

2021-2022 community garden update

1. Overview

2021-2022 has been mixed bag of results. On the one hand, the community garden area has been expanded significantly, allowing more students to join the therapeutic intervention sessions. On the other hand, the dry spring and summer heat waves took a big toll.

Starting with the positives, we have a far larger area with which to work: five new raised beds, a new polycarbonate greenhouse and a multitude of new planters. Taken together, these growing areas allow for a significant increase in the number of plants. Some of these areas will be dedicated to produce whilst others will be used for annual and perennial decorative plants. The new greenhouse likewise provides an invaluable resource, allowing us to prolong the growing season and explore produce otherwise unavailable in the British climate.



And then came the heat waves. By and large, most plants fared fairly well. However, annual produce had to be sacrificed to conserve water. This year's apple harvest also had to be sacrificed; the trees showed a great deal of heat stress and, to conserve the tree's resources, we were forced to pluck the fruits before they ripened. Most disappointing of all were the 100 saplings donated by IDigTrees; almost all failed to

survive with the water stress and water restrictions. However, these losses provide a window for other plants to take their place.



2. Updates on previous fundraising projects

Apple orchard – the trees are shooting up! While the harvest was lost due the extreme weather, the trees continue to put on growth and set themselves up for a fruitful 2023.

Raised beds- the numerous raised beds are all being put to good use. Some remain for growing produce for children to take home while others have been reserved for perennials to attract pollinators to support local wildlife.

Miscellaneous – plants up and down the garden are beginning to come into their own now. We made a deliberate choice to buy smaller plants in larger number and now the rewards are showing: growth is strong and a layering of heights has been achieved.

3. Plans for 2022-2023

With the majority of space now being used, the main focus of this year is growing! Growing more fruit, growing more vegetables and, most importantly, growing more plant sources to support local wildlife. For the 2022-2023 academic year, I have three projects in mind:



3.1 The year of the bat

Summer has always been a popular time in the garden with birds, bees and butterflies are aplenty. This year, I hope to turn our attention to the all too forgotten 'b': bats.

Bats are a cornerstone species in the UK and London is still, for now, lucky to be home to a number of species. However, bats face threats from all angles: light pollution, habitat loss and a lack of suitable feeding sites. It is my goal to celebrate the bat and encourage the community to take as much of a stand on the dangers threatening nocturnal life as we do our diurnal world. There are three ways to do this:

- Create a green wall to cover the shipping container
- Planting night-blooming flowers to attract more moths into the garden
- Create more bat boxes in which to roost.

With the nights now drawing in, we can begin to turn our attention to the nocturnal world. Bat surveys and dusk walks are great way to introduce the community to the darker side life on Earth, to which we rarely give its due.

3.2 Additional space for LSU

There are an increasing number of students requiring and accessing support relating to mental health. The effect of time in the natural world on mental health is well documented and does not re-iterating here. However, it is another goal of mine to

create an additional space specifically for use by the Learning Support Unit. This space will be designed and planned by the LSU.



3.3 Beyond borders

We are running out of room. On the plus side, this means the community garden space has maximised. On the negative, it is creating a squeeze on resources. It is for this reason I am hoping to begin expanding beyond the community garden. How and where remains to be seen. But a small planter here and a rewilded area there across site can make huge difference to our struggling local wildlife.

4. Wildlife update:

This has been a quiet year for wildlife. No new species have been sighted, but a number of less common continue to visit such as greater stag beetles and woodpeckers. Bird song has been disconcertingly quiet this year, perhaps due to the extreme weather and it's knock on effect on nesting. With this in mind, I hope to make this a year of renewed and aggressive action on conservation.

There is a somewhat disturbing number of dead foxes appearing in the garden, four in the space of the year. All the foxes have been of varying ages and show no signs of physical injury. It is perhaps something to keep an eye on.

James Baker 13/09/2022