

# Gardening

HOW TO MAKE  
YOUR GREEN SPACE  
A HAPPIER PLACE  
THIS SPRING

5-PAGE SPECIAL

Facebook is everywhere, says *Hannah Stephenson*, as she finds out all about Joe Perkins' new social media-inspired RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden

**A**S A father-of-three, garden designer Joe Perkins is well aware that social media can lure young people away from the great outdoors. Enter Beyond The Screen, Perkins' Facebook-sponsored show garden at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, within which he's going to reveal how online and offline worlds can come together.

Visitors may think the Facebook garden, set in a 10x10m plot in the 'Space to Grow' category, is going to be high-tech, with state-of-the-art screens and speakers popping out from behind the flora and fauna. But Perkins' vision is very different.

It's a coastal garden for young people, featuring plants from around the world that can withstand salt-laden winds and harsh weather.

"I've got plants from Mexico, the Balearics, India and the US, but the point is, they all share this tolerance of particular conditions, so they have these shared interests — which brings me back to the community groups on social media.

"The coastal element for me is all about connection. The oceans connect us all geographically, water



NATALIA ODESCALCHI

**Going solo:**  
Joe Perkins has been involved in many Chelsea show gardens, but this is his first solo project

● The RHS Chelsea Flower Show runs from May 21-25. For details visit [rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk)

connects us physiologically and as a landscape, it's evolving, just as online communities are constantly shifting and evolving," he explains.

There's a copper canopy which references back to connectivity (copper is a conductor), the parallel being that social media is a conduit for global interaction.

Perkins, 42, who runs his own garden design business in Brighton, has been involved in many Chelsea show gardens, but this is his first solo project. He approached Facebook with a design plan, and they were quick to jump on board. "My inspiration is a

personal one. It's drawn from my experience of having family holidays on the Atlantic coast of Spain. My wife's family is from the Basque country and I've taken my three boys there every summer for years."

His aim is to show how online and offline worlds collide, and he hopes the Facebook garden will spark debate about the value of social media.

"It's about having a proper discussion about how we can use it better, and recognising the difference between how we should and shouldn't be using it, and how we can be responsible."

The garden, he says, is ultimately about connection.

"Social media is about global connection and the possibilities it's opened up for us to connect with people all over the world, and join like-minded people in community groups. In the UK, there's around 1.5 million gardeners on Facebook."

Facebook is partnering with the charity Groundwork, which works with disadvantaged young people throughout the UK, on the project.

"While you can argue that young people have less inclination to go out and engage with nature, you could

equally argue that they're doing a lot of positive stuff online, and a lot of that involves gardening," Perkins says.

And what if the only thing you see your teenager doing in the garden is taking a selfie, unaware of the real beauty that lies around them?

"By doing that, young people are broadcasting our fantastic industry around the world," he says.

"It's clear from social media that young people are very interested in plants and how they can use them to decorate their houses. If you can make gardening cool and desirable, that can only be a good thing."