

Thomas Tallis community garden: 2020-2021

Horticultural update:

2020-2021: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. If you happened to be a slug, the rain made it a great year. If you happen to be anything but a slug, not so much. Wet weather has led to higher loss of crops by predation and disease, but such is the way with organic gardening. Nonetheless, a number of significant gains have been made in the garden with even bigger plans for the coming year.

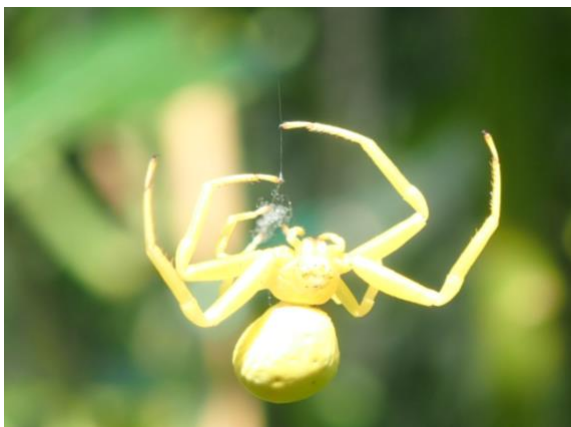


For one, all the apple trees bought with last year's donations have taken!

They have put on a lot of growth this year, reaching around six feet. So, beginning from next year, we may have some apples to start harvesting and juicing! This year's crops have seen more variety, including pumpkins, tatsoi and heritage spinaches all now on the menu. It's also been a fantastic for foraging: rose hips, blackberries and mushrooms have all put out excellent harvest for the picking.

In any effort to reduce watering and avoid a reliance on woodchip, the pathways have been put to use as a growing space for drought tolerant perennials: borage, salvias, thyme, rosemary, lavenders and nettles now fill the pathways surrounding the beds and have led to a surge in pollinator numbers. My teaching timetable has also seen some changes to allow for an increase in garden sessions. Beginning this year, there will be six hour intervention classes ran for children in SEN alongside an after school club which will be open to all. Plans and plots underway to begin running a certified horticultural course for some of these children when they move into years 10 and 11.

Biodiversity update:



The garden has always been two objectives: a place in which children can learn about the natural world and a space for local wildlife. Unfortunately, there appears to be a decrease in some species which I am putting down to the felling of a number of mature trees and ground disturbance from building works in the area. Nonetheless, there have been a number of noteworthy finds this year. In addition to the regular visitors outlined in last year's report, there have been a number of new arrivals:

New arrivals of 2020-2021
Yellow wagtail Hawthorn fly Male lesser stag beetle Green woodpecker

The next year:



Larger plans are afoot. By chance, I happened to find a full 40ft polytunnel lying around in the shipping container. The plan is to build this on top of an area of soil which has been previously damaged and is currently unable to support many plants. The tunnel will be filled with 20 separate raised beds and an overhead irrigation system. This will be where children taking our soon to be offered horticultural BTEC will sow, grow and nurture: their own crops in their own allotted beds.



Next on the building agenda is a greenhouse. With more intervention classes being run in the garden, we will need a more constant rotation of crops without the extended winter break of last year. This requires more growing space to start seedlings. Since the shed will need removing because it is becoming structurally unsafe, this is an ideal time to install a greenhouse on the already in place concrete base. Much of the wood from the shed can then be repurposed for tree guards and planters – a win win!



Finally, a new shrub area. I recently made a bid to I Dig Trees for saplings. We have been successful in this and are due one hundred saplings in November. Fifty of these will be planted in the garden itself, opposite the polytunnel, to form a dense mixed hedge. This will hopefully help with the recovery of some of the species effected by habitat loss by providing a food source and breeding site. The remaining fifty trees will be placed in the school memorial garden as part of the wider sustainability commitment and climate emergency project.

