



About the Garden Centre Association

The GCA has its origins in the very roots of the garden centre movement, which surprisingly has only been in existence for around half a century. The term 'garden centre' was not coined until the early 1960s - before that, gardeners bought their plants from nurseries or by mail order.

Garden centres as such began to take off after the idea that plants could be sold in containers all the year round - an American development - was pioneered in the UK by a handful of forward-thinking nurserymen. This had the effect not only of spreading demand beyond the traditional planting 'bottlenecks' of spring and, in particular, autumn (especially for roses) but also of making plants easy to transport and to handle as a retail commodity.

Stewarts, Russells, Wyevale and Notcutts (who coined the title Plant Area or Planteria for their first cash and carry retail unit), were among those early "container revolutionaries" who helped to shape the garden centre industry we know today.

By 1966, the movement was sufficiently well developed to need specialist representation, so a Garden Centres Group was formed within the Horticultural Trades Association. One of its first decisions was to set up an inspection scheme for members, who were entitled to "Approved Centre" status.

The following year, the group joined the European alliance which eventually became the International Garden Centre Association (IGCA) but it was not until 1979 that it became independent of the HTA and appointed David Nichol as full-time administrator. In 1986, the group finally adopted the name of The Garden Centre Association and moved into its own premises in Reading and eventually to Chester, where the head office is now situated.

Today, the Garden Centre Association, headed by Peter Burks, the Chief Executive together with Laura Smith; his Executive Assistant and Antony Snow (Instructional Designer for the e-learning initiative, GCA GROW) represents approximately 190 garden centres – widely regarded as being among the UK's most progressive garden centres – together with 170 suppliers, our Associate Members. As the market has grown and the expectations of customers have increased, many have developed to become full scale 'leisure destination centres' offering a rich and rewarding shopping experience based around plants and related products for the home and garden.

GCA Membership

The Garden Centre Association was formed in 1966 as a forum for like-minded individuals to meet and exchange ideas. The principles differ little today. It is still a forum and catalyst for communication between members from the garden retail and supplier community.

The GCA asks its garden centre members, from the moment they join, to meet the highest retail standards and to participate in an annual inspection process, to ensure these standards are maintained and improved. GCA members, large and small, set the benchmark for high retailing standards within the industry which others can only aspire to. The Association can state, proudly, that it represents the leading garden centres within the UK and worldwide as part of its membership of the International Garden Centre Association (IGCA).

The Garden Centre Association

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What does the Association offer to its Members?

- **Annual Inspections** are carried out by independent industry experts at all GCA member centres. They are carried out in spring - between March and June - and the inspector's visit is unannounced. Upon arrival at your centre the inspector will make him/her-self known and then continue to assess every department within the centre, awarding marks as they go. The overall pass mark is 50% and a further stipulation is that the plant departments must have also scored over 50% within that overall score to secure a 'pass'.

At the end of the inspection the inspector will spend approximately 45 minutes with the members of the team that you wish to include to give them detailed feedback from the visit. A full report will be available for you to view online, together with a link to download photographs, within a few days of the visit.

The annual inspection scores are used to determine a number of awards, both at area level and national level, which are presented at the conference in January. These include the prestigious 'Local Garden Centre of the Year', 'Garden Centre of the Year' and 'Destination Garden Centre of the Year' titles.

Note: the first 'membership inspection' (equivalent to an annual inspection) which must be passed prior to membership approval, is by appointment, not unannounced, to ensure that the key management team are available on the day. Membership Inspections are not included in the awards process.

- **GCA GROW** Garden Retail Online Workshops - is the GCA's e-learning initiative and is available to all GCA members. The initial cost for joining GROW is just £500 plus VAT with a further £100 per additional garden centre for those groups with multiple sites. There is then an annual fee of £250 per million pounds (or part thereof) turnover of the business which covers maintenance and development costs.

The system is available to all GCA members and owned by the GCA itself. GROW is accessible 24/7 via the internet, to all staff at participating centres, and trained in-house administrators are able to manage and report on the learning progress of your staff through a simple administration process. Considered as one of the most comprehensive training systems in our industry, the courses on GROW (which are designed to be completed in 20-25 minutes), have been written specifically with garden centre retailing in mind. With subjects including plants, gardening products, pest and disease control, and peat-free gardening, as well as our comprehensive and bespoke Customer Service package, accredited Health & Safety and Food Hygiene (levels 1 and 2), and Human Resources, such as Mental Health and Wellbeing and Sexual Harassment, there is a course for everyone. The cost savings achieved by using GCA GROW for compliance training alone, as opposed to conventional methods, will more than justify the subscription.

- **GCA Conference** is held each year at the end of January. The annual GCA Conference attracts 300+ delegates. The conference is an opportunity to meet owners and senior management of member centres and suppliers (Associate Members), over a 3-day period. The programme includes a number of high profile and a diverse range of speakers, covering not only garden centre retailing and improving our standards but the wider retail landscape and subjects such as catering, the economy, innovation, effective team building, human resources and key business issues of the day. You are guaranteed to leave the conference having been inspired and motivated for the season ahead!
- **Summer Workshops/Study Tours** are organised from time to time. In 2016 the GCA launched its 'Plant Area Forum' an event held to bring together plant managers and buyers to enable them to discuss best practice, discover new ideas and opportunities whilst learning from each other's successes.



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- **Barometer of Trade** gives members the opportunity to compare and benchmark their monthly sales performance. To participate fully, you can request login details which enable you to input your sales figures each month and then compare them to all the other participating centres individually or by product or by turnover band. You can view the current summary report online at any time. The summaries updated on the 20th of each month.
- **Area Group Meetings** are organised on a regular basis by your Area Chairman (who also sits on the Executive Committee) and they are open to all members and you can choose to attend other area group meetings if you wish. Do not hesitate to contact the GCA Office if you would like to attend a meeting prior to joining the Association. There are 4 areas; North, East, South East and Midlands.
- **GCA Website** is available to members through log in. The area of the website visible to the public explains the advantages of visiting a GCA centre to customers and has a search facility to help them find their nearest garden centre and a link to your website. The members' pages include calendars of events as well as access to inspection information and the Barometer of Trade plus details of the annual conference.
- **WhatsApp Community replaces GCA Exchange** GCA now use WhatsApp to communicate with full members and cover various topics; information about meetings, relevant events and press coverage is also posted here. It is a completely free service; all you need to do is contact the GCA Office and ask to join in.
- **Publications** such as the Directory of Members and the Best of British Magazine are produced annually. The directory is the members' 'bible' with details of all members (garden centres and suppliers) and other useful information. The Best of British magazine is available at the GCA Conference and subsequently is mailed to all members. It showcases the winners of the annual GCA awards and features highlights and innovations from the inspectors' visits the previous spring.
- **Display items** provided include membership boards (physical and digital artwork) to promote your membership of the GCA in your centre and reinforce your quality and expertise.
- **International Garden Centre Association (IGCA)** membership is an automatic benefit of GCA membership. 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.
- **Insurance packages** are available to members via one of our Associate Members; they are tailored to the needs of each individual business at competitive rates.
- **Reduced rate subscription** to Horticulture Week.
- **Gardenforum** is 'The Information Hub for Garden Retail' and as a GCA member you receive free registration and free annual subscription, for as many of your team as you wish.
- **FORUM OF PRIVATE BUSINESS (FPB)**
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. As a GCA member you receive a 25% discount on full FPB membership. FPB would be on hand to help you join, which would include how to work out holiday entitlement, signpost to a resource like business debt line or gov.uk and supply a template on how to manage your fire risk assessment etc.
- **Associate members** offer a wide range of products and services. There are approximately 185 suppliers and service providers that are GCA members.



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- **GCA Trust** is a charity which provides grants and bursaries to students studying horticulture/garden centre retail. The Dick Allen Award is available to a member of staff from a GCA centre to attend the IGCA Congress.

What does it Cost?

There is an annual membership fee, due each January. There are two levels of membership; full and subsidiary. Full membership is for a single site or the first centre from a group. Subsidiary membership is for second and subsequent group centres. The annual membership includes your inspection fee. For your initial application, there is an inspection fee element which is non-refundable. The cost of your initial membership will be pro-rata, depending upon the time of year your application for membership is made:

Applications received before and approved at:-

- March Executive Committee meeting – full year's fee (current year)
- June Executive Committee meeting – inspection fee plus half of the balance of the annual fee (current year)
- September Executive Committee meeting – inspection fee plus half of the balance of the annual fee (current year)
- November Executive Committee meeting – full year's fee (following year). However, there will be an additional inspection fee due the following January to enable your centre to be inspected in spring.

How to Apply

Applications are welcome from any company that has at least 12 months trading history and feel able to meet the initial inspection standards. Applicants are invited to discuss joining the GCA with a current member or the GCA Office. The completed application form, together with payment for the appropriate membership and joining fee, should be sent to the GCA office. An inspection will be arranged to enable your application to be placed before the Executive Committee, for approval, at the next scheduled meeting.



Membership Fees 2026

Full Member

	<u>Full Year</u>	<u>Half Year</u>
Inspection fee	£495.00	£495.00
Balance of membership fee	£655.00	£328.00
Total	£1150.00	£823.00

Subsidiary Member

	<u>Full Year</u>	<u>Half Year</u>
Inspection fee	£495.00	£495.00
Balance of membership fee	£430.00	£215.00
Total	£925.00	£710.00

The membership fee applicable depends upon when you apply to join and when your membership inspection is completed (see above). The application will be presented to the next Executive Committee meeting for approval.

- Full fee: March and November* meetings (*additional inspection fee only due following year)
- Half Year: June and September meetings

Once you have become a member, each subsequent year of membership runs from January 1st to December 31st.

The membership fee for each calendar year is determined, annually, at the Association's AGM in January.

The initial membership fee has to be paid at the time of application. Once approved, all invoices issued to members are due within 30 days of the date of invoice.

If at any time in the future you wish to resign your membership, this must be done in writing to the Chief Executive by 30th November in the year prior to renewal, otherwise the following year's subscription, at the rate set at the AGM, will become due and your membership will continue for a further year.

The above fees do not include VAT, which will be applied at the current rate

By joining the Garden Centre Association, you agree to the terms and conditions and any variation in the future, as published on our website.



Requirements & Responsibilities of Membership

When you join the Association, you become part of more than just another trade association. You will be a member of a group of garden centre operators who believe there is more to be achieved by co-operation and working together than an individual centre can achieve by working in isolation.

The Association is constantly seeking ways by which this co-operation can be developed to the advantage of members. As a result, we move with the times and move quickly in a variety of ways designed to help members improve their businesses and exchange financial and management statistics.

Participation in the various activities is encouraged but it is not compulsory.

Responsibilities

- a) To support the aims and objectives of the Association with particular emphasis on achieving, maintaining and improving standards.
- b) To offer a minimum of one year guarantee of container grown, hardy plants.
- c) To welcome and allow other members to visit and look around your centre.

General requirements for membership

- a) Membership is open to any person, firm or corporation being:
 - i. The owner or operator of one or more garden centres, which comply with the standards determined by the Executive Committee.
 - ii. The company needs to have been trading for at least 12 months
 - iii. A member of the Horticultural Trades Association.
- b) Members must offer to the public at the appropriate season throughout the year:
 - i. A comprehensive range of good quality garden and houseplants. All plants should be suitably labelled, displayed, well maintained and available for immediate sale.
 - ii. A wide range of garden equipment and sundries.
- c) All members must operate and display a plant guarantee not less favourable than the following:

“Members of the Garden Centre Association guarantee the free replacement or credit of any container-grown hardy plant which dies, providing it has received reasonable care, bears the member’s garden centre label and is presented for examination with proof of purchase within one year”
- d) Staff must be sufficient in number and adequately skilled to provide a good service to the public and must include trained horticulturists.

Minimum areas and facilities

The minimum area for each section of the garden centre should normally be as follows:

- a) 100m² of internal sales and display area of which an appropriate proportion is devoted to the sale of houseplants.
- b) 500m² devoted to hardy plants, entirely, to be available for immediate sale.
- c) 50m² of sales area for garden sundries and garden accessories, such as pots and containers.
- d) Garden centres should have adequate adjacent parking.

Note: Flexibility is allowed in the above, particularly in built-up areas, as long as quality and standards are high.



Application for membership

Applicants must complete an application form and return it, together with a remittance for the full membership fee. The inspection fee element is non-refundable. The premises of new applicants for membership shall be subject to a visit by an inspector authorised by the Executive Committee. The Inspector will book an appointment to complete the initial 'membership inspection'. Subject to a satisfactory inspection (the current pass mark is 50%) and subsequent approval by the Executive Committee, applicants will be invited to become members.

Annual Subscriptions

In order to provide funds for the activities of the Association, a membership fee will be required from members, this is reviewed annually. Companies joining part way through the year pay a pro-rata fee. The rate is determined by the timing of the submission of the application for membership to the GCA Executive Committee. Membership fees in subsequent years are due for renewal in January. Where more than one establishment is owned by a person or company, the first centre is the 'Full Member' and the second and subsequent centres are 'Subsidiary Members'. See Membership fees, above.

Visits and inspections

- a) Member garden centres receive annual inspections and the inspection report is available online within a few days of the inspection taking place together with a link to the photographs, taken by the inspector, that form part of the report.
- b) A member garden centre will be given a minimum of four weeks' notice by the GCA of the exact dates of the 'inspection window'. The inspection window will fall in the months of March to June, under usual circumstances and the inspection will take place during normal business hours. (Membership inspections can be arranged throughout the year, not just within this window).
- c) The actual date and time of the inspection will not be given beforehand and the inspector will make an unannounced visit. The inspector will make himself/herself known upon arrival at the centre prior to undertaking the inspection.
- d) If a member's garden centre is considered at any time to fall below the minimum standards required with a score less than 50%, the member will be notified in writing with a view to helping him or her rectify any failure. The Committee has the right to withdraw membership if failures are not rectified within three months of notification.
- e) If a member's plant area should fail to reach the required pass mark of 50%, regardless of whether the overall centre mark exceeds 50%, they will be notified in writing with a view to help them rectify any failure; should they continue to fail in that department the Committee reserves the right to withdraw membership.

Withdrawal of GCA logo and display materials

Upon cessation of membership for any reason, the garden centre concerned will no longer use the name or logo of the Association, in any form whether electronic or physical (This includes, for example, stationery, advertisements, websites, social media and material within the centre) or for any other purpose. Access to all member benefits will be withdrawn (This includes, for example, the Barometer of Trade, the GCA Exchange and GCA GROW).