

SHARING REPTON: HISTORIC LANDSCAPES FOR ALL

Garden History Lucky Dip

Entry Level prompt sheets

The Garden History Lucky Dip is an activity to encourage informal interest in garden history. The Garden History Lucky Dip uses everyday objects to introduce a particular topic. The prompt sheets were developed to lead the conversation about the topic, stimulating discussion within a small group of participants. The notes provide short stories about garden history to generate interest and inspire further involvement.

The Garden History Lucky Dip activity is intended to be an interactive workshop, and is suitable to do within an hour, easily conducted over a lunch break or long tea break at an event, AGM, or other meeting.

These prompt sheets are aimed at three different levels of interest and knowledge in garden history.

Entry Level is aimed at those who have little knowledge of garden history or gardening.

Prepared by Dr Audrey Gerber
<https://www.audreygerber.co.uk/>



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Object: Brick

Subject : Walled gardens

Prompt questions:

Where do you think bricks might be used in a garden?
Steps, paving, garden buildings. Lead conversation to walls, and then introduce the walled kitchen garden.

Conversation teasers:

What would bricks add to a walled garden? (shelter from wind, protection from deer and rabbits, warmth from the sun).
Can you think what the three main things are that plants need to grow? (water, sunshine, soil).
Do you or your family ever grow vegetables? If they have lived in a different country ask what they can grow there and not in the UK.

Garden History story:

Walled gardens were important to the grand estates of the 17th and 18th centuries in Britain, growing the fruit and vegetables needed to feed the estate family, all of the servants, and the many visitors that arrived.

The wall was designed to **shelter the garden, and to capture maximum sunshine and warmth**. Plants that needed more warmth were planted along the **south-facing wall**.

- In the 17th century walled gardens were close to the house for convenience.
- As they grew larger and more active they moved away from the house. Those living in the grand house had no wish to see the gardeners coming and going, or hear them working, or worse still smell the manures used in the garden.
- Some gardens were moved, others were just hidden behind creepers, hedges and trees.

Many of the vegetables that we eat nowadays have not always been grown in this country. Some of them were not even known as vegetables.



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Scarlet runner bean

This was first introduced into Britain in 1633. Originating in Virginia,, North America, it was grown for the ornamental beauty of its flowers. Its vigour and lengthy growth made it popular as a climber to cover balconies and arbours, and "*any defect in our walls*". Only in 1759 were scarlet runner beans known and used as a vegetable.

Tomatoes

Initially considered to be an ornamental plant, tomatoes were treated with suspicion as a food because many of the tomatoes' relatives (Solanum) are deadly poisonous.

Who would relish eating something that was described as "*full of a slimie juice and a waterie pulp*".

Beetroot

First grown for its leaves (called beet greens), which were eaten like spinach, the beetroot was long and thin, almost carrot-shaped. In the 19th century during Victorian times, the root became popular to add colour to the vegetable plate. In the 19th century beetroot was sometimes used to add colour to red wine.

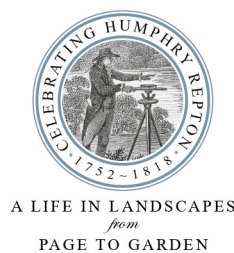
Rhubarb

Rhubarb has been known and cultivated for centuries. The root was used in Chinese medicine as a laxative. Only in the 18th century in Britain was it discovered that the baked stems made a delicious pudding, without any of the root's less desirable side effects!

Reference. A History of Kitchen Gardening, Susan Campbell

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Object : Toy sheep, cow or deer

Subject: Ha ha

Prompt question:

Why would you not want animals in your garden?

Lead conversation – eat plants, could be dangerous, poo!

Conversation teasers:

How else would you keep animals out of the garden?

Hedges – hedges are closely planted and clipped to form a barrier.

Fences and railings – designs changes over time.

Walls-where stone was plentiful, walls were used to demarcate field boundaries and to contain farm animals

Garden History story:

In the 18th century gardens were large and open, with views outward to the farmland which surrounded the house. Farm animals were not wanted in the garden, and yet it was desirable to have views uninterrupted by hedges. The Ha-ha filled both purposes: keeping farm animals away from the house, and allowing seemingly continuous pasture to extend across the estate.



The Ha-ha is simply a sunken ditch which divides the farm pasture from the garden, yet which is only visible from a few yards away. It consists of a retaining wall constructed of brick or stone on the garden side, and a sloping bank on the pasture side.

- Although it is thought to have originated in France, the ha-ha was popularised in England by Charles Bridgeman.
- There are many examples of ha-has, such as Stowe and Rousham.
- The name comes from the startled cry of “aha” on seeing a deep ditch so close.

If it were not for the ha-ha, railing fences or hedges would have separated estate and house. English farmland hedges are very complex: Hoopers Law is one way to estimate the age of a hedge.

Count the number of species in 100ft length, and multiply this by 100. This equals the approximate age of the hedge.

The traditional method of pruning and shaping hedges is called laying, and different counties have different and recognizable patterns. Hedge planting peaked **between 1750 and 1850** when hedges were planted at **an average rate of 2,000 miles a year.**

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Object: Pineapple

Subject: Fruit for the estate table

Prompt questions:

Do you know where pineapples come from and how they got to England?

What would be needed to grow pineapples in England?

Conversation teasers:

Have you tried any new fruit? Do you know where it was grown?

Can you think of another example of fruit or vegetables that we eat often that came from a foreign land/faraway place?

If they are from a different country, ask what they can grow in that country but not in the UK, likewise what fruit is there in the UK that is not available in their country of origin.

Garden History story:

Explorers brought back samples of exotic fruit and vegetables and these became very desirable at the table of the grand manor houses. They were often grown to impress.

The pineapple first became known to Europe in 1493 (4th November, to be exact!) when Christopher Columbus landed on the island now know as Guadaloupe., South America There are also reports from 1536 of pineapples in Venezuela, also in South America.

- The name "pineapple" was given because the explorers thought it resembled the shape of a pine cone, and it was edible, just like an apple.

Despite attempts to bring pineapples to Europe, it was rare that they survived the long journey. It was not a simple matter to just fly fruit in from tropical regions as we do now. And so there were many attempts to grow them here.



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The popular picture of King Charles II (1630-1685) being presented with a pineapple by his gardener John Rose (c1621-1677) was commonly suggested to prove that pineapples were grown in England circa 1670. In fact, the picture shows a pineapple that was brought to England attached to an entire plant in a pot. **It was only in about 1720 that the secret of growing pineapples in England became known** – and the secret was heat! Reports are that Henry Telende, gardener to Sir Matthew Decker, added oak bark tan used by leather workers to his **fermenting dung** in the hot bed pit of his kitchen glass frame – this became known as a pine pit.

Three fruit are considered to have inspired development of the kitchen garden glasshouse: the **pineapple**, the **orange**, and the **grape**. Other highly desired fruit were the **peach** and **fig**.

The wish to grow **melons** and **cucumber** influenced the design and popularity of hot pits and growing frames.

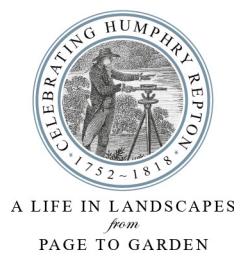
Oranges and **lemons** were grown in sheltered structures in Italy in the 15th century. The first in England was in the 16th century, when Lord Burghley built a shelter for oranges at Burghley Court, in Northamptonshire.

Reference:

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/406896/charles-ii-presented-with-a-pineapple>

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Object: Plant in Jar

Subject: Plant collectors, Wardian case

Prompt questions:

I wonder what the benefit would be to keep plants in a glass jar?

Answers – sea and salty air, humidity, light

Conversation teasers:

Do you grow indoor plants? Where do you get your indoor plants from generally? Cuttings from friends? Supermarkets? Garden centres?

Why are they grown indoors? Answers- warmth, shade, humidity

Garden History story:

The air in London in the early 19th century was so polluted – mainly by soot- that plants struggled to survive outdoors. Dr Nathaniel Ward developed a glass case that protected plants and enabled them to grow. These glass cases were called **Wardian cases**, and became immensely useful in bringing plants in from other countries. **The idea came to him almost by accident.** He placed a chrysalis of a sphinx moth in a wide-mouthed lidded glass jar, burying the chrysalis in moist leaf mould. To his surprise seedlings germinated and thrived in the sealed bottle.

In 1833 the first Wardian cases were sent to Sydney Australia. The Wardian cases were filled with Australian plants, closed up, and sent back to England. During the **8 month voyage** temperatures plummeted to **minus 7°C with snow**, and up to **49°C**. All of the plants survived, and this method became the way that many plants were transported on these long voyages. **19 out of 20 survived**, in comparison with only 1 out of 20 previously.

Following this success, plants were transported across the globe, including **China, North America, Brazil, India and France.**

"There is not, I believe, a single portion of the civilized world which has not, more or less, benefited by their introduction", said Nathaniel Ward.



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Wardian cases were used in a daring escapade that **smuggled 20,000 tea plants out of China** and into India. This started the tea industry in India.

Wardian Cases became very popular for indoor plants too, and this led to the terrariums that are popular now.

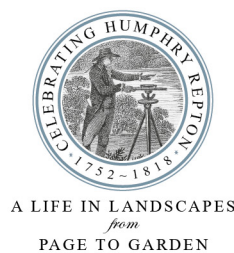
- In 1851 at the Great Exhibition in London, Nathaniel Ward displayed a case full of plants that had not been watered for 18 years, relying solely on condensation within the case.

Wardian case Public Domain,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=783650>

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Object: Bridge model

Subject: Designed serpentine lakes

Prompt questions:

Where in a garden might you see a bridge?

How often can these fit into a small garden? Maybe across a pond or small stream.

Conversation teasers:

What can we tell from how a bridge looks; what does the design of a bridge reveal?

Answers: shows the design trends of the time, particularly architectural; what materials are available; what mode of transport crossed the bridge (foot, carriage, railway)

Garden History story:

In the **18th century landscapes of England** bridges became increasingly ornamental, and there is even a case of a **dummy bridge at Kenwood, London**. The 'bridge', made of wooden panels, has three spans and a balustrade. It was built in 1791 at the end of an ornamental pond, and was placed there to pretend that the pond was a lake and went further into the distance than it did. Style of bridges varied from classical to rustic, and they were often used as **eyecatchers** to highlight a viewpoint in the landscape.

Lancelot Brown (**1716-83**), known as **Capability Brown** because he **would tell his clients that the site has 'capability' for improvement**, was Britain's most celebrated and prolific landscape gardener. He designed and installed around **200 landscape parks**, creating an artistic and horticultural revolution with worldwide influence.



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One of the characteristics of a Brownian landscape is a serpentine lake. These were often lakes that were designed to look like rivers.

- Often the placement of a bridge was selected to create the illusion that the stretch of water, the serpentine lake, was in fact a river, not a static lake. The bridge was also part of the architectural design, almost like a sculpture.
- The Palladian Bridge at Stourhead has five segmental stone arches, and is positioned to the edge of the lake. Its placement was designed to create the illusion that a river flowed into the lake at this point, making it seem grander and larger.

Large estates included other structures as eyecatchers.

At Croome Court, south Worcestershire, **the Panorama Tower** was built on a rise near the edge of the estate. Designed in 1801, it was only completed in 1812. On another part of the estate, **Dunstall Castle** was built between 1750 and 1760. This was designed and built to look like an old ruin. Positioned a mile from the manor house, it certainly would have made the estate look impressively large.

- **The estate was visited by King George III in 1788, Queen Victoria as a child, and King George V in 1894.**

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Object: Cut grass

Subject: Large sweeping lawns

Prompt questions:

If you didn't have a lawnmower, how would you keep your grass neat?

Answers – scythe, goats and sheep, No grass, low growing meadow.

Conversation teasers:

In your garden, or your park how do you use your lawn? Answers – sport, sunbathe, walk the dog,

Do you know any other inventions that changed gardening?

What was used before garden twine? – hazel bark strips.

Garden History story:

The garden style of the **early 18th century** was for large sweeping landscapes.. They were characterised by large lawns stretching away from the house. The **management of these large lawns was not easy**, and having a large, beautiful lawn was a sign of wealth and status. Sometimes they were kept trimmed by grazing of sheep. More commonly they were cut using a scythe and weeded by hand.

- The lawnmower was only invented in 1833 by Englishman Edward Budding.
- The machine was an adaptation of a cloth-shearing machine.
- Early models were large and heavy and were pulled across the lawn by a horse.

There are many garden tools that we use that were invented relatively recently.

Before 1815, any cutting work in the garden was done using a variety of knives only. **Garden secateurs**, with two curved blades fastened together by a rivet, were invented and designed in France. There became available to the public in **1818**, and took a while to become popular, initially regarded in Britain as merely a tool for women!



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Even something as simple as **jute twine** was not known in Europe before **1828**. Its advantages of hard-wearing and tear resistance made it more suitable for garden use than the more expensive fibres of flax and hemp. Manufacturing began in 1832 when it was discovered that 3-ply twine had superb strength. Soaking the twine in green creosote prolonged its useful life, and gave the twine its characteristic green colour.

The **hosepipe** is an invention of the **seventeenth century**, and was first used for firefighting. Made of canvas or leather, this hose was heavy and cumbersome. The first fully flexible, waterproof tubing for use in gardens is seen in advertisements in the early part of the nineteenth century.

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Object: Tree bark or leaves

Subject: Old trees in the landscape

Prompt questions:

(Include tape measure)

Why are old trees special?

Answers to tease out – landmarks in the landscape, shade and fresh air, nature as birds and bugs (Moccas oak estimated age of 900 years supports a rare beetle population.)

Conversation teasers:

How old would a tree need to be before you could no longer get your arms around it?

(measure the circumference in inches, calculate the diameter by dividing by 3.14, multiply by the growth factor for different trees.)

Tape measure for participant's arm reach, and estimate tree age that they could fully hug.

Growth Factor:

- 2 Aspen, Cottonwood
- 3 Silver Maple, Pin Oak, Lime
- 3.5 River Birch
- 4.0 American Elm, Green Ash, Red Oak
- 4.5 Black Walnut, Red Maple
- 5.0 Sugar Maple, White Birch, White Oak, Black Cherry
- 7.0 Dogwood, Ironwood, Redbud

Growth rate:

Holly, Yew: 1.25cm / year

Oak: 1.88cm / year

Ash, Beech, Elm, Hazel: 2.5cm / year

Sycamore: 2.75cm / year

Pine, Spruce: 3.13cm / year



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Garden History story:

Trees form an important part of heritage landscapes because they reach a great age. This enables the original design to be seen decades and even hundreds of years later.

- The English oak can live to more than 500 years.
- The Yew tree and the Redwood also live for 5 centuries and more.
- Next oldest are Lime, Beech, Plane, Sweet Chestnut, Hornbeam, and the evergreen Holm Oak.

Trees were planted in landscapes in long avenues that marked roads and riding paths. They were also planted in woodlands that were used to screen the utilitarian parts of an estate.

While we appreciate their beauty, we must remember that they were very often planted for later use as timber trees.

- **Oak** was highly valued timber in shipbuilding, and architecture.
- **Beech** is used for furniture and ornaments, and any off cuts make very good firewood.

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Object: Piece of Glass

Subject: Protected cultivation

Prompt questions:

What are the properties of glass that would be useful in a garden?
Answers – shelter, warmth, light, to see what is growing.

(Glass from photo frame perhaps, no sharp edges)

Conversation teasers:

Do you know how plants that are cold sensitive survive if they don't have us to protect them with a glasshouse? (drop leaves, die back to a bulb, produce enough seed to regenerate the next year (annual plants))

Can you think of anything that you eat that is grown in protected cultivation?

Garden History story:

Glass was known in Roman times, and was used for small window panes, although sheets of the mineral mica were more common.

The technique for making large panes of glass was discovered in the 17th century. **In 1696 William III introduced a window tax of between 2 and 8 shillings a year**, depending on the size of the house. It is suggested that the term '**daylight robbery**' originated from this tax. Many windows were bricked over to avoid the tax, which 'robbed' the home of its daylight.

- **Abolished in 1851, the glass tax added more than 300% the cost of glass.**
- In **1848 sheet glass was introduced**, and panes of glass became reasonably priced.

It was these two events that contributed to a rapid rise in the popularity of glasshouses. Some of these were impressively grand.



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Before travel was generally possible **glasshouses offered visitors a form of 'armchair travel'**, creating tropical climates to wander through and see in real life exotic trees and flowers. Rainforests cover only 2% of the world's area, though contain about 50% of the world's plant species.

- **Kew Palm house was constructed in 1844**, and still has a fascinating collection of exotic plants, including a **rubber tree, coffee plants, a cocoa tree, and a pink banana!** It houses the **oldest pot plant in the world** – an *Encephalartos altensteinii*, planted in 1775.
- **The Crystal Palace** was built in London for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Designed by Joseph Paxton, it was large enough to hold **a full sized Palm Tree**. Tragically this immense 564m long construction of wood, iron and glass was **destroyed by fire in 1936**.
- **Downton Castle in Herefordshire** is another glasshouse built at about the same period. This was built by Thomas Andrew Knight, the 2nd president of the RHS for his **experiments in protected cultivation**.

Nowadays we might use plastic for agriculture and commercial fruit and vegetable production, but glass is still the best for home greenhouses and conservatories.

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Object: Sprig of Rosemary

Subject: Herbs, early gardens

Prompt questions:

For what purposes are plants grown beyond their ornamental properties? What could they offer more than what they look like?
Answers: Function – trees for wood, hedges for boundaries, plants to eat, plants for medicine. Lead conversation to properties of rosemary.

Conversation teasers:

What other gardens might have herbs in them? Kitchen gardens. Sensory gardens – designed for those with poor sight so they can touch and smell to experience plants. Also texture, rough, smooth, prickly, soft grasses. Sound of leaves in wind, poplar, grasses. Which herbs do you like the smell of?
What herbs do you use at home? – for cooking? – for remedies?
Does your family have recipes that use herbs, and what are favourite dishes?

Garden History story:

Rosemary itself that we know as a culinary herb was grown for its medicinal properties. These include:

- Antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds.
- Improving digestion.
- Enhancing memory and concentration.
- Neurological protection.
- Prevent brain aging.

Early gardens were mostly functional producing herbs for remedies.

Monastery gardens were tended by monks, and this was partly for the **discipline of the labour**, partly for the **meditative nature of the work**, and partly because the monastic community needed **someone who knew about plants** and would prepare the brews, tinctures, essences and poultices that were needed to prevent and cure ailments.

- Because these gardens were functional, they were **laid out in straight lines** for ease of access and to avoid confusion when harvesting.



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The plan of garden of St Gall in Switzerland is believed to be a design of an ideal early middle ages monastery and garden, and was not actually real. **There are three distinct garden sections:**

- the vegetable garden or hortis;
- the physic garden or herbularis;
- and the orchard.

Sixteen rectangular beds are shown in the herbularis of St Gall, each dedicated to a particular herb. **Rosemary is one of the 16 herbs listed in the this garden.** From the plan we see the range of plants that were known and available. These include the herbs **sage, mint, lovage, chervil, summer savoury, rose, cumin and fennel.** The vegetable garden contained **onion, leek, garlic, shallot, celery, cabbage, lettuce, parsnip and radish.** Fruit trees in the orchard include **chestnut, hazel, fig, quince, apple, peach, pear mulberry, medlar, almond and plum.**

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Object : Packet of seeds

Subject: Plant introductions

Prompt questions:

(eg, Californian poppies *Eschscholzia*)

Do you know where these seeds come from?

Did you know that garden plants come from all over the world?

Why would we want to introduce plants from other parts of the world. (New fashion, prestige, competitive nursery business)

Conversation teasers:

Do you have a favourite flower? Do you know where it comes from – what country?

Do you think there are problems with bringing plants in from other countries (climatic differences, pests and diseases)

Do you recognise any plants in the UK that you have seen in other countries?

Garden History story:

These seeds of the Californian Poppy (*Eschscholzia*) were **found in the wild in 1816** by a plant hunter to the far western section of North America.

Throughout garden history there has been a **quest for new plants**, and exploration and exchange has led to introductions of new plant varieties. New plants were often **a show of wealth** and indicated **personal influence** or **powerful connections**. They were first treasured in botanic gardens and by collectors in the grandest gardens, and then slowly became more generally available, often through the plant nursery that sponsored the expedition.

- In the **16th and 17th century** there was an influx of **bulbs into Europe** from the eastern section of the **Mediterranean** – this was the start of the tulip craze. In the early 17th century, the speculative frenzy known as **Tulipomania** saw outrageous prices being paid for unusual tulip colour forms.



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The amounts paid for tulip bulbs had no connection to their intrinsic value. Possession was a form of prestige and a short term investment. In one month the **price of bulbs escalated by between 10 and 300 times**. A single bulb was sold for today's equivalent of more than **10x the annual salary** for a skilled craftsman!

- The **17th and 18th centuries** saw new arrivals of **North American trees, shrubs, and perennials**. Maples with colourful autumn colours became increasingly available and hugely popular. The Georgians were very impressed with variegated plants and double flowers, which were new arrivals into Britain during that period.
- In the **early half of the 19th century brightly coloured annuals** and tender plants arrived from **South America**.
- From the **mid-19th century onward** it was to the **Far East, Mexico, and South Africa** that plant hunters turned. The German explorer Alexander von Humboldt introduced six-thousand new species from South America to Europe.

Garden design changed during each period of introductions, and a style to celebrate and show off the newest introductions became popular.

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Object: Toy instrument

Subject: Bandstand

Prompt questions

Do you go to your local park? Are there musical performances there? What sort of music might you hear in a garden, or a park.
Answers: a band or a concert.

Conversation teasers

Have you been to a concert in a park? What was the stage like? Perhaps you took a picnic? Was it a big park? Is there a café? If the participant has a country of origin different from UK, or has a wide cultural knowledge, ask about designed public open space in other countries.

Garden history story

- Parks in **medieval times** were large, enclosed areas of grassland and woodland. They were created for keeping and hunting deer, and were an ostentatious status symbol for the wealthy landowners of the day.
- **The parks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries** served a similar purpose as a show of wealth and power, as well as a source of game for food.
- Towards the end of the **eighteenth century** the concept of the park changed to a space of visual beauty above function.



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- It was only in **Victorian times of the nineteenth century** that public parks were created, and this was in response to demands for social provision during the population growth of the Industrial Revolution. Overcrowding, cheap, badly built housing, poor sanitation and air and water pollution resulted in epidemics, and public parks were created to provide the benefits of fresh air and natural surroundings.
- **Bandstands** became popular in British parks in the **19th century**, with music seen as an uplifting influence. Visiting parks on a Sunday was widely encouraged to get fresh air, and to provide distractions from unsociable behaviours.

At the height of their popularity, there were over 1,500 bandstands in Britain.

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Object: Tennis ball

Subject: Games in parks and gardens

Prompt questions

What could be the link between a tennis ball and gardens? – answers: playing tennis on public courts, throwing a ball for a dog, family fun cricket in the park.

Conversation teasers

Are games played in your local park? Is there space in your park just to run around or kick a ball?

Garden history story

In the 17th and 18th century some large gardens were designed as commercial pleasure gardens. They were open to the public, though not for free. An entrance fee was charged and extravagant entertainments and many games were offered.

- During the day, visitors to **Sydney Gardens in Bath** in the early 19th century (for the **equivalent of a £2 entrance fee**) could use the 2 bowling greens, 2 swings, and explore the labyrinth. Entrance to the Gala Night cost today's equivalent of £10 for entertainment including **fireworks, illuminations and music**. In the centre of the labyrinth was a particularly large swing that could take 2 people. There was an extra charge for this, and a rule that there be **"no swinging on Sundays"**!
- **Bowling was a popular outdoor sport**, and parks commonly had a bowling green. The game of bowls has many stories. Reports suggest that bowls developed from a game played by the Egyptians. **Henry VIII tried to keep the sport exclusive, and banned the game for those who were not wealthy** or "well to do" because *"Bowyes, Fletchers, Stringers and Arrowhead makers"* were spending more time at recreational events such as bowls instead of practicing their trade. In **1848** a uniform code of laws was drawn up by a lawyer, and included **a law which outlawed 'kicking, hacking and tripping'**.

Games have long been a means of exercise and social contact. Some games started with more serious purposes. **The childhood game of hopscotch was actually a training exercise for Roman soldiers!**

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