



'In one corner of the garden, we let the weeds, including nettles, take over completely,' says Bradbury | CREDIT: Andrew Crowley

Television presenter [Julia Bradbury](#), 53, reveals how her small London garden has played such a big part in her recovery from [breast cancer](#), and the one thing she hates to see in any green space.

Where do you live and how big is your garden?

We have lived in our current house for eight years now. I can remember the exact date we moved in because I was six months pregnant and our twin girls, Zena and Xanthe, were born three months later. My partner, Gerard, and I also have an older boy, Zeph, who's now 11. The house is in west London and it only has a small back garden, but beyond that is a large communal garden where the children can play with the neighbours' kids. So we're incredibly lucky.

What kind of garden have you created?

On both sides of the garden, we have "living walls", which are filled with evergreens and wildflowers. I just love the colour green; it's the colour that humans have evolved to equate with life. In the middle we have a lawn, but, of course, with kids running across it, the grass isn't brilliant. But I'd never have plastic. I hate it! It's toxic, non-biodegradable, gets up children's noses and kills everything underneath it.

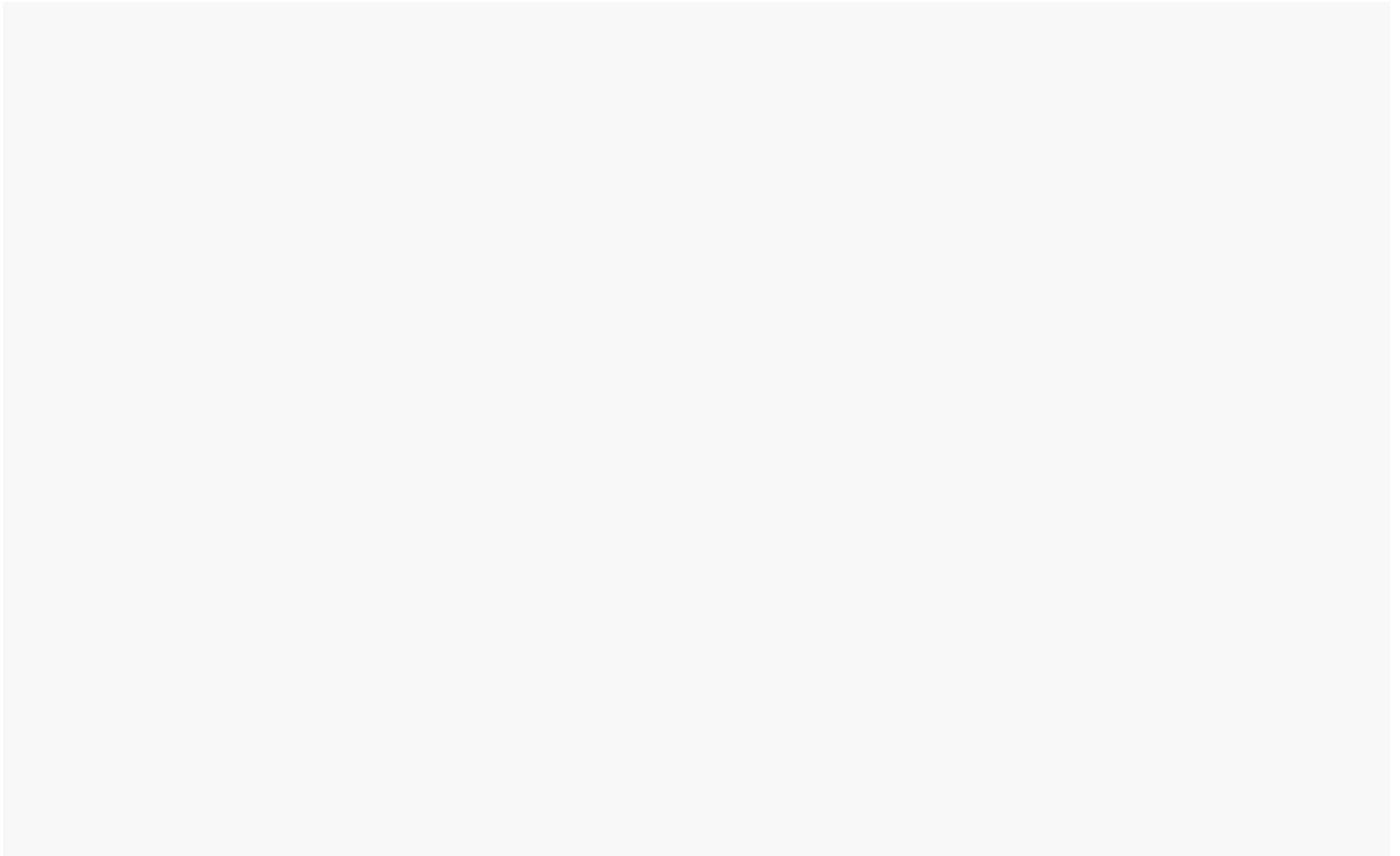
The other day, a gardener was re-laying real grass in the communal garden and throwing away the old stuff. So I went and got a bucket and collected it all up to try and patch up ours. One of my daughters saw me doing this and marched up and said: "Mummy, that isn't plastic grass, is it?" "No!" I replied. She then said: "You didn't steal it, did you?" I said, "No, I saved it from being thrown away."

Where do you sit when you're in the garden?

When I used to do a lot more travelling for my TV work, two places really stood out: Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It was actually during my last trip to Costa Rica in 2020 that I discovered the lump in my left breast. But in

Reproduced by Gorkana under licence from the NLA (newspapers), CLA (magazines), FT (Financial Times/ft.com) or other copyright owner. No further copying (including printing of digital cuttings), digital reproduction/forwarding of the cutting is permitted except under licence from the copyright owner. All FT content is copyright The Financial Times Ltd.

Nicaragua, I was making a film about Morgan's Rock, which is an eco lodge in the middle of a 4,000-acre jungle. It's an incredible place, and before I left I planted a tree for my mum and dad.



Fast-forward several years and I'm at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, looking at this beautiful curved garden table in one of the displays. It was a fallen tree trunk and turned out to be made from the same species of tree I'd planted, and the person selling it was instrumental in setting up Morgan's Rock. I had to buy it and it now sits in the middle of the garden. I use it all the time. We also have a garden pod from Cuckooland, which is great to sit in when it's cold or wet.

What do your children find interesting in the garden?

In one corner of the garden, we let the weeds, including nettles, take over completely. We call it our "wild area" and the children love it, not least because they can tread all over it and things still come back to life. They also notice the bees and butterflies it attracts. It can occupy them for ages. I think my son is turning into a mini-Attenborough; he's very in tune with nature and is always pointing out stuff in the garden. We have both a chestnut and a London plane towering over us from the communal garden and he'll come out with things like: "Mum, listen to the noise of the wind in the trees. Isn't it fantastic."

What kind of garden did you have growing up?

I'm very lucky because I have two of the most loving parents. They gifted me and my sister the ultimate present, which is love, love, love. Mum is Greek and 5'1; Dad is from the Peak District and over 6'. When I was growing up, we lived in a few different places, including Rutland and Sheffield, and some of my earliest memories are of coming home from school and heading straight into the garden.

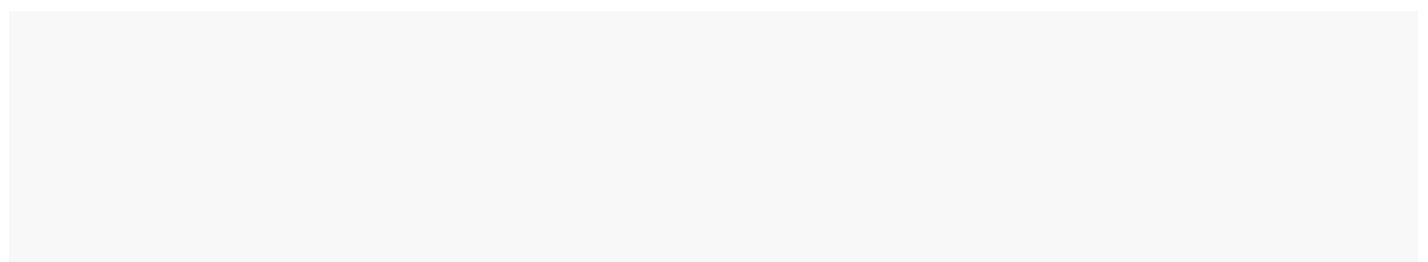
Mum loved it out there and always had lots of plants that needed dead-heading and pruning, like her roses and geraniums. She still does it. It's also probably a wonderful therapy. We had a vegetable area where Dad grew staples such as potatoes and carrots, but he also had a thing for more unusual vegetables back then, like artichokes, which he grew and then used to make the most wonderful soups. I still make them myself.

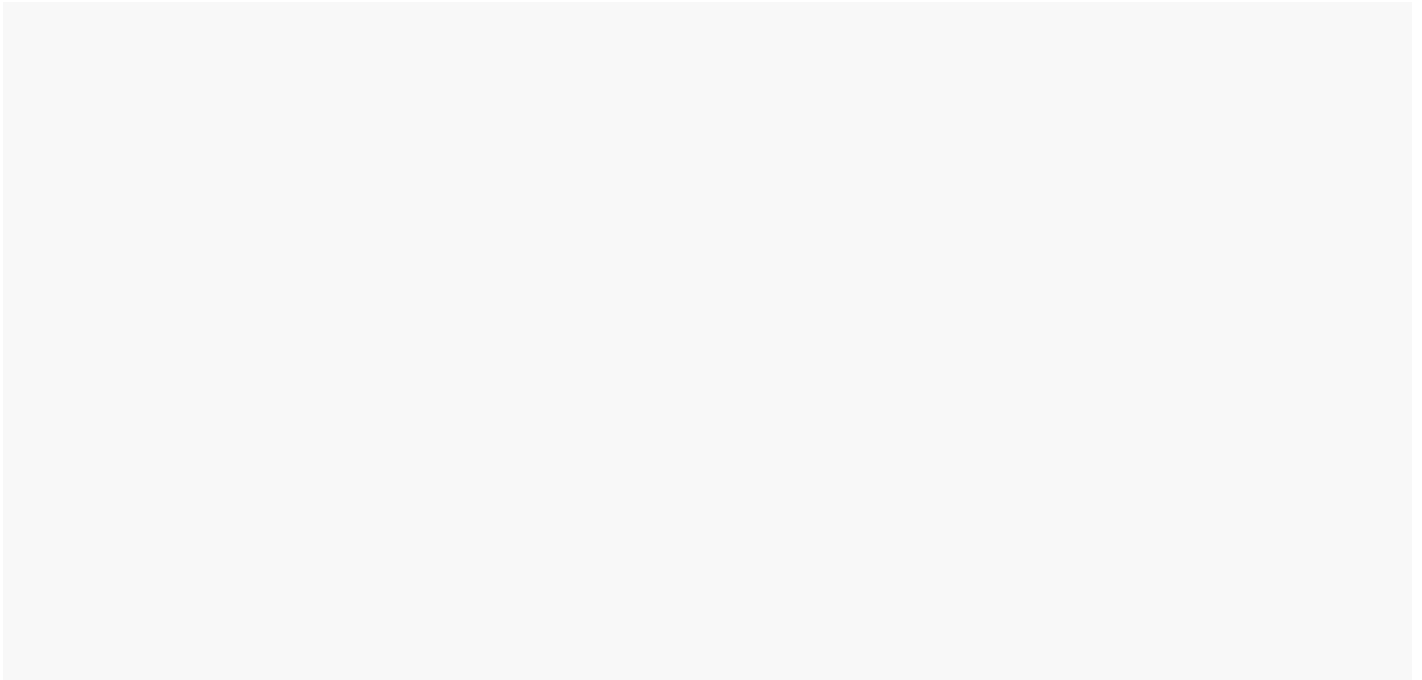
Did your parents influence your interest in the environment in any way?

If Mum's little haven was the back garden, then Dad's was the wide, open space of the Peak District. From an early age, he'd take my sister, Gina, and me on endless treks, including many of the places he knew as a child. The landscape was rugged and immense in every direction. In fact, he loved it so much, my parents had their honeymoon next to Mam Tor, which is a spectacular hill on the edge of the Dark and White Peaks. I've climbed it many times, and after my mastectomy, I wanted the whole family – me, my partner, our children, my parents and my sister – to go up there and hold hands. The sky was the most beautiful blue and it just happened to be filled with paragliders. It's a day I'll never forget.

Has the garden played a part in your recovery?

At every step. I remember the first day I came home from the hospital after my mastectomy. It was October 2021, the middle of the afternoon, the sun shone and leaves from the trees were starting to fall. I sat down at my big tree trunk table and felt its grain beneath my fingertips. I was filled with a sense of peace and made a promise to myself that I'd go outside every single day, even if it was just five minutes in the garden.





'Every single cell in our body has its own clock and they are all set off by the light,' says Bradbury | CREDIT: Andrew Crowley

So, being in the garden automatically became a part of my recovery. The children were also due home from school that day. They didn't come and see me in the hospital because I didn't want them to see me so weak and vulnerable. I couldn't wait to see their faces. I was full of anticipation, excitement... full of the potential of my life to come.

Over the last couple of difficult years, what are the things that have stood out the most?

Reproduced by Gorkana under licence from the NLA (newspapers), CLA (magazines), FT (Financial Times/ft.com) or other copyright owner. No further copying (including printing of digital cuttings), digital reproduction/forwarding of the cutting is permitted except under licence from the copyright owner. All FT content is copyright The Financial Times Ltd.
582558206 - CisionML - A 21618 - 38 Article Page 5 of 9

What I do now believe is that we are ultimately connected to the light and dark cycle of the day. Our body wakes up when the sun wakes up because we have something called "an awakening response". Our blood thickens, our cortisol levels rise, our production of glucose goes up to give us energy to start the day. In fact, every single cell in our body has its own clock and they are all set off by the light – just imagine, trillions of little clocks in your body. Equally, when we go outside, our immune system functions at a higher level, and when we sleep, our body begins to flush out toxins and repair itself. The natural world is at the very centre of who we are.

Do you think a garden and, more generally, a greener environment is beneficial to our wellbeing?

If you think about our daily lives, so many of us sit at a desk or in some indoor space where we barely move. It's not normal for humans. There are studies being done that show that when you walk on the earth, you are swapping electrons with it. We are energy, the earth is energy, we are spinning around on a planet, the tides, the moon, we are all interconnected. We're still learning about all these connections and yet sometimes we don't even have to think about them. We just know. It's that feeling you get when you stand in your bare feet on grass or a sandy beach. It's called "earthing" or "grounding" and it sounds a bit woo-woo, but it just makes you feel better.

Walk Yourself Happy: Find Your Path to Health and Healing in Nature by Julia Bradbury is out now (Little, Brown Book Group, £20).

Related Topics

Gardens, Breast cancer

