



How community gardens can contribute to biodiversity

These case studies have been prepared to provide illustrations of how community gardens can both contribute to and benefit from improved biodiversity. An accompanying factsheet of the same name is also available from FCFCG, describing the many simple, practical ways to increase biodiversity at project level.

Lanark Moor Sensory Garden

Clydesdale Community Initiatives was initially set-up in 2002 to enable young people at risk and adults with mental health issues to develop a derelict site in Lanark, South Lanarkshire. This project was so successful, with both groups gaining exceptional skills and confidence from their involvement, that it was decided they would undertake further projects.

Q: What were the aims of the biodiversity improvements you made - were they achieved?

The aim of the biodiversity improvements was to create a resource where people with support needs could participate in programmes of green activity that will improve their health, skills and confidence in an environment that is healthy, well managed and sustainable.

Q: Why did you choose to improve your site for biodiversity?

Our site had a number of aspects that recommended it. 1. It was a completely unused public area that was a simple grass cutting burden to the local authority. 2. It had previously been a chicken coup in the 1980's and represented a bit of a challenge for our horticulturists. 3. It was accessible to a wider range of individuals with support needs. 4. It had a high profile position at the entrance to Lanark.



Q: Have you noticed any other benefits as well as an increase in biodiversity?

The site produces food for consumption by our volunteers and it is now regularly visited by people from the wider community.

Q: How have you measured biodiversity before & after the improvement works?

Not formally but from previously being an area of mown grass it is now bursting with a massive variety of mostly native plants and trees.

Q: What improvements were made/measures taken?

We put in a path network and dyke walls that created five distinct areas, these areas were then dedicated to each of the five senses and planted up appropriately. Altogether the site covers about 2000msq of which about 60% is cultivated and a further 20% managed as wild flower meadow or woodland.

Q: What challenges did you face & how did you overcome them?

Overcoming challenges is what we are all about so getting the garden built was part and parcel of our core social inclusion practice. Obviously the most difficult thing is dedicating the necessary time to maintain and improve the garden on a sustainable basis. We have overcome that by using the

site as a resource to deliver wider health, inclusion and skills development programmes.

Q: Where did you go for help and/or advice?

Everywhere and anywhere! From the local garden club to the local authority to Trellis. We have been ruthless about getting as many ideas and tips from others as possible and applying them to our circumstances.

Q: Do you have any tips or tricks to pass on to their projects?

If you cannot keep on top of an area you can put a sign in it saying 'wildflower meadow'!

For further information:

www.cciweb.org.uk

www.facebook.com/pages/Clydesdale-Community-Initiatives-CCI/232205156910695?ref=hl

Nine minute video from 2007 showcasing the opening of Lanark Moor Sensory Garden:
<http://youtube/2HAMdDT-Bjl>



On the Verge - Stirling

On the Verge is a campaign based in Stirling, Central Scotland. Our mission is to encourage the sowing of wildflower seeds and the planting of nectar rich plants in and around the town of Stirling next spring. We are asking schools, community groups, businesses, gardeners and Stirling Council to get involved. We hope that an increase in favourable biodiversity will help our dwindling bee populations recover, foster a greater interest in our environment and make Stirling look beeeautiful!

Q: What were the aims of the biodiversity improvements you made - were they achieved?

The main aim of On the Verge was to increase areas of native wildflowers in and around Stirling in order to offer a greater range of nectar-rich feeding opportunities for pollinators, particularly bees, and yes, this was/ is being achieved.

Q: Why did you choose to improve your site for biodiversity?

We chose Stirling as that is our home town, and the project was set up in response to reports of declining bee populations in the face of a lack of forage in the countryside. It was reported that bees were heading into towns in search of food and we decided to





make it worth their while, for the ones around Stirling at least!

Q: Have you noticed any other benefits as well as an increase in biodiversity?

Yes, we hadn't anticipated the level of community engagement the project would encourage. We work with any group, business or individual in the Stirling area, but often our work centres around schools and community groups. It has been very satisfying to involve both a school and associated community group in the establishment of wildflower areas in their locale and get them working together to improve local environments..

We also rely heavily on Stirling's Criminal Justice Service for the preparation of many of our sites and have been able to introduce many community councils and schools to their services. But it is probably our work with schools which shows clear benefits above and beyond our initial aim to help support pollinator populations.

Giving kids the opportunity to get involved in getting their hands dirty raking - weeding and sowing brings about a total engagement with their environment that classroom learning simply can't offer. There is a gap in the school curriculum which projects like On the Verge can fill, and is probably one of the most valuable human aspects of the project.

Q: How have you measured biodiversity before and after the improvement works?

Stirling University students have run field studies and trials on our sites at various stages and have come up with some interesting data regarding the efficacy of what we are doing. That information is currently being collated and will be available for any interested parties in due course.

Q: What challenges did you face & how did you overcome them?

It is much harder to establish effective and permanent areas of wildflowers than most people imagine so one of the biggest challenges has been making sure that the wildflowers establish and continue to survive. We constantly review the seed mix in order to get the best results.

The other challenge is to manage human expectations of what can be achieved. People generally love the first year flowering which is mostly the colourful annual component and which cannot be achieved year on year. Pollinators, however, prefer the wider range of more nutritionally satisfying perennial plants which follow in subsequent years but which don't have such a pleasing aesthetic impact and might look a bit messier than some people are happy with. So making sure people understand the constraints

and primary purpose of the project is an ongoing challenge!

Q: Where did you go for help and/or advice?

Initially we spoke to as many people who would listen to us and that way we tracked down the key people we needed. Our council Biodiversity Officer has been an extremely important contact for us and has helped get Stirling council on board with the project in a much bigger way than we ever imagined. Our current funders, CSET, were also very helpful above and beyond the finances, and Scotia Seed, who sell us our seeds were also very good with advice about seed mix.

Q: Do you have any tips or tricks to pass on to their projects?

Talk to everybody you can about what you are trying to achieve. Keep it as simple and doable as possible- people will only engage if the process is simple and straight forward and doesn't require too much from them – and be prepared to put in the hours!

For further information: www.facebook.com/OnTheVergeStirling

The Hidden Gardens, Glasgow

Q: What were the aims of the biodiversity improvements you made - were they achieved?

We formed a group of volunteers which met to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for the Gardens. The aim of the BAP was to 'secure the conservation, enhancement and public appreciation of biodiversity within The Hidden Gardens'. We identified 6 key areas to work on: Species, Habitat, Shelter, Food, Water, Environmental Awareness, and came up with short and long term objectives. This has helped to focus the maintenance work we have carried out in the Gardens as well as the volunteer projects and Hidden Garden events.

Q: Why did you choose to improve your site for biodiversity?

It is an important part of what makes The Hidden Gardens special and we are keen to showcase methods of gardening for wildlife and biodiversity. It is an on going project and commitment.

Q: Have you noticed any other benefits as well as an increase in biodiversity?

Volunteers are increasing their interest and knowledge of wildlife and biodiversity and can pass this on to visitors, family and

friends. Volunteers give guided tours to visitors and this is an ideal opportunity to share this knowledge.

Q: How have you measured biodiversity before & after the improvement works?

We carry out wildlife surveys throughout the year in the Hidden Gardens, mainly focusing on birds, butterflies and bumblebees. We feed our results into National Surveys as well as building up a species list for the Hidden Gardens. It allows us to monitor annual variation as well as differences between the habitats within the Gardens.

Q: What improvements were made/measures taken?

We have developed new meadow habitats and areas specifically designated as wildlife areas. We have grown native wildflowers from seed, planted early spring bulbs to increase nectar sources throughout the year, developed a 'dead hedge' for composting woody material as well as providing another habitat, provided bird food throughout the year, continued to establish log piles, bug hotels, ground cover for invertebrates.

Q: What challenges did you face & how did you overcome them?

Conveying the importance of the Hidden Gardens for wildlife and biodiversity to the visitors has been challenging. We carry out

regular wildlife surveys in the Gardens and promote results on our website. Also volunteers learn about wildlife in the Gardens and they are keen to share this knowledge, especially at events in the Gardens.

Q: Where did you go for help and/or advice?

We contacted Davie Black from Plantlife who came and talked to volunteers and gave us some ideas about developing and monitoring our meadow area. Butterfly Conservation also visited the Hidden Gardens and talked to the volunteer groups. Paul Gunn from Buglife (TCV Natural Communities trainee) visited the Gardens to work with volunteers surveying invertebrates. Volunteers at the Gardens are encouraged to share ideas or plans to improve biodiversity within the Gardens.

Q: Do you have any tips or tricks to pass on to their projects?

It is an ongoing project with no final end point, so there are always new things that can be done and different ways of doing things. Engaging with as many people as possible, particularly our volunteers at The Hidden Gardens, means we can tap into lots of different ideas, and we generally get lots of positive feedback.

For further information:

<http://thehiddengardens.org.uk>



Bothwell Community Garden, Nr Glasgow

Q: What were the aims of the biodiversity improvements you made - were they achieved?

Our aims are to work with nature, let nature do the work, plant for the future - today, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, promote good health and grow together as a community. By following these aims, we feel that biodiversity is improving year on year.

Q: Why did you choose to improve your site for biodiversity?

We wanted to provide habitats for beneficial pollinators such as bees and insects to ensure good yields of fruit and vegetables. As we garden organically it was important to encourage natural predators such as frogs and hedgehogs to keep slug numbers down.

Q: Have you noticed any other benefits as well as an increase in biodiversity?

The attractive visual appearance of flowering plants and wildflowers and the birds nesting in our boxes feeding their chicks are lovely to watch. We have a camera installed in one of the boxes and watched a family of blue tits hatch this year.



Q: How have you measured biodiversity before and after the improvement works?

Mainly by taking photographs and by maintaining a biodiversity diary.

Q: What improvements were made/measures taken?

Wildflower seeds and plug plants were sown. Bird and bat boxes, roosting shelters put in trees. Pond and bog garden developed including log piles for amphibians.

Two demonstration borders, one a bee bistro, the other to attract butterflies and moths were planted with a range of plants of benefit to these species. This shows what could be grown at home in your own garden to encourage more wildlife visitors

Woodland walks take advantage of the natural tree belt which borders the garden. These were formed using logs and wood chips.

Q: What challenges did you face & how did you overcome them?

Funding and volunteers to carry out the work were two challenges. Making sure the funding criteria could be met was important and making sure that people were willing and available to complete the tasks on time was also crucial.

Q: Where did you go for help and/or advice?

Scotia seeds for wildflower sowing, Jupiter wildlife garden

in Grangemouth for plug plants. Leaflets from SNH are also available on line for gardening for butterflies etc. Plantlife and Froglife are also useful resources.

Q: Do you have any tips or tricks to pass on to their projects?

The garden is a wonderful educational resource, which is good to share with local schools.

For further information:

<http://bothwellcommunitygarden.org.uk>

Woodlands Community Garden, Glasgow

Q What were the aims of the biodiversity improvements you made - were they achieved?

Our aim is to help reconnect people to nature through a series of walks, talks, film events and family fun sessions. We also work with local schools and an elderly day care centre. Site improvements for biodiversity have included:

- Making bird feeders as part of our All About Birds family fun session- these are hung up around the site and re-filled twice a week by one of our regular volunteers. So far species seen using the feeders include Wood Pigeon, Coal tit, Great tit, Blue tit, Robin and Blackbird.



- Making hedgehog hibernacula as part of our All About Hedgehogs family fun session - no hedgehog activity so far but the hibernacula was also made suitable for amphibians as comments have been made about a toad being present in the garden.
- Installing a second pond and planting appropriate wildflowers around the edges. Made improvements to bath tub pond so as creatures can get in and out using a new ramp. Will be running 'Dragons in your Garden' workshop with Froglife in September.
- There are lots of flowering plants to attract bees and butterflies and the teasel plants attract Goldfinch to the garden.

Q. Why did you choose to improve your site for biodiversity?

The garden has regular meetings and this issue was raised by the community as an area for improvement, leading to WCG successfully applying for funding to run it's Bio-diverse programme.

Q. Have you noticed any other benefits as well as an increase in biodiversity?

The site is more colourful and inviting. The garden is run organically and so attracting natural pest control is a huge benefit.

Q. How have you measured biodiversity before & after the improvement works?

The level of biodiversity hasn't been recorded scientifically but anecdotal evidence from people's feedback shows that there has been an increase in the number of bumblebees and birds (or at least an increase in awareness of bumblebees and birds).

Q. What challenges did you face & how did you overcome them?

Vandalism can be a problem and having the time to put right damaged things. This is still ongoing to a small degree, so not technically overcome, but we are managing the problem by timing events and keeping the garden busy, limiting the amount of undercover structures there are on site.

Q. Where did you go for help and/or advice?

We work with a number of organisations:

- Buglife
- Froglife
- The Bat Conservation Trust
- The Hedgehog Preservation Society
- RSPB Scotland
- Plantlife
- Soil Association
- The Conservation Volunteers
- The Wildlife Trusts



Q. Do you have any tips or tricks to pass on to their projects?

Even if you're not an 'expert' just give things a go. There is a lot of information on the internet about practical conservation tasks you can undertake to make a difference.

Also, natural play is a great way of getting children and young people involved if you have a site you can use. Making up games that get them using their imagination is a good way of reinforcing positive interactions with nature and helps foster a sense of respect and belonging that will enable the next generation to continue stewardship of the Earth.

For further information:

www.woodlandscommunitygarden.org.uk/bio-diverse/biodiverse.html



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