Edith: Maggie's Podcast. Giving you so much more than medicine.

Thanks for listening to this Maggie's Podcast. Each episode in this series will focus on a different aspect of living well with cancer, whether it's the food you eat, the buildings you spend time in or the people around you, they're here to make you laugh, talk and think.

This episode is all about gardens and gardening.

\{Garden birdsong\}

Kirsty: Get yourself a cup of tea or a cup of coffee and come into the garden with me, Kirsty Wark.

Peter: There's plenty of weeding to do here. You're quite welcome if you've got a spare half hour \{laughs\}.

Kirsty: My first visit to Maggie's was a revelation. I know the garden, probably, at Glasgow Gartnavel best, but I do love the one in Edinburgh Maggie's Centre. The Glasgow Gartnavel one – I don't know if they're beeches but what – oh I'm not sure what they are, actually – but when you see them waving in the wind, they're just so beautiful on the windows, outside the windows. They give a real sense of enclosure. They have inhabited the Maggie's Centre area.

Karen: A welcoming garden makes a huge difference to people coming into the centre. It says, "We value you, because we have this gorgeous garden for you." Because it's a difficult thing, especially for your first time, to actually get through those doors.

My name is Karen Laing and I've been looking after the Maggie's garden in Edinburgh for three years and I also look after the one at Gartnavel.

Being able to sort of slowly make your way through a beautiful garden that says, "It's ok. This is lovely." You can stop and you can sort of look at the plants for a wee bit and pause for a moment and not have to, you know, stride in there.

I think that's one of the things that I've noticed with people when they come into the Maggie's Centres, they do that; their shoulders go down, they go \{big sigh\}.

\{Music in the background: Tiptoe (Instrumental) – Yeyey\}

Kirsty: The first thing I do when I get up in the morning is go and stand in the garden and see what's happened overnight. Gardens make many of us just feel a bit better.

Jimmy: I love the garden.

Karen: I actually like not to use the word 'therapeutic' when it comes to gardens because it's almost like you have to actively seek therapy from your garden. Gardens are just enriching to the human soul. There you go! It's as simple as that.

Frances: I always think a garden is like the soul of a house. You're walking through a space that just uplifts you.

Jimmy: And there's some place to sit out and relax as well when it's a gert nice day.
Frances: It sort of lifts your spirit which is very difficult to define.

Karen: Whether or not it's a conscious thing, gardens give to people all the time.

Kirsty: My garden has taught me patience. I am, unfortunately, rather an impatient person, but you cannot rush plants. There's nothing you can do. Of course you can put them in the greenhouse and bring them on but, by and large, when you stand and look at your garden, you cannot hurry what's happening.

Frances: It's a nice place to come before and after treatment to calm down.

Kirsty: There's so many passionate and dedicated volunteers. Maggie's would be nothing without them, and it's actually in springtime that many of the gardening groups get back out and get dug in.

Steph: We're in Maggie's Cancer Centre in Swansea.

Ross: I've always seen this place but I've never actually known what it is, but now I do.

Steph: It's just nice to get away from the hospital.

Ross: I'm Ross.

Steph: {Laughing} I'm Steph.

Peter: Hello [Mo]!

Brian: How the devil are you?

Peter: Nice to (see) you. Yes, see I've been missing, haven't I?

Brian: You've been missing me!

Peter: They said you've been in Florida for three months.

Brian: No, I'm going May. Can't get rid of me!

Peter: You look as though you been there and...

Brian: That's gardening!

Peter: He's a fibber. He's a fibber! {Both laughing} Let's see what Roger's up to!

Brian: I'll see you later!

Peter: See you in a minute.

Kirsty: There's something rather special about volunteering in the garden.

Peter: Roger runs the whole garden group.

Roger: We meet once a week on Wednesday afternoon.

Peter: Lot of new recruits. Are you alright, Caroline?
Caroline: Yes. I've not seen you since last year.

Peter: Is it that long ago? Eh?

Roger: Plant potatoes or sow peas?

Peter: Something nice and easy. Potatoes sound a bit... a bit of a back breaker.

Roger: A bit energetic, isn't it? (Both laughing)

{Music in the background: Tiptoe (Instrumental) – Yeyey}

Kirsty: I love just sitting in the garden, in which I do have a couple of old benches. I follow the sun round the garden and drag the benches round. And a garden, to me, is a place of kind of joy and comfort and relaxation.

My mother, particularly, is very green-fingered. My family were part of the same tomato-growing business – they had a soft fruit farm as well. So, I've got a few suggestions on what you might want to grow if you want scent, if you want butterflies, if you want colour and if you want plants that would give real pleasure.

My brother and I were both given a little patch and we were given nasturtiums. That was the easiest thing to grow. You know, use your dibble, put your nasturtium in, cover it over, and then you had this beautiful, beautiful display. One of the great things about nasturtiums is that they are prolific but they make any kind of straight-forward green salad look rather lovely. They're all edible. You can also put them on top of cakes when you've baked. So I think nasturtium is the all round, joyous, optimistic, summer flower.

Karen: There's a lot of optimism in gardening but not in a heavy way.

Frances: That's broad beans, I think.

Kate: I don't know. I don't know what those are.

Frances: Those are broad beans.

Roger: Our first lot got eaten by mice.

Kate: I put in some beetroot in some seeds last week but I can't see anything's come up, but we've got some others that were planted in trays so we're hedging our bets.

Frances: Yeah, they're over there. Do you see them over there?

Karen: It can just be the simple fact that the garden's there and, for some reason, you feel better and you don't know why.

{Background sounds of bird song, hum of bees} Whether it's the smell of the plants, the rustle of the leaves, looking at nature on that flower, watching the bumble bees go into the flower, all those little things going through a garden have a life-affirming, life-enriching value.

And, just now, you know, it's springtime and we've got all those yellow daffodils and the forsythia just smiling out at us. So, even though it's a grey day, you know, they're just glowing out and cheering us up.
Kirsty: The main thing that I love growing for the early part of the year is hellebores. You know, I've got black ones, I've got lavender-colour ones, I've got white ones, I've got pink ones. My taste just runs to riot. I don't necessarily want a blue garden or a yellow garden or an orange garden. I love a colour-full garden, you know, crazy clashing colours. So I'll have nasturtiums of all shades and a black-eyed Susan. I mean, a black-eyed Susan, I really like, and I'll have a wonderful, lime nicotiana which is a beautiful, beautiful plant, and I'll have them all together.

My mother would be horrified by my sort of slapdash nature of gardening, I think, but I'm a gardener who weeds quite a lot, who has to deal with the fact that I've got two Labradors who use the garden for another reason. And, actually, it's not as productive sometimes as I wish it to be.

Peter: Coming here, I've become the allotment man. I tend to be the digging and planting of the onions and potatoes or whatever.

Roger: Peter reckons that he does the hard graft (both laughing).

Peter: I mean this is why I like to come back here at the beginning of each season to get back into it.

I'm Peter. I joined the gardening group after I lost my wife. She had breast cancer. It was not the vicious type but, after several years, that was one reason for coming down here – I took redundancy and we moved here 8 years ago really to enjoy the time and being by the sea.

And, of course, the gardening group, you're all in a similar situation. Before we start work, you might sit and have a cup of coffee and you're just chatting to someone who you've just said hello to, but you can get a lot of help, but you can also contribute to other people's problems.

Frances: Right. What do you want to grow? Are you having these? I'll put the broccoli in then.

Karen: No pressure! There is no pressure for anything. If you want to come in and say, "I'm falling apart and my life is falling apart and I can't cope!" You can say that but, you know, if you just want to be somewhere where you know that people understand that and you never, ever have to say that out loud, you can come here as well.

(Background music: Tiptoe (Instrumental) – Veyey)

Peter: You can be weeding and you're chatting to someone who's standing by the wheelbarrow. You're not actually looking them in the eye, but you can say, "And what was your problem yesterday?" That sort of thing. And you do carry on the conversation.

You're more open, I think, with discussing life.

Kirsty: For me, a garden is a meditation on life. And it's about living, you know, because it's not that a plant dies at the end of the year, it goes back into itself in order to come out the next year.

Lily: Being in a garden, you know, it actively can connect us with something larger than ourselves. I think that's a very powerful experience. The dynamics of a day or a season, just watching the garden evolve. Particularly, I think, time is a massive part of it because of how things change.
I'm Lily Jencks and my mother was Maggie Keswick who started the cancer caring centres with my father, Charles Jencks, as a place that could help deal with some of the issues that she found herself facing while having cancer treatment.

Gardens are full of both life and death and that can be quite reassuring when you're so aware of that yourself. Things feel so much more urgent and raw, in some senses, and so the colour of a Japanese acer is super bright, you know? (Sound of light rain) The smell of the daffodils and the first rain is wonderful.

Her idea was to have a place for all kinds of... a support, a network, a place apart from the hospital.

Karen: Very much when Maggie, herself, got that diagnosis, she was given this horrible news and had to go and sit in a bleak window-less corridor.

Lily: I remember her telling me, "Why isn't there somewhere where I can just shut the door and scream because that's what I really need to do! And then cry a lot and then go back and face my family!" Because that's what people have to do, it's facing their young children and trying to put on a strong face for them or facing their husband who's falling apart outside.

Karen: What she wanted to give to everybody else was somewhere where they could go, where they could feel at home, but also where there were windows where they could look out and watch the birds and look at nature. And it's amazing how decompressing that is. It just happens.

Frances: This garden – the garden at Maggie's – it's quite a nice refuge, really. And the building is beautiful. It's sort of a sheltered place and, in the summer, people sit out in the sun over there. There's a beautiful view across the bay... really lovely.

Karen: If nothing else, if she couldn't give them a garden, she wanted to give them a view, even if it's just trees or clouds or bees.

Steph: We've got the beach just right outside. So, from the end, all the way around, is just Mumbles Bay. So, even in the winter, it's nice.

Lily: They did the blueprints for the first Maggie's Centre which opened in Edinburgh after she died, but she died with the blueprints on her lap.

John: What's the day today, then?

Kevin: 13th.

John: Is it the 13th?

Kevin: Yes.

Lily: When the centre opened, it became so clear that this could be really helpful for other oncology units around the country, eventually, and she didn't know that they would be so well enjoyed or well used. She didn't know they would be so successful and that there would be so many of them. She really thought this would be one centre just beyond the hospital oncology unit.

John: I'm no slave to grass.

Kevin: No, nor me.
John: Concrete it would be better! *(Both laughing)* Concrete!!

My name's John and I've had bowel cancer and now I've got an ileostomy.

Kevin: I've had prostate cancer. I'm Kevin.

John: Yeah, we met through Maggie's and we watch the birds, I mean, the birds are back and fore.

Kevin: Yeah, the squirrels.

John: I don't know whether it's a nuthatch. I've seen a few of them there and they're not shy or anything which is unusual for them. They come to see all the people in Maggie's I suppose *(laughs)*. Did you see the timber boxes with plants in? Did you see 'em?

Kevin: Boxes? Wooden boxes?

John: And that one up there. See that bird box on the tree? That's what I do. Bird boxes. The Friends of Maggie's sell them for me. The money goes for Maggie's. Well, since I've been doing my bird boxes and bird stands, and things like that, I've lost all interest in the garden. I'm building sheds all over my garden at the moment *(both laughing)*.

Kevin: Same as me!

*(Background music: Tiptoe (Instrumental) – Yeyey)*

Kirsty: The thing is about Maggie's is, you know, we get no money from anywhere else. So many of our supporters are incredibly generous. If you'd like to give something, no matter how little, no matter how big, then visit maggiescentres.org.

Lily: My mother was very interested in the intimacy you get in gardens and her book, *The Chinese Garden*, I took that book with me travelling around Suzhou and Hangzhou. Those are really wonderful places when you can get there and they're not completely overrun. They pack a punch in a very small space. They're very rich and complex in tiny courtyards.

If you have a small space, you want to make it seem bigger, put a wall in the middle of it. And put a window in the wall and then you see across the wall and then it looks, "Oh, there's another space beyond!" Never allow the viewer to see the edge, the definitive edge of something. Boundaries and edges are always smudged with rocks or planting, cloud-like, billowing rock forms just amplifying the experience in a very small space, bringing the whole of the universe into that small scale. So the ponds are representing the oceans. The rock formations represent the mountains. There is much richer metaphor.

Meandering paths are all over Chinese gardens, walking round edges and to get to the pavilion in the distance you have to walk a very circuitous route rather than the straightforward answer *(laughs)*.

*(Music: Sweet and Clean – Podington Bear)*

Ginny: Maggie's garden is my special garden. My first impression is the big tree – a most beautiful pine tree with a superb trunk. It gives me strength.

My name is Ginny Ring. I had breast cancer in 1998 and felt that that was it, I'd said goodbye to cancer. In 2012 I had cancer in another breast and an MRI on my back found that I had cancer in my spine and pelvis, but I'm living my life to the full.
I can lose myself in the garden. I feel completely calm. Somehow every season, the different flowers come up, it's just a joy to see how it blossoms.

I do think about my cancer. I can't say that it takes me completely away, but {sigh} it just gives me {sigh}... it's very funny really. I can think about the cancer in a calm way and it doesn't worry me. It's a funny sort of feeling.

Karen: One of the things that gardening offers is a total distraction from other things around. So, suddenly, without actively trying to, you remove yourself from your problems and issues of daily life.

Frances: Pricking out we are...

Kate: Yup.

Karen: For me, personally, being in the garden, all the pressures, they disappear because suddenly I'm absorbed by picking out these weeds or saying hello and thank you to the millions of worms in the garden for making the soil richer. And then you might see a little robin come in looking for that worm.

Kate: Gotcha.

Karen: You almost get found in it. That's the interesting thing. I think, yes, you get lost in it but maybe you find yourself, you find the moment, you find the present. I mean so much we talk about mindfulness these days, I'm sort of connected with life in a completely unselfconscious way.

Kate: Spinach, this is.

Karen: You know, I don't meditate. I garden.

Lily: It's a whole different way. Gardening's a whole different way of being in the world. It's the inverse of efficiency in a hygienic hospital, getting your fingers dirty and the microbes in the soil, those calm moments and, hopefully, some of the joyfulness.

Frances: Been in the soil, got my hands dirty and now the sun's out now.

*(Background music: Sweet and Clean – Podington Bear)*

Ian: I enjoy the whole of my garden at different times of the year. A little copse at the top of the garden is full of primroses and wild flowers which are all in colour in the spring. In the winter, at Christmas, I have some flowering trees nearer the house which are rather nice.

Karen: It's a wonderful quote... um, I think it's by Audrey Hepburn, actually, and it's, "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."

Ian: You get the bats flying above, the buzzards flying above...

Karen: But I think I'd also qualify that, "It's also to believe in today," because you're very much doing something in the moment.

Ian: It's somewhere where you can really channel your thoughts into the now and you can get some deep enjoyment out of it.

Lily: Take time... Slow down...
Maggie: It's good to be doing something practical and to be doing something physical in however limited a way.

Karen: Coming out into the garden, doing things in it can be physically good for you in terms of your manual dexterity and your ability just to be working gently. But, again, to me, that's just a mindful meditation.

Ian: My father was a market gardener's labourer when I was born and my mother worked on the ground as well.

My name's Ian. I was in the police force for 30 years. I finished up as a detective superintendent on murder investigation.

With my cancer, it's just... When I've taken my tablets first thing in the morning, then I can have two or three hours in the garden, I get deep satisfaction and joy out of just mowing a lawn nicely, clearing the borders out. I can just look at the compost heap and think, "Well, that whole heap needs turning and that'll take an hour to do so."

It takes your mind away.

Kirsty: {Sound of bees humming and birdsong} My garden is very personal and I am kind of shamed by the expertise of previous generations. In the Clyde valley, my Aunt Anna used to have grapes, vines all over her greenhouse.

I'm not a great edger, although I like an edge, but I can't find my edges right now. So, either myself or my husband, we Flymo, and when I moved in there... when we moved in as a family, it was completely overgrown and what we did was we cut a lot of things back. We kept an ornamental quince. We kept beautiful dog roses on the back wall and we kept a really rather lovely laurel tree, but the rest we pulled out and I have now put in some beautiful old stones from the Broomielaw where the trams used to run along the Clyde. It's now where the cars are, but I'm old enough to remember when the trams did run along the Clyde. So it's a rather lovely memory to have that I have got part of that in my garden.

Maggie: When we first moved into the house, there was a horrible area of decking which had rat runs underneath it. So my partner ripped up the decking with a crowbar and she made up a series of raised beds, not knowing in advance how useful it would be.

My name's Maggie. Because of the myeloma and the treatment for the myeloma, my energy levels, generally, are very low. I can't walk very far, but because we've got raised beds with various different plantings – herbs and perennials and bulbs, and so on – we're actually able now, still, to get out and do bits of work in the garden.

It's not a whole afternoon at a time. It might be five or ten minutes at a time now, but I can sit on a crate by a raised bed and do a bit of weeding for five or ten minutes and then kick the crate along a bit and do a little bit more. It's still precious and valuable to be able to do that.

And it's rewarding because you do a little bit of deadheading and tidying, you plant some bulbs, you look forward to seeing what happens. {Sound of light rain} You get a shower of rain and you see the next group of buds coming out on the flowers. You see the next little geranium starting to shoot new leaves in the spring and there's a reward from seeing that, that doesn't relate exactly to the time that you spend doing the work because you might only spend a few minutes here and there. Days and weeks later, even, and you look back and think, "Oh, I can remember tidying that up and it was worth the effort. It looks good!"

You feel you're really doing something and that you don't feel that you need waiting on or looking after to do it. I think that's part of the thing. When you have a lot of fatigue, there's
a terrible tendency for people to think that you need to be run round after a lot and, very often, that's not the case. You need to be able to do your own thing but very much in your own time and I think that's something that gardening allows you to do. You can take your time with it. You can work at your own pace and you can work independently, which I think is important.

Karen: Some of the people that come to the garden, when I'm gardening in the garden, like to come in the garden and be with me when I'm gardening because they're actually quite keen gardeners themselves and, while going through treatment for cancer, their own garden becomes an enormous pressure; another of the many things sort of crowding around them because, physically, they're not able to look after their own garden but, yet, gardening is such an important part of who they are or what they do.

So coming to somewhere where they can still enjoy conversation about gardening, not feel the pressure of all those jobs that they need to do that they actually can't do and, therefore, that makes them have to confront the limitations of the situation they're in at that given time, they can sort of be allowed to be themselves without either having to be in a clinical situation and having to face all those things or isolated, maybe at home, and thinking, "Well, now I should just cope with all my other life," and, actually, you don't have to cope with any of it on your own.

Frances: Last year, while I was having radiotherapy, 10 weeks after I'd finished, I got this infection and shingles because my immune system was all down. So this is the first time I've been in the garden since then [laughs] because it's not excessive exercise and you can monitor yourself while you're doing it.

My name's Frances. I've lived my life in a white coat for 40 years. I am a scientist [laughs].

I'm glad I'm back. It's nice to do something outdoors.

Kate: The tea break!

Roger: The most important time for the gardening group...

Kate: Are you having a tea? There's always a nice biscuit that somebody's donated.

Geoff: My names Geoff Jones. I've been coming to Maggie's for about nine months, I guess, and Kate helps out in the garden. I wasn't all that keen to come, to be honest. She persuaded me to come and she's got to know some of the people in the... the wives of the guys who go to the prostate cancer group.

Kate: The Nearest and Dearest Club. We don't like 'Carers Group' because it sounds as if our husbands need constant care. Some of them do and some of them don't, but nearest and dearest is what we are and they are.

Coming to Maggie's has been a major part of coping and dealing with what's happened for him, what's happened to him and, for me, what's happened to us, you know.

Geoff: We had a big house and it was too big for us now our son has left, and we like Swansea. So we moved now to somewhere where we can walk to anything and, by a happy coincidence in some ways, when I moved down here, I discovered I had prostate cancer.

I got a diagnosis because, when one changes doctors, they do a check on you and the guy said, "Well, we'll do a blood test." And he got a blood test and when it came back, he said, "Ah, I think you'd better go and see a specialist." So it went from there, really.
I had chemotherapy earlier on but that's over, finished, and so I'm just seeing what happens.

Kate: I'm glad to say either he's doing very well at the moment, his treatment has been very good and so there's more to life than cancer. The cancer, for a while, takes over your life and, sadly, for some people, it's taking over more and more but if, as in my husband's case, he's responded very well to the treatment. Yeah, he's got cancer and he'll always have it, but there's ways of living well with cancer and Maggie's is part of that and shows you, you know, how you can put up with it, live with it and even learn from it and, you know, make friends and get new experiences.

Kirsty: {Music – Tiptoe (Instrumental) Veyey} To find out how Maggie's Centres help people to live well with cancer, please do visit maggiescentres.org.

If you want plants that would give real pleasure, sweet peas are the main things to grow for scent. My mother used to grow sweet peas and always taught me that the more you cut, the more came, and old roses. I think they give the best perfume.

My Aunt Anna used to have beautiful displays of roses. I used to be given a jam jar and I used to go round my Aunt Anna's garden picking up petals, all sorts of different... and jam them as far as I could into the jam jar, and then add water. And you just leave it for two or three days and you get this beautiful rose water that I used to put on my face {laughs}. {Music} But you can't leave it for more than two or three days or it goes a bit mouldy, but actually it's lovely even for, you know, sprinkling on ironing as well.

And I've got lavender because I want to have bees. I put a buddleia in which I actually don't think a buddleia's that attractive a tree, but it means I get butterflies. Otherwise I wouldn't have a buddleia in the garden. And I love growing tomatoes, partly because my great grandparents were tomato growers.

Caroline: Peas! I think.

Roger: Pea Misty.

Caroline: Pea Misty.

Peter: So it's an early garden pea.

I suppose the best time is when the produce is ready to pick and we can all enjoy it. I mean, a lot of it, obviously, is given to patients and family and friends, but it is nice to taste your labours throughout the year.

Frances: What's mesclun?

Kate: Ooh, I'll have a bit.

Frances: Oh, salad leaves, ok. Is it like rocket?

Kate: Mm, it tastes like rocket. It's delicious.

Kirsty: I've got a herb box which I replenish a lot. I've got lemon verbena, parsley, mint, oregano and I must put marjoram in. And I actually had a rosemary hedge on both sides of the front door, quite a large hedge – all the neighbours would just take a quick, surreptitious clipping on the way past to put in their lamb or whatever they were making, but then it started to become very spindly and woody. Now I just have one rosemary plant at the back, but I have a lot of chives.
I transferred my sage plant the other week. I absolutely love cooking with sage. What you do is you heat butter in a pan to quite a high degree. You put your sage in until it crisps up. Then you take it out and then that, with pasta, lemon and some parmesan, with the sage sprinkled on it, makes a delicious dinner.

Roger: Frances, a lettuce?

Frances: Yeah, lovely. Do you want one?

Kate: Ooh, yes, I wouldn't mind one.

Roger: There you go. Right, I think that's everything.

(Sound of packing up, people leaving)

Will we see you Wednesday week, then?

Roger: Yes. Wednesday week, yes.

I just want to say thank you very much... thank you...

Sarah: I'll see you next week, Caroline.

Caroline: Yes, I'll be here.

Sarah: OK, bye!

(Music)

Edith: Thank you for listening to this Maggie's podcast which was produced by Loftus Media for Maggie's.

We hope it gives you a taste of just some of the support we offer in our centres. Maggie's Centres support anyone living with cancer, including families and friends, and it's all totally free of charge.

For more information or to listen to other episodes in this series, go to maggiescentres.org.

Maggie's Podcast. Giving you so much more than medicine.