

JEKKA MCVICAR, VMH: The UK's Doyenne Of Herbs

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I first saw one of Jekka McVicar's herb gardens at BBC Gardener's World in the mid 90s and was impressed by the artistic way she designed her display using only herbs. The overall effect was colourful, attractive to wildlife – particularly pollinators – fragrant, and edible. Since 1991, Jekka supported by her husband Ian (known as Mac), has exhibited at numerous RHS and local flower shows winning an impressive 62 RHS Gold Medals. In 2009, her Chelsea exhibit won the RHS Lawrence Medal for the best floral exhibit shown that year which was the first time Herbs and Organic plants certified by the Soil Association had been so recognised. Further awards were presented to her. In 2017, Jekka received the prestigious Victoria Medal of Honour (VMH) awarded for her services to Horticulture; she was also made a Vice President of the RHS.

As a 17-year-old, growing up in the Somerset village of Chew Magna, Jekka's interests were focused on the music industry rather than anything to do with horticulture. Having joined prog-rock band, Marsupilami, as a singer and flautist, Jekka appeared on the same bill as Bob Dylan at the Isle of Wight Festival and performed at the first ever Glastonbury Festival in 1970. However, in 1971, Jekka's

career took a different path when she went to work for the BBC drama department in London. Her experience gained in early video technology then took her to Bristol where she started a video unit for Bristol Police. Having taken on a job which required physical stamina – sometimes having to hang upside down out of a helicopter to monitor traffic flow or being strapped to the back of a motorbike with a camera – this became difficult when she was expecting her first baby, Hannah. With maternity cover not an option in the early 80s, she decided it was time to try something completely different.



RHS Chelsea 2009

