



Working together to sow seeds.



This case study has been developed as part of the Food Growing Schools London project, a partnership initiative led by Garden Organic.

Garden Organic is the UK's leading organic growing charity, with over 20 years experience bringing the benefits of growing food to schools.

Food Growing Schools London is funded by the Big Lottery and Mayor of London to bring together the very best of London's food growing expertise, information and support, with the ambition to inspire and equip every school in London to grow their own food.

The School...

Melcombe Primary School is a large inner city school which has a Children's Centre within the grounds. The children come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds with 37 represented languages, meaning a high number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils. The School also has Special Education Needs (SEN) pupils.

They have always grown flowers in window boxes, hanging baskets and pots, but involvement in a project called; 'One World Schools' led to the creation of two outdoor food growing areas which can be used as outdoor classrooms.

This story shows how a largely concrete space can be transformed into a place to grow fresh food and learn about plants.



The Project...

A large-scale project was undertaken to create outdoor classrooms, converting part of the playground into a quiet garden, and creating a safe growing area at the site of an old toilet block.

There are two principal growing areas. The first is an area for growing vegetables, fruit and herbs. At any time in the year a number of year groups as well as the school's gardening club will have produce growing here.

In 2015 the produce grown included: tomatoes, runner beans, cauliflowers, Brussels sprouts, strawberries, broad beans, lettuce, sunflowers and rhubarb.

These were all sown and planted out by the children. As the project grew so did the need for more space! The school maximizes space by using a number of containers to grow produce.

Watering raised beds.



Three word project summary...

NURTURING
ENJOYABLE
SKILFUL



Who's involved?

At first the gardens were maintained by volunteers, but in June 2013 the school began employing a retired head teacher one day a week, to extend the growing opportunities for children.

He works with groups of children on activities such as recognition of familiar plants, planting seeds and monitoring their growth as well as creating compost and learning how this benefits the soil.

Once the various fruit and vegetables have grown, he teaches the students how to use the produce to create meals such as green salads and coleslaw. This has substantially raised the profile of growing in the school.

The School accepted advice and guidance from one of Garden Organic's School & Community Engagement officers during a visit to the school. She helped them to think about plants which might grow in shady areas around the Victorian toilet block, and why they prefer shade.



Team work planting up raised beds.

Secret Garden...

The second area was converted from the school's former outside toilet block. The transformation of this area could not have been achieved without the youth offenders' team, who offered help in the form of community service. The youth offenders cleared the site of rubble, overgrown bushes and plants.

Dubbed the 'Secret Garden', this area presents the challenge of coping with various degrees of shade, providing opportunities for staff to teach the children about what plants need in order to survive, suitable planting for different areas and habitats in darker, damper areas of the grounds.

A covered notice board outside the garden displays pictures of the plants that grow there.

Challenges...

Initially raising funds was difficult but with fundraising and charitable donations, combined with matched funding from Groundwork UK, the project has become more established.

Resources

If you also struggle with limited space or knowing where you can grow plants, visit Garden Organic's website for a wide range of factsheets, posters and other resources which may help you.

Specifically, to solve these problems, see: Where to grow plants, using space well, building raised beds, setting up a square foot garden and many more.

www.gardenorganic/schools



Planting out seedlings.

What's next?



The outdoor classrooms are vital to ensure children have meaningful first-hand experiences of growing plants and the school has now allocated a budget for a gardener to ensure the gardens continue to thrive!



Highlights

When children eat the very produce they have grown it makes this whole project so worthwhile! Reception children have previously made a humus with broad beans they have grown and Year 3 used their many varieties of lettuce as the basis of a salad which they then ate.

The produce grown by Gardening Club is taken home for their families to enjoy which is something that the children can be really proud of when showing their families something they have helped grow and nurture.



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