

HMDT and RHS Campaign for School Gardening resource

Creating a green memorial for Holocaust Memorial Day



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Introduction

Creating your own green memorial, whether it be a small plant on a windowsill or in a dedicated space in a school garden, is a creative and impactful way of marking Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), either individually or collectively.

This resource has been designed for you to use around HMD, which takes place on 27 January each year. Developed in collaboration with the RHS Campaign for School Gardening, the resource offers ideas for using plants to commemorate the Holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups and more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. It provides a foundation for creating a green memorial and outlines three activity ideas for different settings: 1) Growing an indoor memorial plant in a pot; 2) sowing a wildflower memorial bed outdoors; and 3) designing and working towards a memorial garden space.

This resource is suitable for primary and secondary school students. You can adapt it to suit learners of different levels of ability and knowledge of the Holocaust and more recent genocides.



Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) is the registered charity, funded by the UK Government, to promote and support HMD. We provide resources and support for thousands of HMD activities every year in workplaces, youth groups, museums, prisons, schools, colleges and universities, places of worship, and more.

To learn more about HMD, HMDT's theme for HMD, or to access free resources, visit hmd.org.uk.

RHS Campaign for School Gardening

The RHS Campaign for School Gardening works to give children and young people opportunities to grow and connect with nature. We do this by supporting school staff, home educators and youth group leaders with training, resources and advice, so they can encourage young people to explore the outdoors and learn how to care for plants and our planet. Connecting with nature can bring us a moment to pause and remember, and the very act of growing illustrates hope for the future.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) takes place every year on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. It is the international day to remember the 6 million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of people murdered under Nazi persecution of other groups and during more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. It is an occasion for everyone to come together to learn, remember, reflect and consider what action we can take to stand up to hatred, discrimination and racism in the world today.

HMDT's [HMD education guidelines](#) for teachers provide age-appropriate ways to introduce and discuss the Holocaust and more recent genocides in schools. Our lesson plans, assemblies, life stories and other materials allow you to ground the creation of a green memorial in students' learning about the Holocaust or more recent genocides. [These resources, that you can filter based on age and genocide, are available here.](#)



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*Learning from genocide -
for a better future*

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Green memorials

Flowers, plants and trees of various types have long been used as symbols of remembrance and as a way of commemorating. Yellow flowers, such as daffodils, are often used as a way of remembering the Jews killed during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, as the yellow colour reflects the stars that Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis. White roses have also been used, inspired by the White Rose Movement, which called for active opposition to the Nazi regime. Outside of remembrance of the Holocaust, the Srebrenica flower has become the symbol of remembrance for the genocide in Bosnia. The Kigali Genocide Memorial to the victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda has been created with many different remembrance spaces within it: the Gardens of Unity, Division and Reconciliation; the Rose Gardens; the Garden of Self Protection; the Provinces of Rwanda Garden; the Flower of Life Garden; and the Forest of Memory. Roses in the gardens have been dedicated by people who lost loved ones in the genocide.

Outside the context of the Holocaust and more recent genocides, at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, the natural surroundings and different types of trees form a central aspect of the remembrance of both military and civilian personnel who have served and sacrificed. Every year, nations across the world use red poppies, blue cornflowers or yellow marigolds to remember those that have lost their lives in war.

Creating your green memorial

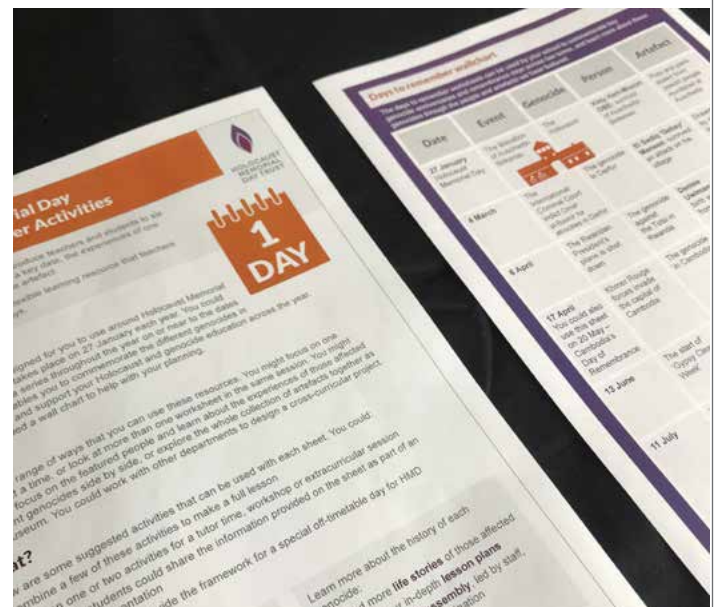
Creating a green memorial can be a rewarding and meaningful experience that gives students an opportunity to reflect on remembrance and instils empathy as they work together to commemorate an individual or community affected by the Holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups, or more recent genocides.

A good place to start is with a discussion around the purpose of a green memorial and to whom or what it is dedicated. If students have little existing knowledge of the Holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups or more recent genocides, consider delivering our [primary](#) or [secondary](#) school assembly, or a lesson based on our [Days to Remember resource](#). Your students could decide to commemorate a person or a community or to mark an anniversary. Explore [life stories](#) about personal experiences of hate, prejudice and discrimination as well as resistance and hope and use [dates to remember pages](#) for ideas. You may also want to take inspiration from HMDT's [HMD theme](#).

Discuss with your students:

- Who or what do they want to remember with the green memorial?
- Why is it important to remember this person, community or event?
- How can growing plants and connecting with nature help us remember?

You can introduce students to the symbolism of plants (page 4), evoke a connection between caring for plants and caring for each other, explore with them ways in which everyone works together to create a green memorial and care for the plant(s), and reflect on how the creation of a lasting, living memorial reminds the whole community of our shared humanity.



Activity idea:

Choose three to five [life stories from the HMDT website](#) and give them to different groups of students to read. Ask the groups to discuss and share with each other:

- What does this life story tell us about genocide?
- Do we know why this person was persecuted?
- How does this life story make you think or feel differently?

When you have established who or what to commemorate and why, you can follow the detailed guidance to create your green memorial and complete it with signs, plaques or messages.

Plants to represent commemoration

There are many plants that can be used to represent remembrance and commemoration when creating a living memorial. Flowers have different meanings that can be used to demonstrate thoughts and feelings; yellow chrysanthemums are a symbol of sorrow as are purple hyacinths. White tulips have been used to represent honour and forgiveness, whilst white roses are associated with unity, peace and love. Rosemary is traditionally carried by mourners at funerals and is a symbol of friendship, loyalty and remembrance. Forget-me-nots are often associated with remembrance and are used to show love and respect. Here is a list of flowers with meanings that inspire commemoration.

Chrysanthemums – sorrow

Purple hyacinths – sorrow

White tulips – honour and forgiveness

White roses - unity, peace and love

Rosemary – friendship and loyalty

Forget-me-nots – remembrance, love and respect

Cornflower - hope

Violets - loyalty

Nasturtiums - patriotism

Edelweiss - courage

Dahlia - dignity

Lemon balm - sympathy

Pansy - thoughtfulness

Sweet William - gratitude

Marigold - faith

Iris - determination



Image: Pansies
©RHS, Credit: RHS / Tim Sandall

When creating a green memorial, choosing specific flowers can help illustrate the themes and reflections you want to draw on through commemoration. HMDT's annual HMD theme may help shape your thinking around what types of flowers or plants you choose to use or the shape or look of your memorial.

Grow an indoor memorial plant

Spring-flowering bulbs are often associated with new beginnings and symbolise hope. The act of planting and caring for a plant such as this offers opportunity for ongoing reflection as it grows and blooms. As we remember, we hope for and work towards a better future for all.

Here is guidance on how you can make your own indoor spring-flowering plant pot. If planted in autumn (September-November) by following the advice below, your pot may flower in the following spring (February-May).

You will need:

Bulbs for planting (Narcissus or hyacinth work well indoors. [Find more bulb ideas here](#))

Peat-free compost (multipurpose, bulb fibre or garden soil mixed with small grit)

Water and watering can or spray bottle

A small pot with drainage holes

Paints, pens or other materials to decorate the pot

Gloves for handling bulbs (*Please be aware that bulbs can cause skin irritation and are toxic if eaten. The RHS recommends bulbs should only be handled by children under supervision and when wearing gloves; care should be taken that they are not eaten*)

1. Select a pot, with drainage holes, big enough for the number of bulbs you intend to plant and the type of bulb. For example, for a daffodil bulb you'll need a pot approximately 15cm deep to allow for growing space and height.

Further guidance on bulbs can be found here.

2. If you wish, decorate the pot using your chosen materials. Terracotta pots can be decorated with marker pens and paint, plastic pots work well with decoupage. Invite students to think about how they can make their pot decoration reflective of commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day perhaps using illustrations, words or phrases.
3. Once decorated, add compost leaving a gap approximately 3cm from the top of the pot clear.
4. Place the bulb on top of the compost, pointed end upwards. If planting more than one bulb, make sure they are not touching each other or the side of the pot.
5. Fill in the gaps between the bulbs and side of the pot with compost, leaving the top third or growing tips sticking out.
6. Water your bulbs, but be careful not to over water them, and allow any excess water to drain away.

Once planted, bulbs in pots need to be left in a cool dark place for 6-10 weeks to mimic the winter cold, such as a shed or greenhouse or a dry (covered) area outside. Make sure you check whether they need water throughout this period. After this time, they should have started to grow some small green shoots and will be ready to bring indoors to a warm sunny spot mimicking spring. Note this should not be too near a radiator as this will cause them to dry out.

You can also plant bulbs into outdoor planters or directly into the ground and create a colour-themed flowerbed for your memorial, if you have the space. **Find out more about planting into the ground here.** If in an outdoor location, this can become the focal point for your commemorations. Adding a seat near your planting will create a simple space for people to sit amongst the plants and reflect.



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Credit: RHS / Georgi Mabee

A wildflower memorial bed



©RHS, Credit: RHS / Oliver Dixon

Wildflowers can be a beautiful way to commemorate, with the mix of flowers encouraging wildlife such as bees and butterflies to visit, giving a sense of new life and hope.

Wildflower seeds often include flowers such as forget-me-nots, cornflowers and the red poppy, synonymous with remembrance. Wildflower seeds can be sown into the ground in autumn or in spring after the risk of frost has passed into a dedicated flowerbed, or into a pot placed outside.

When planting wildflowers in autumn or spring, you can learn about and commemorate different events. For example, 6 April marks the beginning of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, 19 April marks the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, 20 May is the National Day of Remembrance in Cambodia, and 2 August is Roma Genocide Remembrance Day.

[Other dates to remember are available here.](#)

How to sow wildflowers

Wildflower seed packets can be found at garden centres or sometimes even your local supermarket. Planting in autumn or spring works best. Follow these steps to make a wildflower garden:

1. Choose an area for planting - a sunny space works best.
2. Prepare the ground by removing sticks, leaves and any unwanted plants (wear gardening gloves to protect hands against stinging nettles or brambles).
3. Dig over the soil and rake it for a smooth surface.
4. Once the soil is ready, take your wildflower seeds and scatter them finely over the surface of the soil, making a thin layer of seeds.
5. Press the seeds into the surface of the soil by walking across it and then gently water the whole patch (so as not to wash the seeds away). Watering will only be needed if there is a dry or hot spell of weather.

Designing a garden memorial space

For a larger-scale project, you could invite students to plan what a memorial garden would look like to them, encouraging them to include elements like seating, what plants they'd like to grow and even sculpture. They could work together to design a green memorial space in pairs or groups, and then go on to create one of the designs on school grounds. We understand that you may not have the space or resources to bring all their ideas to life, but even the activity of planning a garden can be enough to encourage discussion about HMD.

Garden design ideas for your class

Consider the location of where the memorial garden would be. Is it quiet? Is it big or small? What features could be added to enhance the space? Shape is often an important factor in garden design – it can be a feature of flower beds, how plants or trees are placed, and even in the structure of plants themselves. Shapes can also be represented in the paving or stones used to create paths. Circles represent unity; using circles could be symbolic of commemoration bringing people together. Square shapes are synonymous with strength and could represent survivors of the Holocaust and more recent genocides, who have shown strength in rebuilding their lives and sharing their experiences. Triangles could also be used in remembrance of the triangles the Nazis made prisoners wear.

In addition to plants having different meanings, their colours have meanings too: blue represents peace and freedom; yellow, hope; and green, healing. Choosing different coloured plants not only will create a colourful display but will also prompt different thoughts and feelings that encourage reflection.

Trees make an impressive display, and even just one tree planted to commemorate and raise awareness can make a big impact. Oak trees symbolise strength, silver birch regeneration and cherry blossoms symbolise life. A tree is a lasting memorial and can be visited each year as a mark of respect and commemoration to those whose memory it is planted in. Messages or reflections about Holocaust Memorial Day could be hung from the branches. [Find out more about how to plant a tree here.](#)

In addition to plants and trees, students could think about the sounds that can be heard in a garden and their design could include water features to encourage reflection, objects that create sound for example, a wind chime, and flowers that attract wildlife that will create sound. Why not create a sensory garden full of sound, light and interesting plants to touch? For example, they could include herbs such as rosemary and lavender for taste and smell, silver sage, which is soft to touch, and sunflowers that symbolise loyalty and faith as well as being a joyful colour.



Planting in your garden space

When it comes to selecting plants, to aid successful planting, you would need to consider the type of soil (clay, sand or silt, etc), whether there is light or shade and how much moisture there is, to help choose the right plant for the right place. [Use a soil testing kit to help identify what is in your soil here.](#)

Gardening projects are a great way to engage with the whole school community and a chance to invite volunteers in to help support with the creation of your memorial space that will be there for years to come. For more inspiration and ideas visit the [Campaign for School Gardening website](#) where you will find further guidance to help you.

Evergreening your memorial commemoration and reflection

Your green space can offer a site for commemorative activities and reflection. You may also want to communicate to whom the memorial is dedicated. This can include displaying [information about the Holocaust and more recent genocides, available here.](#)

Some ideas for commemoration and reflection:

- Create markers, small signs or plaques with personal messages, or significant events, dates and locations. You could also include the names of those who were murdered, survivors or communities whom you commemorate. Special areas in an outdoor space can be marked out with signs created using simple wooden plaques.
- Place stones or notecards with heartfelt messages or drawings on or near the planter as a symbol of remembrance and respect. You can write or draw on pebbles or stones. Create a space in your memorial to light a candle on HMD, January 27, to be part of the [Light the Darkness national moment](#). Please ensure that a candle is lit in a safe place. You may also use a hurricane lamp to place the candle in or use an LED candle.



Your memorial serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy, tolerance, and standing against hatred and prejudice. Together we can create a better and more compassionate world.

Let us know

Once you have created your green memorial let us know about it.

Share images of your memorial on social media on or around HMD (27 January). You can do so using [HMDT's social media hashtags and graphics](#), and by tagging HMDT on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram, and the Campaign for School Gardening on Instagram.



@holocaustmemorialdaytrust

@rhsgrassroots



@HMD_UK



@HMD.UK

Please also add your HMD activity to HMDT's interactive activity map to become part of the national picture of HMD across the UK. We love seeing what people across the country have been doing to mark HMD.

Add your activity here: hmd.org.uk/letusknow



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Find out more...

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: hmd.org.uk
The RHS Campaign for School Gardening:
schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/competitions

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