

## *Connecting with Allotments*

### **Let's Grow Our Own Fruits and Vegetables!**

#### **Introduction**

The importance of eating fruit and vegetables for a healthy mind and body needs no elaboration. However, in these days of globalised food-market, we, the consumers know very little about how the fruit and vegetables we eat daily is produced. There are growing concerns about the wholesomeness of food grown using chemicals and pesticides, which often travels hundreds of miles before appearing on our dinner table.

One way to ensure that we eat 'fresh and safe' produce is to buy locally grown organic fruit and vegetables from nearby shops and cooperatives. While this may be a better way of counteracting the problem of "food miles" and "pesticide", it may not be affordable for the majority of the population. Probably the best way of getting a steady supply of fresh produce is to grow our own fruits and vegetables either in our own back garden, or on an allotment.

#### **A Personal Account**

I started growing fruit and vegetables on an allotment plot in Bluebell South, Norwich five years ago. The plot was overgrown and at first I thought I would never be able to clear it, let alone grow vegetables. In the first year, I only managed to clear a small area. I started growing some vegetables that I was familiar with, such as spinach, lettuce and courgette. Gradually, I cleared the whole plot and added more varieties, including soft fruits such as, raspberries, and gooseberries.

Now, I produce almost everything that our family of four needs from the allotment. I do not use any chemicals or pesticides and buy organic seeds wherever possible.

You cannot get any fresher produce than this. And it is wholesome and cheap too! Moreover, the additional benefits of growing our own fruit and vegetables in terms of physical exercise and connecting ourselves to nature are immense. All I have to do is spend about three hours a week on the allotment on a regular basis. This may sound too much of a time commitment, but many of us spend more than this amount of time watching TV or going to a gym.

#### **Allotments in Norwich**

While I was surprised by my own success in producing almost everything for our family, I was also saddened by the fact that so many allotment plots were and still are left overgrown. The official statistics about the waiting lists for an allotment tell us nothing about how allotments are managed in actual practice. At present, there are 1450 allotment plots on 18 sites across Norwich, that is

one plot per 38 households. Yet, nearly half of the plots that are officially termed as 'occupied' are in a state of neglect.

Why are people not interested in growing their own fruit and vegetables on allotments? Maybe people are not aware of allotments or lack the support or know-how to start growing their own fruit and vegetables? Maybe people find overgrown allotment plots unwelcoming? Maybe the plots are too big for novice gardener to manage on her/his own? I wanted to find out what the real reasons were behind the current lack of interest on allotments, which once produced half of the country's supply of fresh produce. To this end, in the autumn of 2004, I started an initiative called 'Grow-Our-Own (GO<sup>2</sup>)'.

### **The Grow-Our-Own (GO<sup>2</sup>) Scheme**

The main aim of GO<sup>2</sup> is to help those who are interested, but have little or no experience in growing fruit and vegetables on allotments. Under this scheme, a 10-rod plot is subdivided into small portions depending on the need of individual growers. GO<sup>2</sup> offers practical help and advice on what to grow, when to grow it and how to get seeds, compost, and so on. The support is provided for at least a year, after which the growers are encouraged to share a plot with someone else thereby helping another newcomer to grow fruit and vegetables. In this way, the GO<sup>2</sup> scheme aims to nurture a 'grow-our-own' culture in Norwich.

For those who have little spare time or are physically unable to work on the allotment, the GO<sup>2</sup> offers an opportunity to come and pick organically grown produce from allotments once a week. This would help people to see how the fruit and vegetables they eat are grown and get a regular supply of locally grown fresh produce straight from the land. It will also help the scheme to raise funds by turning surplus produce into cash.

### **Postscript**

Growing our own fruit and vegetables is only a beginning towards sustainable living. The journey from knowing how to grow fruit and vegetables to the practice of growing at least some of the food we eat and maintaining continuity may not be easy. However, it is the commitment and perseverance that matters most in achieving what we aspire to achieve in our lives.

Mahesh Pant  
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**GO<sup>2</sup>** is a project run by **Sustainable Living Initiative**, a Company Limited by Guarantee 5472105. For further information about **GO<sup>2</sup>** please contact: [grow-our-own@ntlworld.com](mailto:grow-our-own@ntlworld.com) or Tel: 01603 508272.