



Advantages of GCA Membership

GCA Conference

Our members represent the cutting edge of retailers and suppliers within the horticultural industry. As a member you would soon recognise the value of the GCA for its inspections, its networking opportunities, the sharing of trading data, its e-learning training package for garden centre staff and, for its conference. The GCA can boast that some 50% of its members attend annual conference - a remarkably high figure for a trade organisation. The conference addresses the key business issues and challenges that retailers are facing and the programme will provide you with inspiration, hard facts, and business-critical information that will help you grow your business. Those who are 'regulars' know what a huge benefit this meeting of minds is for them and their businesses.

The annual conference, held at the end of January, gives you the opportunity to express your opinions and to discuss the future of our association.

Summer Workshops / Study Tours

From time to time the GCA organises summer workshops and study tours for the benefit of its members. The cost of attending is highly subsidised and covers topical subjects relevant to today's retailers.

GCA Annual Inspection

All full and subsidiary members are included in the annual inspections. We use four independent inspectors. The centres are equally divided between them by geographical area. The area each inspector is allocated is alternated each year so that your centre is visited by a different inspector each year. Inspections are carried out in spring, between March and June. The inspector's visit will be unannounced, so the actual day of the inspection will not be known until the inspector arrives at your centre. The inspector will announce his arrival, peruse your centre and talk to your staff. Every department and area will be awarded marks. The overall pass mark is 50% and within that the plant sections must individually score 50% and above for entry into the GCA (even if the overall mark is 50% or above).

At the end of the inspection the inspector will report their findings to the centre during a feedback session. The centre will then have the opportunity to discuss the inspector's observations. A written report with photographs will follow.

These inspections generate a number of annual awards, including Garden Centre of the Year, Garden Centres of Excellence (the top 10 centres), Area Winners, Highly Commended Status (all the centres that achieve a mark of 75% or above), to name a few. As a member, a copy of the current inspection form can be downloaded from the website, should you wish to use it as a management tool.

Associate Members

Currently there are 160 Associate members who offer our members a wide range of products and services relevant to the garden centre industry.

Website and GCA Exchange

The GCA website address is www.gca.org.uk and has a members' only site which is password protected. All membership information is available for you to access and download from this section.

All members are listed with links to their own websites from the public pages.

The GCA Exchange has been running successfully now for many years; it is an excellent open forum facility available to garden centre members. It is a great facility to interact with fellow members. You can ask any question and a reply is guaranteed! Any post you make is seen by all the members but is confidential within the membership. There are many and varied topics discussed by the members using the Exchange. Information about meetings, relevant events and press coverage is also posted here. It is a completely free service. All you need is to have a valid email address; we will then invite you to join the group.

We also have an internet community service which is open to both Associate and Full Members. It will give you the opportunity to communicate with Associate members and find out about new products, special offers or end of lines. This is a completely separate group to the successful GCA Exchange.

Area Groups – Meetings

Area group meetings are organised on a regular basis by your area chairman. These meetings are open to all members regardless of the area group that you belong to, and you can be assured of a warm welcome if you would like to join in. Do not hesitate to contact head office if you would like to attend an area meeting before joining the association.

Display and Information Items

As a member you will receive: a copy of the comprehensive Directory of Members, which is updated annually; a copy of the GCA Yearbook, a buyers' guide that also lists all members of the association; the GCA membership display board along with window decals; and 'The Best of British' magazine, published in January, which showcases examples of 'best practice' by members, taken from the prior year's inspections. You will also receive regular editions of GCA e-News, published throughout the year. You will receive a copy of the Members Handbook, which contains valuable information especially in connection with the inspections.

International Garden Centre Association

Membership of the GCA also gives you automatic membership of the IGCA. Each year a member country hosts an International Congress, which includes tours of garden centres and places of interest. It is a great opportunity to see how our industry is progressing worldwide and to meet garden centre owners from every part of the globe.

GCA GROW – e-learning training package

For a very modest joining fee and small annual subscription, members can participate in GCA GROW. The subscriptions cover the costs of site support and on-going development. The package is exclusively available to GCA members and owned by the GCA itself. The package is available, via the internet, to all staff at participating centres. You are able to manage and report on the learning progress of your staff through a simple administration process. The package contains learning 'modules' – courses of about 20-25 minutes duration – written specifically with garden centre retailing in mind. In addition there are accredited courses for Health & Safety and Food Hygiene (levels 1 and 2 for each). The cost savings achieved by

using GCA GROW for training in these 'compliance' subjects alone, as opposed to conventional methods, will more than justify the subscription.

Barometer of Trade

Each month approximately 65 full members submit their trading figures online into the Barometer of Trade via the GCA Website. Using this information you will be able measure your garden centre's performance in comparison with fellow member centres. You can view the current summary report online at any time. The summaries are updated on the 20th of each month. If you wish to be included in the Barometer of Trade Online report email your contact name to info@gca.org.uk we will then send you your unique password for online entry.

Inter-Firm Comparisons

We are able to give you a very informed and personal analysis of the position of your centre compared to others in the industry with regard to costs, overheads and annual gross sales etc. All figures submitted are treated in the strictest confidence, only disclosed to those participating.

GCA Trust Scholarship

The GCA Trust has set up a scholarship which enables up to two students at any one time, to attend horticultural college for full or part time study for either a Diploma in Horticulture or BSc in Horticulture. The generous scholarship helps cover the cost of tuition fees and accommodation. Members are encouraged to nominate a member of their own staff (if applicable) in an effort to promote horticultural training.

Credit/Debit Card Deal

We have negotiated very competitive business tariffs with a card services provider for GCA Members.

Details of the scheme and the rates negotiated on behalf of members can be obtained from head office should you wish to join the scheme.

Insurance Deal

~The GCA and can provide full members with details of a unique insurance package offering wide and cost effective cover via one of our associate members.

Reduced Rate Magazine Subscription

Annual subscription to "Horticulture Week" at a significantly reduced rate.

Forum of Private Business (FPB)

Automatic Associate Membership, with an opportunity to upgrade to full membership of the Forum of Private Business, free of charge. Founded in 1977 and representing around 25,000 UK-based private businesses. The FPB fights for fair treatment of private businesses and provides support to enable its members to grow profitably.

Garden Forum Newsletter

As you know www.gardenforum.co.uk provides the industry with up to date news 'as it happens' and is a valuable communication resource for the garden centre industry. As part of your membership we offer free registration for all full GCA members. You can register as many individuals from your company as you wish.

Free Health & Safety and Employment Law Advice Helpline

Employment Law/Human Resources and Health & Safety advice helpline through a GCA associate member specialising in these matters.