

The Grow-Our-Own (GO²) Scheme: An Update

After giving you a brief introduction and short history of GO2 in the last issue of Norfolk Organic Newsletter, I am going to provide an update on the progress of the GO2 scheme and outline our plans for the future.

The GO2 scheme is on the Bluebell South Allotment site on the Avenue. Once you come through the allotment gates, you will see a large bubble-wrap plastic greenhouse. Next to the greenhouse is a social area (with picnic benches) for growers and pickers. There is at least one GO2 member present on the site every Sunday morning from 10 until 1.

This year, we have rented 8 plots from the Norwich City Council for the GO2 scheme. Of these 8 plots, 4 are allocated for individuals to grow vegetables. Normally, a parcel of land measuring 6 metres by 1.30 metres is allocated to an individual with no previous experience in growing vegetables. Over 20 growers have now started working on their plots and there are still a few more spaces available for newcomers.

All it costs for one parcel of land is £5 for a year. This includes rent and the cost of manure and seeds. Hands-on practical help and advice, along with tools, are provided to all the growers. Our new greenhouse provides an opportunity for the growers to come and learn about growing vegetables from seed, instead of going to a garden centre to buy plants.

With the help of GO2 members and volunteers, we are clearing the remaining four plots to grow fruit and vegetable for ourselves. Any surplus produce will be available for sale to those who are interested in buying fresh, local produce, with the proceeds going to the GO2 organisation to buy further inputs. A total of 18 people, one nursery school and a food-coop have already shown interests in buying our surplus produce. Information on which vegetables are available is circulated by e-mail to those interested in coming to the plot to buy vegetables. This information will also be available soon on the GO2 website.

What Next?

The success of the GO2 scheme in its initial years has encouraged us to expand the scheme – not simply to add more plots but also start new activities. We are currently working on the idea of setting up a “Good Life Centre”, with the aim of promoting sustainable development in Norwich in a holistic way.

The Good Life Centre proposes to initiate a range of activities to further its goals, which include:

- An information centre to provide advice on the ‘good life’: how to improve our quality of life and wellbeing without threatening the environment.
- A grow-our-own area, where plots of different shapes and sizes will be available for hire along with tools and hands-on practical help with

propagating seeds and growing vegetables, herbs and fruits; special arrangements will be made for families with young children and disabled people to make the plots suitable to their needs.

- A pick-your-own area, which provides visitors with an opportunity to see how vegetables and fruits are grown, and buy freshly picked, organically-grown seasonable produce (vegetables, fruits, herbs) at an affordable price;
- A picnic area where people can bring their own food and enjoy nature;
- Recycling facilities for kitchen waste, plant pots, seed trays, garden tools, juice cartons, cardboard and plastic bottles (all to be used for growing plants).

Other activities related to a "good life" may be added, for example, lecture and interaction programmes, a small kitchen providing home-grown cooked food and complementary medicine.

We are in the process of finding a suitable site for the Good Life Centre. It is important to set up such scheme in inner city areas so as to benefit the urban population who often lack such opportunities. However, finding a suitable piece of land in an inner city area is proving difficult. Alternatively, if we were to set up the centre outside the city area, land may be less of an issue. However, if we have to use car to get to the centre, it will not only limit the access of those people without a car, but would also defeat the very objective of sustainable development. We would welcome comments and suggestions from readers about these plans for the future.

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