

Interview with

## Jeremy Scott

Blind Gardener of the Year 2010 -  
Champion of Champions



*Gardener Jeremy Scott was named Thrive and RNIB's Blind Gardener of the Year, 'Champion of Champions' in October 2010. He was named Blind Gardener of the Year in 2009 and his inspiring work at his garden once again wowed the judges and earned him the coveted title of 'Champion of Champions'. He talked to Bella D'Arcy Reed over the telephone from his home in Uckfield, East Sussex.*

I caught Jeremy at home just as he was about to embark upon the digging up of his asparagus beds in order to plant 100 crowns expected the following week! He happily agreed to spend half an hour talking to me as it was midday and he had the afternoon left....

Jeremy told me about his blindness: "I am totally blind in the left eye and have 5% vision in the right eye - imagine seeing everything through the frosted glass in bathroom window. That is what it is like. I see things in dark or light colours: brown, green and red are the same colour to me. It is better on a bright day than on a dull day". Colours are remembered because Jeremy became blind through a retina problem caused by his diabetes (as I have been diabetic for 50 years we talked diabetic-speak for a while..).

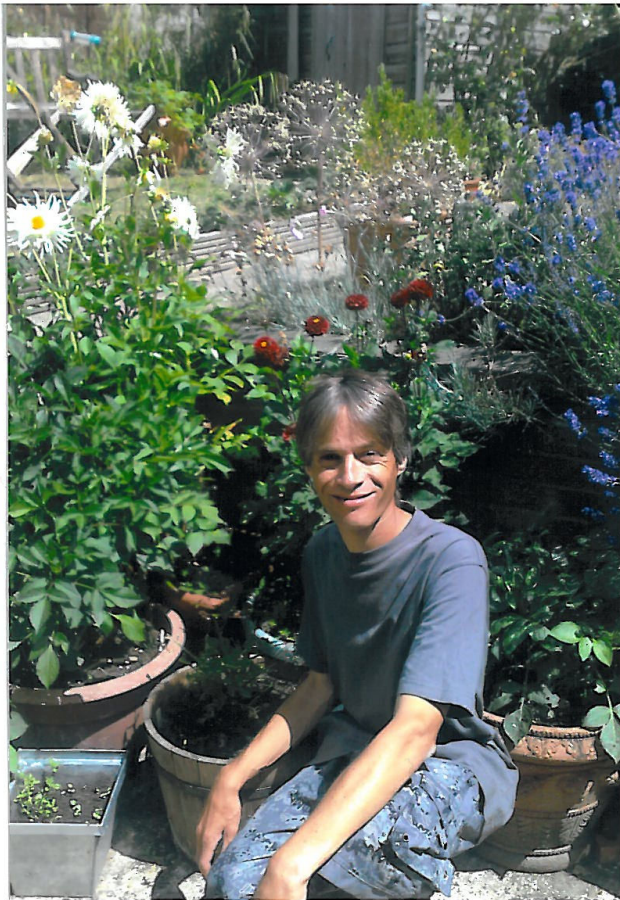
We then talked about how he gardens. The land is divided into square patches. "I would like to have some raised beds but I designed the garden before I thought about it, and it would be quite a trouble to do it now - beside the materials for beds on my space would be very expensive. It has to be square as I spend a lot of time walking into things and in the gardens I know where I am. I lay down scaffolding planks in order to plant - I spend a lot of time on my knees - and have strings laid out all year as markers for hoeing. So, in the Spring, my patch is white string with nicely-dug beds.

Hoeing had been mentioned- how does he cope with the weeds? "It's the biggest problem - I weed on my knees mostly. The garden is next to a field so I get a lot of weed seeds coming in. I can tell meadow grass quite easily. I put plants in when they are a reasonable size - 4-5 inches tall - then I can tell them apart from the weeds - the plants are in rows. I can't see to put the seed in the soil - well, parsnips sometimes and of course potatoes. So most of the seed planting is in seed trays, Jiffies, toilet rolls. Lettuce seeds I plant straight in, in rows."

Tools are important to Jeremy, but they are often adapted for him "I use tools which are shortened: mini-rakes and shovels. All painted yellow so I can see where they are when I put them down. I use yellow marigold gloves - everything is done with my hands- they are my eyes. I am always on

the look-out for small tools - handheld hoes for example. It must look funny sometimes with me on my knees scratching away - like someone who uses nail scissors to cut the lawn!"

Jeremy wasn't always a gardener. He started for something to do. His parents lived in Ashdown Forest and had a field, mostly for letting the dogs run out. It was covered in brambles and things with tap roots. "One day I started pulling stuff out, just to do something. I got hooked on clearing it - then I planted a few potatoes. A friend who goes to a re-cycling tip brought me some pots to start with, and has been bringing me stuff ever since. I didn't get a book, I just did it. I went on a course at River Cottage which was fantastic. I learned a lot from that The lady who ran the course said we ought to grow the more expensive vegetables rather than those you can just buy in a shop, but I do like my potatoes! Last year I grew 400lbs of potatoes - they are part of the rotation of my crops. I grow a lot of sweet corn - I have a three-crop rotation cycle, and a cold frame of railway sleepers."



After all this talk about vegetables, does Jeremy grow flowers?

"Oh yes I love dahlias I can see dahlias I can't help myself I have to buy lots. Especially the white ones and the very dark ones. I have some of those chocolate ones, and I grow sweet peas, chrysanthemums, delphiniums, and cardoons. I just love those big leaves and flower on the cardoons and the silvery leaves. I grow lilies and tulips for cutting in the vegetables beds - oh and sunflowers - big and bright."

Jeremy thinks that people (designers?) who immediately think 'scent' for blind people are right - and wrong. "they often over do the cents, all mixed up so we can't differentiate. A few scents spaced apart so you get a good whiff of lavender, then one of roses, then lilies" Think scents in groups as thinking planting in colour combinations - colours in harmonising or complementary groups, not bitty colours. "Yes - designer should think of it like that - we need to enjoy each scent for itself - otherwise it can be too many scents which actually smell awful together!"

Jeremy and his girl friend Sophie visit gardens together, and she describes things to him. Having not been blind since birth he can imagine borders and plants quite easily. "If you have been blind since birth then it is another ball-game. People need to talk in a different way" We talked about an article coming up here soon about an organisation which trains people to be audio-describers, and how it could be used in gardens. "That is a fantastic idea - it would make such a huge difference to people in gardens"

Jeremy Scott is a very bubbly and enthusiastic man, happy with his garden and his plants. Talking to him is like actually being with him in a garden on a sunny day, with flowers and vegetables

everywhere; being a gardener has totally changed and enhanced his life. I said farewell to him, reluctantly, as he prepared to go off to dig his asparagus bed.

*There is advice for blind gardeners on:*

<http://www.thrive.org.uk/national-blind-gardeners-club.aspx>