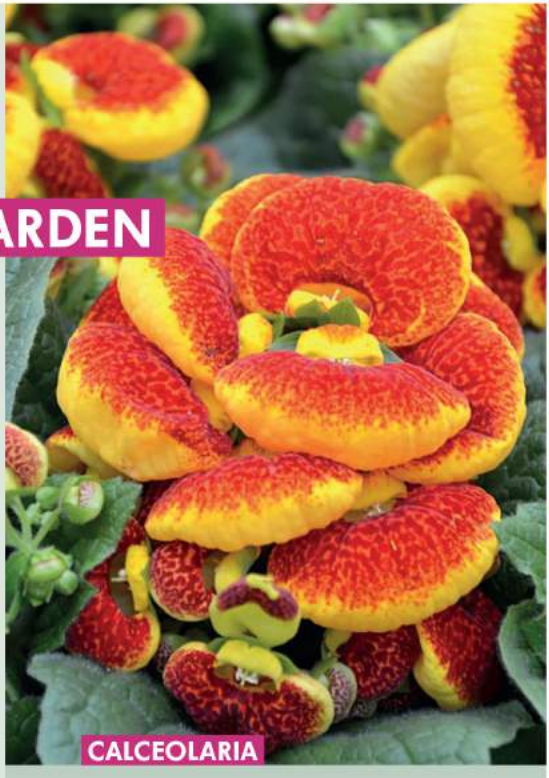
CREATING AN ALLERGY FRIENDLY GARDEN

In order to create an allergy friendly garden, it is vital to understand how plants reproduce.

All plants have sexes. Some are male, some are female, some have both sexes on the same plant. In botany there are complicated names for plants and many exceptions to rules. Plant flowering systems can be complex, which has led to great confusion over which plants cause allergies. This booklet sets out in simple terms how to create the most allergy-friendly garden you can.

The most important factors to consider when choosing plants, trees and shrubs for an allergy friendly garden are; the size of the plant, how much pollen it produces and where it is located in the garden. Male trees and shrubs such as Fraxinus excelsior (Common Ash), Acer (Maple) and Ilex (Holly) produce large amounts of pollen. A general tip for allergy friendly gardening is not to plant any male trees or shrubs.

Grass pollen poses the biggest trigger for allergy sufferers. It is vital to mow the lawn regularly as this will help prevent the grass from flowering, resulting in less pollen being released. Female lawns are recommended, as they require less mowing. (Remember to wear a mask which covers your mouth and nose whilst mowing.) If possible get someone else to do mowing.



CALCEOLARIA

Please see our recommended List of plants, trees and shrubs to use or avoid in an allergy-friendly garden on page 8 of this booklet.

Flowers such as roses, have both male and female parts inside the same flowers. These flowers also may be called bisexual, hermaphroditic, or complete. The majority of these plants do not cause pollen allergies as the pollen of these plants does not have to travel far for pollination to occur. e.g. Agapanthus, Bergenia and Campanula.

PRACTICAL TIPS ON CREATING AN ALLERGY-FRIENDLY GARDEN

It is important to consider the relatives of a plant. Plants are classified by botanists into large related groups called families. All too often plants with notorious relatives are themselves allergy offenders. Size, shape, colour and fragrance should be considered when searching for problem plants.

- Blossoms shaped like trumpets seldom cause allergy because they are designed so that insects must actually crawl into them to contact the pollen. e.g. Phygelius capanesis (Cape figwort), Penstemon.
- Plants that spread their pollen mainly by wind (this includes most trees, all grasses and some wild flowers, but not fruit trees) cause the majority of allergy problems. The pollen from wind pollinated plants is light and floats around in the air, it is therefore easier to inhale and can trigger asthma, and allergic rhinitis (hayfever) symptoms.
- Pollen weight is an important factor to consider too. Heavy pollen does not fall far from the plant. Pollens which are extremely light, float off easily in the wind and thus cause many problems for people with allergies. e.g. Pennisetum setaceum (Fountain grass).
- Plants which rely on insects to pollinate them usually create less problems for people with allergies. These plants usually release less pollen into the air, and therefore these plants generally cause fewer allergies. Most plants rely on insects to pollinate them.
- Fragrance in plants serves to attract pollinating insects, and fragrant plants do not pose a pollen problem. However some people's allergies are triggered by the fragrance itself and thus these are all factors to consider when creating your allergy-friendly garden. Replace heavily scented plants e.g. Jasmine or wisteria, with gently fragrant herbs such as rosemary or mint.

- Avoid climbing plants around bedroom windows as pollen and dust can blow into nearby windows. Very special care should be taken when choosing plants to place near bedroom windows. For this location plants with a low allergy rating should be chosen. For a sunny wall, Clematis could be used. For a north wall Parthenocissus (Virginia creeper) could be used. It is advised not to place these plants near bedroom windows.
- A good many plants only release their pollen at night or in the early morning. Gardeners call these plants "night bloomers". e.g. Jasminum (Jasmine).
- Be careful with the use of all insecticides, fungicides and herbicides. Accidental exposure to all of these chemical pesticides has been shown to trigger allergic reactions. A very effective non toxic insecticide can be made by mixing two teaspoons of liquid dish soap and 3 teaspoons of vegetable or mineral oil into 1 gallon of warm water. This non toxic insecticide can be sprayed on plants and works well.
- Using suet will attract wild birds into the garden. Wild birds are a big plus in achieving an allergy-friendly garden as they eat so many insects. Insect dander causes allergies and birds consume aphids, whiteflies and other pests.
- Although shrubs are insect pollinated, some are heavily scented. Plant shrubs away from your house, as far down your garden as possible to avoid triggering allergy. The plants, Philadelphus and Phlox both have low allergy ratings.
- Some trees produce large amounts of pollen, especially in summer. Check the list on page 6 for which trees to avoid.

FOXGLOVE

5 STEP RULE FOR DEALING WITH AN ASTHMA ATTACK

1

TAKE TWO PUFFS OF RELIEVER INHALER (USUALLY BLUE) 1 PUFF AT A TIME

USE A SPACER IF POSSIBLE

2

SIT UP AND STAY CALM

3

TAKE SLOW STEADY BREATHS

4

IF THERE IS NO IMPROVEMENT

TAKE 1 PUFF OF RELIEVER INHALER EVERY MINUTE

ADULTS & CHILDREN AGED 6+ UP TO 10 PUFFS IN 10 MINS
CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS UP TO 6 PUFFS IN 10 MINS

5

IF SYMPTOMS DO NOT IMPROVE AFTER 10 MINUTES OR YOU ARE WORRIED

CALL 999 OR 112

Repeat STEP 4 if an ambulance does not arrive within 10 minutes

REMEMBER:

- Use a spacer if possible, a spacer helps deliver more treatment to the lungs than the simple inhaler, this is very important if your are experiencing an attack.
- Extra puffs of the reliever inhaler are safe.
- Do not lie down or let someone put their arm around you

USEFUL RECOMMENDATIONS

GRASS

Consider replacing the lawn with gravel. If this is not possible remember to shut all your house windows before mowing the lawn. For those who are especially allergic to grass pollen it is advisable to ask someone else to do the mowing. If this is not possible a face mask which covers the nose and mouth should be worn whilst mowing. These face masks filter out many allergic materials.

WATER

Water fountains should be avoided as falling water creates air currents which cause pollen and dust to become airborne.

POTS

Pots are an attractive feature in any garden and can be user friendly. Do not bring pots into the house during winter months, as spores can be released from the soil in the heat of a house.

WEEDING

Plant low-allergen ground-cover plants, such as, Vinca (Periwinkle), Geranium (Cranesbill) or Bergenia (Bear ears) to suppress the weeds. It is advisable to avoid bark mulch. Gravel can be used as a non allergic mulch.

HEDGES

Replace hedges with a fence or any kind of wall. Hedges harbour dust, pollens and mould spores which are released in strong winds and when they are cut or trimmed.

COMPOST

Remove all rotting vegetation and compost to avoid moulds growing and releasing their spores into the air. Compost heaps should be removed or kept at the bottom of the garden to avoid triggering allergies.

Remember avoidance is key in allergy relief. Avoid being exposed. The fewer allergenic plants in the garden, the Less chance of triggering allergies.

If you follow this simple guide to allergy-friendly gardening and creating an allergy-friendly garden you will greatly reduce exposing yourself to allergy triggers and thus enjoy your gardening experience.

AGAPANTHUS

DIANTHUS BARBATUS

CAMPANULA

PAEONIA

PLANTS TO CONSIDER

FLOWERS TO USE

- **Aquilegia** (Colombine)
- **Campanula** (Bellflower)
- **Cyclamen**
- **Galanthus** (Snowdrop)
- **Crocus**
- **Agapanthus**
- **Delphinium**
- **Lupin**
- **Primula**
- **Paeonia** (Paeony rose)
- **Strelitzia** (Bird of Paradise)
- **Orchids** (as House Plant)

TREES TO USE

- **Sorbus** (Mountain Ash)
- **Larix** (Larch)
- **Pyrus** (Pear)
- **Pinus** (Pine)
- **Cedrus** (Cedar)

SHRUBS TO USE

- **Azalea**
- **Potentilla**
- **Mahonia**
- **Camellia**
- **Pieris**

NOT RECOMMENDED

FLOWERS TO AVOID

- **Rumex** (dock, sorrel)
- **Urtica** (Nettles)
- **Grasses** (Ornamental and Lawn)
- **Asters**
- **Cirsiums** (Thistles)
- **Chrysanthemums**
- **Helenium** (Sneeze wort)
- **Helleborus**
- **Artemisia**
- **Anaphalis**
- **Spinacia Oleracea** (Spinach)

TREES TO AVOID

- **Salix** (Willow)
- **Quercus** (Oak)
- **Platanus** (London Plane)
- **Betula** (Birch)
- **Fraxinus** (Ash)

SHRUBS TO AVOID

- **Ligustrum** (Privet)
- **Forsythia**
- **Griselinia**
- **Hedera** (Ivy)
- **Eleagnus**

In the lists you will see that there are a lot of ordinary trees that you see about you every day but studies have shown that the majority of the tree pollen falls to earth a short distance from the tree. The nearer you are to high pollen producing trees the more you will be affected.

It is important to consider the size of plants, trees and shrubs. A tree produces huge amounts of pollen compared to a small plant so you can have a plant in your garden that is allergic but won't affect you as much unless you bend down to sniff it, where as a tree will cover everything in a central radius with pollen.

ASTHMA SOCIETY OF IRELAND

GET AHEAD OF YOUR HAYFEVER WITH OUR DAILY POLLEN TRACKER

asthma.ie

Leinster

Munster

Connacht

Ulster

Low	
Moderate	
High	
Very High	

gsk dyson

ASTHMA SOCIETY OF IRELAND

Worried about your asthma?

Call the Asthma Adviceline today and one of our asthma specialist nurses will help put your mind at ease!

Asthma Adviceline

1800 44 54 64

Email: nurse@asthma.ie Text: 086 057 1838

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