

EMBRACING 2030  
SUSTAINABLY:  
THEORY TO  
PRACTICE

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# COMPASS

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## SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

BRIDGEFOOT STREET PARK

## BLOOM IS BACK

GARDENER'S NOTES  
KILGAR GARDENS

DESIGNING RESILIENT  
LANDSCAPES  
DOWN UNDER

NEWS & REVIEWS  
GLDA SEMINAR,  
CHELSEA,  
ALCI AWARDS



Meadow Roof © Taina Suonio



Finnish Soul Garden © Taina Suonio

GARDEN DESIGN SUPPORTING  
BIODIVERSITY AND AT THE SAME  
TIME BEING SUSTAINABLE –  
IS IT POSSIBLE?

# SUSTAINABLE GARDEN DESIGN

Words by **Taina Suonio**

Connected by Exante © Stephen Studd

Greener environments in cities are not only nicer to look at but they contribute significantly towards the well-being of inhabitants and support biodiversity.

## BIODIVERSITY

By making small decisions in design, we can support biodiversity in gardens. Whether it is your own patch, an RHS Chelsea Flower Show Garden or a public park the same design principles work for gardens of all sizes and if adopted universally will contribute locally, regionally and in the larger scheme of matters, globally.

One of the most important decisions we can take to support biodiversity is to remove hard surfaces to the degree in so far as this is possible and to use sand, gravel, or wood (duck boards) or grass concrete to make paths. This would help with the urban runoff too. Smaller decisions might include that part of the lawn be transformed into a flowering meadow. By adding bug hotels and birdhouses, one will get the opportunity to see the richness of nature. The best way of supporting biodiversity in the garden is by planting trees. Even

in a small garden there is always space for a tree. I recommend planting fruit trees, which are not only beautiful in springtime when they flower but give food too. Older trees give shelter and add another dimension to gardens. These are simple and effective ways to support pollinators, natural ecosystems and biodiversity in gardens and parks.

In Finland we advise private garden owners and even the public sector not to rake and bag tree leaves in the autumn, but rather to shred them and mulch under shrubs or in vegetable plots. This gives earthworms and insects food as they decompose organic matter. Composted leaves and garden clippings create organic soil for your garden. I use the hot composters because they work faster, and you can include organic kitchen waste. These work even in the Finnish winter. If possible, we should leave a part of the garden wild, not interfering with it at all. Allow nature to work its miracles.



Finnish Soul Garden, Tree and Rock © Taina Suonio

The best way of supporting biodiversity in the garden is by planting trees. Even in a small garden there is always space for a tree.



Connected By Exante, The Roof View © Taina Suonio

## FLOWERING MEADOW VEGETATED ROOFS

My passion is vegetated roofs, also known as eco-roofs or green roofs, and especially roofs which are rich in biodiversity. I love flowering meadow roofs which have native and if possible local meadow plants.

Why is it still so difficult to find vegetated roofs in cities? Based on the results of my research, the city's administrative policy instruments, such as a vegetated roof policy and urban planning, play a significant role in the proliferation of vegetated roofs. Not all cities have these policies in place. Financial instruments including direct financial support together with informational policy instruments which increase general awareness, knowledge, and know-how, go hand in hand with administrative policy. A particularly valuable example is set when a city decides to create vegetated roofs on municipal properties.

An important project in which I am involved is 'Greenest of the Green', an apartment development in Helsinki (121) which has vegetated walls, vegetated roofs, and roof gardens, including a kitchen garden. The residents share the roof gardens for recreational purposes and grow flowers, herbs,

and vegetables in the garden. The housing project with its vegetated walls and roof gardens is the subject of research by University of Helsinki, Fifth Dimension research group (<http://www.helsinki.fi/fifth-dimension>) on plant and environmental aspects as well as the sociological impact of the shared greenery on the community living in the building. More information <https://oppla.eu/casestudy/18875>.

In my 2021 RHS Chelsea Flower Show Garden I featured a vegetated roof based on our initial results from University of Helsinki research. My 'Finnish Soul Garden' included meadow plants on the roof of the first ever functioning Finnish sauna built at Chelsea Flower Show. In 2022, on the 'Connected by EXANTE' garden's oak stump -building's roof, I used the same woodland and native plants as had been used in the garden, thereby reflecting the surrounding plant selection. Greening even small buildings in gardens, parks and public places is important for the environment and the nature.



Meadow Roof at The Greenest Of The Green © Taina Suonio



Sandy Beach Roof Garden © Taina Suonio

## BEAUTIFUL, BIODIVERSITY-RICH GARDENS

At the top of this article, I asked if it is possible to design beautiful gardens which support biodiversity and are at the same time sustainable. My answer is a resounding YES!

The message of my RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden is that we can have beautiful biodiversity-supporting sustainable gardens by using recycled materials, native plants, and trees and by not using chemicals of which pesticides are an example. As designers, hard landscaping companies, producers of various products, city planners and researchers, we should make sure that we work together to apply the accumulated knowledge to sustainable and biodiversity-supporting gardening and landscaping. We set the example for gardeners, professional and hobbyists alike.

We begin appreciating the beauty of nature by caring for and supporting it as if our life depended on it – as it in fact it does. In Albert Einstein’s famous words: “If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would have only four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man.” ■

### MEADOW VEGETATED ROOF PLANTS AT THE FINNISH SOUL GARDEN:

Centaurea jacea, Veronica spicata, Knautia arvensis, Viola canina, Campanula rotundifolia, Thymus serpyllum, Dianthus deltoides, Deschampsia flexuosa, Festuca ovina, Geranium sanguineum, Sedum rupestre, Saxifraga cespitosa, Hylotelephium telephium, Trifolium repens, Trifolium pratense.



Taina is a landscape designer, horticulturist (Greenmount College, Northern Ireland), MSc. environmental biology (University of Helsinki, Finland), tv and radio presenter and researcher in the **Fifth Dimension - Vegetated Roofs in Urban Areas** research group of the University of Helsinki. She lectures and writes articles on matters related to horticulture, landscaping and the environment.

In 2019 Taina came to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show as the first ever Finnish designer and first ever Nordic female designer. She was awarded a Silver-gilt for her garden **The Roots in Finland Kyrö Garden**. In 2021 her **Finnish Soul Garden** got Silver-gilt. The garden’s two large black granite boulders were relocated in the RHS Wisley Science Garden. In 2022 her **Connected, by EXANTE** garden was awarded Silver-gilt. It will be relocated to the roof garden of the University College Hospital in London.

She was Chair of the working group on **Vegetated Roof Strategy for the City of Vantaa** (2022). She is the co-initiator and landscape designer of the **Greenest of the Green**, internationally awarded block of flats (121) project in Helsinki, completed in 2017. One of her current projects, is a major housing development **Kurkimoisio** in Helsinki, comprising five blocks of flats (350 flats).

Her recent international designs include the **City of Vantaa Diversity Park Garden** (Jinan, China, 2021), London’s **Pantechnicon’s roof garden and indoor plant design** (2020) and **TT-Liquor-Bar Roof Garden** (2019). At present as member of a design team for a major roof garden in Japan.