

---

## Beth Barber, Freelance environmental educator

---



### Profile of a LEEF Fellow

This fellowship was awarded on Monday 1 June 2015 at Chelsea Physic Garden

LEEF fellowships are awarded to recognise excellence in Environmental and Sustainability Education

To find out more about LEEF  
[www.leef.org.uk](http://www.leef.org.uk)

### *How did you get where you are today?*

By the most circuitous route imaginable! Via legal qualifications, a first career in publishing and then eight years working at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew as a botanical horticulturist. While I was working at Kew I realised that my primary interest in plants was as an educational tool to teach people more about the natural world and the myriad interactions between the plant and animal kingdoms. I began to volunteer for a number of environmental education projects working with both child and adult audiences and then I was lucky enough to be employed by a garden space which was looking to develop its use for educational purposes by the local community. They weren't quite sure what they wanted to achieve which gave me lots of opportunities to try new things.

### *What tips would you give someone starting out in your field?*

Don't be afraid to experiment with new ideas for engaging different audiences with the natural world. Some will work and some might not, but you will learn something from them all.

### *What inspires you? Or who?*

Hearing the gasp of excitement from a child (or adult) who has managed successfully to focus a microscope and experienced that amazing gateway into a whole new perspective on the natural world. I love microscopes!

### *What is a significant memory of being in nature as a child?*

Numerous walks accompanied by my favourite wildflower book. I can't remember the title or publisher but it was a guide to hedgerow plants and had a bright yellow cover. It taught me the names of so many British native plants.

### *What project are you most proud of?*

A weekly gardening club ('Gone to Seed') aimed at seniors, especially those with underlying health or mobility issues. The project created such positive outcomes in terms of providing participants with opportunities for gentle exercise in the fresh air; an excuse to get out of the house and forge new friendships; access to fresh home-grown vegetables and a reason for cooking healthy meals for themselves. It also provided fantastic opportunities to try new vegetables and to share food cultures and recipes.

### *What's your favourite game or activity?*

Building flower presses from offcuts of MDF and coach bolts and encouraging children to create their own mini-herbarium of pressed specimens.

### *What is your favourite eco-place in London, and why?*

The RSPB reserve at Rainham Marshes, obviously there are lots of birds to see but of more interest to me personally is the fantastic array of invertebrate species. It's bug heaven.

### ***Do you have a recommendation to LEEF members?***

Get in touch with the outreach team at the Royal Microscopological Society: they offer some great discounts for organisations working with microscopes and kids.

### ***What are you working on at the moment?***

Right now I am working on a growing project involving around 50 vulnerable children. It's our end of project picnic in a few weeks and I am desperately trying to encourage the veggies we have planted to grow a bit faster so we can harvest an abundant feast.

### ***How would you like to see environmental or sustainability education develop in the next 10 years?***

As a core aspect of the school curriculum. How about 50% of all lessons at key stages 1 and 2 to be taught out of doors for starters? Too ambitious? OK, I'll settle for 30%.