

PLANT CULTURES

Mark Nesbitt, Centre for Economic Botany, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

The Plant Cultures website was launched in February 2005. It uses plants to tell the story of links between Britain and the Indian Subcontinent over the last 400 years. 25 plants, ranging from banyan to turneric, are featured, with 400 pages of information on subjects including South-Asian art and garden history, Indian medical traditions, the spice trade and fair trade, imperial history, and migration to Britain. The website contains much material that might be useful to horticultural therapists, particularly those working with ethnic minority communities or in schools.

Although Plant Cultures is not a horticultural website, it does include cultivation guides for the featured species, as well as hints on gardening activities for the public and for schools. Everything on the website is freely (and easily) downloadable and printable for educational and community use. We hope that users will include gardens that wish to improve public interpretation of their Asian plants. A searchable picture library offers about 1,000 images from partners including the Victoria and Albert Museum, British Library and Wellcome Library.

The project is as much about people and history as about plants, and a key part of it has been community work with British Asian groups in London, Bradford, Leicester and Liverpool. These have contributed a wide range of stories on the significance of plants on their lives – an important part of the website. At an early stage it was decided to work with local partners who would carry out the outreach work. This would enable Kew to work over a wider geographical area, and increase the likelihood that links with community groups would continue after the project ended.

Each partner brought a different approach. The Bradford Community Environment Project (BCEP) already had a very active garden programme with Bangladeshi communities. BCEP collected a wide range of stories (many downloadable as audio files) and pictures, and worked closely with local schools. At Leicester City Museums a roving community worker

visited many groups and locations to collect material. Liverpool Museums carried out an arts-based programme that introduced users to digital cameras and imaging software. Docklands Museum in London worked with three groups who already knew the Museum, carrying out activities ranging from art to story-telling. Although practical gardening did not form a large part of the project, groups from all four cities visited Kew for behind-the-scenes tours organised by Kerry Rowe, the project's overall community coordinator.

The project is a collaboration between the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (the lead partner), and Culture Online, an initiative of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Although the project ran from 2003–05, the website will continue to be updated for the foreseeable future. We would be grateful for feedback or suggestions from users of the website. We can also supply attractive tree leaflets to any organisations willing to distribute these.



Mango fruits at Jamil Food Store, Bradford

Mark Nesbitt, Centre for Economic Botany, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AB
E: m.nesbitt@kew.org
W: www.plantcultures.org.uk

Issue 103 Winter 2005

growing point

The Journal of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture



In this issue:

DIVERSITY

**BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC PARTICIPATION
IN SOCIAL AND THERAPEUTIC HORTICULTURE**

ASIAN WOMEN WORKING WITH NATURAL DYES

CONSIDERING TRANSLATION

BARRIERS FACING BANGLADESHI WOMEN

CULTURE KITCHEN AND PLANT CULTURES REPORTS

PROFILES OF CONCRETE TO CORIANDER, THE HIDDEN GARDENS,
THE COMFREY PROJECT AND THE SYDENHAM GARDEN PROJECT

CULTIVATING QUALITY - THRIVE QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME



using gardening to change lives