

EASTON COMMUNITY GARDEN

INDUCTION

The garden was begun in 2001 by a group of permaculturalists based at the Easton Community Centre. The site is owned by Bristol City Council and was originally mostly waste ground. The Council fenced it in and charge rent at the annual rate for 3 allotments. This has been adjusted to be slightly less as there is no running water supply.

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GARDEN

1) Permaculture

This is a fundamental design system which can be applied to all aspects of human interaction with our earthly environments. You can read about the theories and practices for yourselves, but here is a brief summary of the principles as applied to our Community Garden.

It is basically aimed at the sustainability of growing food in relation to the earth, water and nature of the crops grown. "A philosophy of working with, rather than against, nature". Bill Mollison.

a) Water: As we have no running water at the Garden, as much as possible water is harvested from the rainwater draining from neighbouring garage roofs. As you can see, this is then held in linked containers and transported by hosepipes to other containers around the garden. In dry conditions the water is taken in watering cans to those plants in need. It is often applied through adapted plastic bottles situated directly to the plants root system. This avoids too much evaporation.

- b) SOIL: The soil is our most valuable resource. We look after it in a number of ways. Foremost, the natural ecosystem of the soil is preserved by not digging and disturbing little as possible.
- c) COMPOST: The soil is nurtured by organic composting and feeding. This in turn nurtures and feeds our plants. Our compost primarily consists of the weeds we remove and parts of plants not eaten. Composting happens naturally when these ingredients, after being chopped fairly small, are placed in one of compost bins. The process is speeded up with the addition of air by turning and layering. The compost is then covered to encourage heat caused by microbial activity. The compost serves as a mulch as well as feeding the soil.
- d) COMFREY JUICE LIQUID FEED: This is produced from the leaves of the comfrey plants grown in the marked bed as well as other parts of the garden. The mature leaves are put into the big bin, which is weighted down when full, and gradually give off their juice. We collect and store this in plastic bottles. It is then added to water in the cans and fed to the plants when, and where, necessary. Comfrey juice as a natural fertilizer helps to maintain the organic nature of the plants and the soil.
- e) COMPANION PLANTING & PESTS: Companion planting is the term used for plants that grow better in close proximity, e.g. French marigolds discourage aphids so are useful next to greenhouse tomatoes. Pests such as carrot fly do not like the strong smell of most alliums, such as garlic, which can then be usefully planted close to the carrots. Pests such as greenfly and

blackfly are deterred when necessary by organic sprays using garlic juice, lavender oil and other herbs, although ladybirds also feed on these insects.

Companions may also be used in other ways, such as the famous “three sisters” planting used by indigenous Mexicans. The corn grows tall and the beans climb up the stems, while squash planted beneath benefits from the shade.

- f) POLLINATORS: We grow a variety of flowers, annuals, perennials and shrubs to attract bees and other pollinating insects. They are needed to serve our flowering vegetables and fruit and to help maintain a healthy, biodiverse environment. Our calendula verges are a good example, also benefitting the health and happiness of gardeners.

2) FOOD CROPS

We try to grow as great a variety of food as possible. We follow the seasons aiming to have at least one or two crops to harvest even in winter, and chard can usually be found somewhere in the garden all year round. As well as the annual planting there are fruit trees around the garden and fruit bushes in the fruit cage in season. Most crops are planted in rotation through different beds. Rotation uses the movement of plants by families, e.g. legumes, brassicas, potatoes, alliums and umbellifers etc. The reason for this is to avoid contamination by pests and diseases which are common within each group. We try to rotate in 3 year cycles when possible.

Where practical we save our own seed for planting the following year. We usually save all our own beans and peas, and when there is sufficient we can contribute to the annual seed swap events which take place locally.

When we have to buy fresh seeds and potatoes we try to buy organic as much as possible.

3) BUILDINGS

The main building is our Shelter. This was built with entirely natural materials except for the roof felting. The walls are wattle and daub, with the mud for daubing being taken from our 2 ponds when they were dug out. In 2016 there was a fire and the original compost toilet and shed were burnt down. They were replaced by kind donation of labour and materials by a local company. Money was raised by successful funding applications for both the fruit cage and the greenhouse.

4) ORGANISATION

This year we are re-organising from being an entirely voluntary structure to a Company Limited by Guarantee and existing for charitable purposes only. Our policies, constitution and other matters relating to this can be found online. Currently there are no paid employees. A small team of experienced volunteers are key-holders who open the garden on appropriate days and co-ordinate activities.