



Early summer scenes at Valley Gardens

Photographs by SIRA Studio, Harrogate. sirastudio.com

But why is it so important for Valley Gardens to have so many mates?

'The gardens are for the whole community, so community involvement is vital in their design and upkeep,' said Richard Cooper, a Harrogate councillor who was one of the first to sign up as a volunteer. 'Many hands make light work, so the more members we get, the better. People can do as much or as little as they want. Some might want to be

volunteer gardeners, while others might want to raise funds. Whatever time they can offer us will be most welcome.'

A great deal of time and money has been spent on Valley Gardens in recent years. First came the regeneration of the Sun Pavilion and Colonnades then, last summer, more than £180,000 was spent on a new children's play area complete with a 30-metre zip air ride, a treehouse and a ropewalk.

Other successful community-led ventures include an allotment which was tended by children from a nearby school with the resulting crops given to a local homeless hostel. So, what's on the agenda for the new friends in 2010?

'We are currently rejuvenating the New Zealand garden,' said Richard. 'It was originally planted to celebrate a visit by New Zealand dignitaries years ago, but has recently become overgrown and unkempt. We are putting that right now though. Hopefully it will be complete in time for a visit by some New Zealand rugby players later in the year.'

'We also want to create some plant guides so people can learn a bit about the plants they are looking at.'

Now all Richard needs is some more friends to join him and the dozens of others who have already signed up as volunteers, particularly as he revealed he is not exactly green-fingered when it comes to gardening.

'I touch plants and they die,' he admitted. 'I'm quite happy to get my hands dirty, but I think it would be better for everyone if I'm not actually let loose with a spade. I'm sure there will be plenty of other things for me to do.'

For further information on how to become a Friend of Valley Gardens, visit www.harrogate.gov.uk.

Fact file

Valley Gardens opened in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and are now English Heritage Grade II listed.

Thirty six of Harrogate's 88 mineral springs are in Valley Gardens including the Magnesia Well discovered in 1895. Some say the gardens have more mineral springs than any other known place.

The gardens were awarded a Gold Medal in the Entente Florale competition (Europe in Bloom) in June 2004.

Valley Gardens was home to the Harrogate Spring Flower Show for almost 70 years before it moved the Great Yorkshire Showground nearby.

Pathways from the gardens lead into Pinewoods and link to RHS Harlow Carr making a popular mile-long walk.

