

Community garden summer fun



I have been spending the last couple of months working on the community plots at Marl Pit Community Gardens in Hellesdon. The gardens are part of the Sustainable Living Initiative which is a Norwich based charity. The initiative aims to share resources and knowledge to people who want to grow their own organic produce and cook with and eat fresh food.

After finishing my second-year exams I decided that I wanted to try something new over the summer. Gardening and permaculture was something that I had recently become interested in after attending an introduction to permaculture course organised by UEA healthy planet. I was also looking for somewhere to do some research for my dissertation and I was aiming to base my dissertation on sustainability in the community.



I came across the Marl Pit Community Gardens after an email asking for volunteers was sent to all the students in ENV and DEV. I decided to go along to the gardens to see what it was like.

I went on a Tuesday which is the volunteering day. People who have their own plots at the gardens can go at any point during the week. Since then I have been going on Tuesdays to work on shared community plots and have gone some of the Saturday sessions which are normally classes. For example, I went to a session on how to make jam with the gooseberries from the gardens. All the cooking classes take place in the community centre down the road. We then took some jam home and the rest got sold the following Saturday at the open day for the gardens.



One of my favourite parts of going along on Tuesdays is having the group lunch cooked for us using the produce from the gardens. After getting stuck in to digging, planting, watering and weeding all morning it's the perfect way to refuel and have a catch up with everyone.

The gardening itself is great exercise and a great chance to get some fresh air and sunshine. I've found it a welcome break from the craziness of everyday. It's nice to go somewhere that is relaxed and friendly. It's also a good place to go to leave all technology behind. If you need an excuse to stop looking at your emails or Facebook page it is the perfect escape! Even in the two months I've been there I feel healthier from all the good food I've been eating and the exercise



I've been getting but also from the amount of smiling and laughing I do when I am at the gardens! I believe this ties in with the notion that looking after ourselves can benefit the planet.

One environmental benefit that growing your own produce has is that it reduces food miles. Eating seasonally from your garden will reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are released from shipping produce from other countries. Growing your own also means that you can eliminate harmful chemicals from your crops such as pesticides and weed killers that can get into natural systems and food chains. You will also be improving the biodiversity of your local area.



Monoculture farming is where only one crop is produce on a farm to get the most profit as possible. Most shop brought produce comes from these types of farms. They can discourage local wildlife like insects, other plants, amphibians and birds as the habitat isn't suited to them. However small scale plots with lots of varieties of crops boost the biodiversity of an area. I have seen a lot of wildlife since being on the community gardens including frog and toads, lots of different birds and lots of different types of bees and butterfly. Another sustainable aspect of growing your own is that it eliminates the use of packaging that you get in supermarkets. There's no plastic wrap involved with growing your own!

Being part of the gardens has been an eye-opening experience and has made me live more sustainably and healthily. I have managed to bring home a variety of produce in the last couple of months including broccoli, spinach, broad beans, cucumber, kale, peas, potatoes, onions and a variety of herbs. However, the most valuable thing I have gained is a lot of new friends from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities and ages. I have met people that I wouldn't have met otherwise and I am so glad I've had the opportunity.



I would encourage everyone to get involved in their community in any way they can. Community gardens are a great way to do this. If you want any more information on the Sustainable Living Initiative or would like your own plot to grow your own, visit grow-our-own.co.uk or email Mahesh at sustainable@grow-our-own.co.uk.

About the author: Emily Lewis

Emily Lewis is a student at UEA's School of Environmental Sciences. She is interested in living a sustainable life, and exploring fairtrade fashion and vegan food and beauty.