

## **Hatchlands – the 1,000<sup>th</sup> National Trust allotment Surrey**

In September 2011, the Brown family became proud plot holders of the National Trust's 1000<sup>th</sup> allotment.

Claire, Ashley and William Brown (aged 7) live just a 6-minute walk away from the Trust's Hatchlands estate in West Horsley, and Claire already has big plans to grow some "big vegetables" on this new family plot just outside the walled community garden.

"Huge pumpkins for William at Halloween, tepees dripping with beans and rows and rows of potatoes and onions – this lovely new plot will allow us to dream and grow big," said Claire Brown. "My husband Ashley can even have his Brussel sprouts! For us, it's about practicing what we preach – growing our own fresh food right on our doorstep, and with the seasons."

Claire believes that kids learn by "osmosis" and is also putting her growing skills to good use with a gardening club at William's school.

Their new allotment is part of a much wider community project that has blossomed in recent years at Hatchlands. The National Trust is working in partnership with "Grace and Flavour" a not-for-profit horticultural co-operative of local residents in East and West Horsley.

The project aims to grow local food for local people, and has brought back to life the 3-acre walled garden on the Trust's estate in West Horsley. The community project is set up on a CSA model and members of the co-operative share in the work of cultivating the land – taking a share of the crop to match their input of time and effort.

Produce is also sold through local village shops and 10% of the crop is donated to those in the local community who don't have easy access to fresh veg. As well as sharing produce, people share skills, and so far the project has recruited over 100 volunteers – both first-time growers and gardening gurus.

Su Johnston, a founding director of Grace and Flavour, said: "One weekend we put out a call to villagers to come and help us get started, and it just grew and grew from there.

"Now there's a huge community spirit here. People pitch up whenever they can and clock up a few veg hours, and we insist on regular tea and cake breaks! There's all ages – from retired folk to Duke of Edinburgh Award participants and even one or two babies."

Along with the harvest festivals and scarecrow competitions, plans are afoot to restore the potting shed and to create a new children's garden with its own raised bed.

### **Other case studies**

#### **Anglesey Abbey - Cambridgeshire**

Right next to the recreation ground in the heart of Lode village, just 5 minutes walk from the National Trust's Anglesey Abbey, an aptly named 'sunray' allotment site has taken shape.

Villagers from Lode and neighbouring Bottisham – just half a mile up the road – have adopted the Trust's 38 family-size plots, along with four community growing spaces. Each allotment forms part of a 'ray', beaming out from the central plot.

On any given day you'll find a real mix of ages down here, and they're just as happy to chat and share advice as to knuckle down to the real work.

Bottisham local Debbie Martin loves her plot. She caught the gardening bug early on her father's allotment when she and her brother were given a small square each to call their own.

Carrying on the family tradition, Debbie's son Harvey (aged 16) always thrived in the outdoors and knows the value of local, real food. Such is the hook that's he's now doing a chef's apprenticeship at a major hotel in Cambridge. Even younger son Harry (aged 10) is happy to pitch up at the plot.

Debbie said: "We often stagger home laden with courgettes, beans and other beautiful fresh veg, and drop off little food parcels on our neighbours' doorsteps!

"The rewards are huge. We dig and weed, plant and pick, and then cook up a treat – it's wonderful to be part of this whole cycle of life. And if Harry ever gets a little bored there's a play area right next door!"

National Trust community gardener Janet Jephcott said: "Many people, including myself, pop down for a while and stay for ages! It's a really peaceful place right in the centre of the village.

"You can't put a value on a place like this. It's good for both your physical and mental health and quietly draws the whole community together. People make new friends and learn new skills. They happily swap seeds, and exchange plants, produce and a little conversation."

### **Buckland Abbey - Devon**

The Pig Group, Chicken Group, Fruit and Veg Group, Bee Group and, of course, Cider Group! The Buckland Food Growers have it all.

At the top of Garden Field, Buckland Abbey, there are 40 fine allotments, but the bottom half of the field has been transformed into a fabulous community growing space for up to 40 local families and individuals – simply named the Buckland Food Growers.

In a previous life Lucy Wood was a nurse, but now caring for the land is beginning to consume her life. Not only is she Chair of Buckland Food Growers but also a keen allotment holder here.

Lucy said: "I was having relatively little success growing veg in the patio tubs at home, and we were nowhere near self-sufficient. But with the combined power of the Growers we can really begin to feed our children fresh, local food. We're no longer forced into supermarkets!

“Together we’re reviving rural skills and changing our relationship with food for the better. Our jam and chutney courses are hugely popular, as are our cider lollies!”

Jonathan Cummins, House and Visitor Services Manager at Buckland Abbey said:  
“Buckland Food Growers has sucked the staff in too. I’m a fully signed-up member of the Fruit and Veg Group and our Property Manager Jez McDermott is in charge of the pigs.

“For me it’s a good way to work together to achieve a common goal, get to know local people and have a laugh. Next year we want to open up the site for our visitors to enjoy. Maybe a little of the joys of growing your own will rub off on them too.”

### **Clent Hills – Worcestershire The Green Academies project - growing spaces in the city**

At Kings Norton in Birmingham, National Trust has been creating growing spaces at a number of urban locations for use by different community groups – a scheme known as the Green Academies Project.

At Greaves Hall, on The Fold, a parents and toddlers’ gardening group have been growing their own veg in newly created raised beds, and enjoying the harvest from new fruit trees on the site. The garden is also used as a base for youth activity programmes around food growing and cookery activities. Dee Whittle, project manager for the Green Academies Project (GAP) explains: “The garden is very much a communal project where people from different age ranges and community groups all work together. It’s especially good for young people to be involved in caring for the environment – it gives them a sense of pride in their own local area.”

More growing spaces are planned at nearby Hawkesley Primary School where children will care for the space, growing salads, herbs and tomato plants with help from the youth group. The produce will also support the Community Café, on The Fold, which is a local not for profit café.

Meanwhile, National Trust is also providing NVQ training in practical conservation in partnership with Bournville College and the Youth Service, 3 Estates Youth Project. As part of their qualification, young trainees have created an orchard at Millennium Green, Kings Norton as well as helping to manage our own National Trust Countryside sites, The Clent Hills and Kinver Edge. The orchard has improved a local green space for residents of The Three Estates, Kings Norton and continues to be maintained by the youth group. Dee says “For many people it’s a surprise to see pears and apples growing on trees in urban areas like these. To be able to harvest some of the food, and use it in a cookery session is amazing. It’s a fantastic resource for the area.”

GAP is supported by Natural England as part of its Access to Nature programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund’s Changing Spaces programme. You can find out more about the project on our website at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/GAP](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/GAP)

### **Gibside – Tyne & Wear Learning to Grow at Gibside**

The walled garden at Gibside, near Gateshead in North East England, is supporting people with learning disabilities work towards qualifications in horticulture, as well as growing their own food.

The garden has become a registered training centre for the Open College Network and this year 15 students are enrolled for horticulture modules. Some have been coming to Gibside's walled garden for many years, but now they are turning their learning into a formal qualification – which for some will be the first they've gained.

The students learn basic horticulture, including sowing seeds, pricking out seedlings, doing soil and pH tests and a worm survey.

Sue Adamson, Community Kitchen Gardener at Gibside, and course teacher, said: "The certificate means a great deal especially to people who have a mental disability. It also gives me the opportunity to pass on my enthusiasm for all things horticultural."

The gardening itself is also an excellent form of therapy that can be influential on the lives of the students, helping them to improve their skills and confidence.

John Aisbett is a Day Care Officer supporting people with learning disabilities at the nearby Winlaton Community Base. John explained "The garden's a valuable community resource – the people taking part can work within a safe environment, achieve a sense of fulfilment, and learn new skills as well as build and maintain new friendships. Its also good experience for those who choose to enter the world of employment."

The walled garden is also used by other community groups including Norcare (who support people with social problems, such as addiction or homelessness), St Nicholas Hospital (people who suffer mental ill-health) and Real Care (a school for boys with learning difficulties). The garden also has new plots for schools and individuals from the local area.

### **Kingston Lacy - Dorset**

A set of 118 new allotments for the community are now open at the National Trust's Kingston Lacy estate in Dorset.

There are 40 allotments for members of the local community; 26 for school and community groups and a further 52 subsidised plots for individuals referred through local housing associations.

The plots lie between the formal gardens and Home Farm in an area formerly used as the kitchen garden and never before open to the public. There is also an area of raised beds for special needs groups and wheelchair-users, and the team hope to recreate an orchard and pond at one side of the garden.

The National Trust's Andrew Hunt, who has been leading the Growing Spaces project, said: "It's great to be able to give people the chance to grow their own food, to get out into the fresh air in a place like this and meet other like-minded people. Not only can people save money, they can gain real satisfaction from sowing seeds, nurturing plants and harvesting the fruit and vegetables of their labour. There are also physical and

mental health benefits from being outside and gardening, especially in such a social environment.”

**The Dorset ME Support Group** is just one of the community groups involved, and it has plans to grow everything from courgettes to strawberries and herbs to kale. Service co-ordinator Wendy Rideout said: “There are so many benefits to our members, from providing them with nutritious vegetables through to giving them an opportunity join together and contribute to a rewarding group project. It’s great to be able to provide a group activity in an environment so beneficial to our health and happiness.”

The funding for these allotments came from the Big Lottery Fund through the Local Food Scheme (£102,000) with £30,000 from Local Action Group, Sowing Seeds.

### **Minnowburn – Belfast**

A new community of gardeners is blossoming in south Belfast. Minnowburn Community Allotments sits between the local landmarks, Shaw’s Bridge and the Giant’s Ring in south Belfast, and this project couldn’t have come at a better time – locally there’s a waiting list of three to five years for allotments.

Craig Somerville, National Trust Warden said: “People now have the chance to nurture their own green space and grow their own fresh produce. It’s creating a real sense of community and connection to the environment.”

The community Allotments are as diverse as its gardeners - some specialise in vegetables, others love to grow flowers, and social and health groups have taken on raised beds.

Tomasz, Magda and Antony Cesielski (aged 5) joined the community garden in 2009 and have been at the heart of things ever since. This Polish family have helped organise numerous social events and are tremendously resourceful. Tomasz is the polytunnel champion, but has also built a sandpit for kids who use the site. He volunteered with the Belfast rangers and now works for the National Trust as a Belfast Academy ranger.

Tomasz said: “We were overjoyed when we got our space to grow vegetables. There’s no room to do this at our apartment in central Belfast.

“When I was younger I grew food on my parents’ farm in Poland, and they taught me a lot. Now I have the chance to pass on these skills to my son, and it’s great for our family to get out and work in the open air in such beautiful surroundings. We have a strong community spirit here as well, and it’s wonderful to have barbeques and get to know everyone.”

Also at the garden, Grey’s Court, a drug and alcohol rehab group are always up for doing jobs around the plots, never mind just working on their own plot. They’re also keen to work with the rangers on the land, and have spent many a day removing invasive plants or mending fencing.

Emma and Muriel are die-hard gardeners, passionate about the community garden. Muriel is French and they spend part of the year there, involved in collective initiatives in the small village where they have a house. Muriel has mobility problems due to illness

but doesn't let this hold her back. The couple are regulars at the plot and produce an astonishing amount of food between them. They are currently working on a Minnowburn Community Allotments recipe book.

### **Monk Coniston - Cumbria**

Monk Coniston's walled garden nestles amidst one of the most breathtaking landscapes in the UK. From the top of the walled garden you can see right down over Coniston Water and beyond.

This stunning garden high in the Lake District had been unused for many years, and restoration work began when the Trust received a Heritage Lottery grant in 2006, after which it was opened to the public for the first time.

Hill walkers are regular visitors to the walled garden as it lies on a public right of way. Staff here have also forged closer links with the local community, who felt strongly that the garden should be used for growing food - and a new future for the garden is emerging.

Since 2009, 10 plots have been marked out and taken on by locals. Nick Monk, one of the plot holders, believes that it's the location of Monk Coniston that makes it so special.

Nick said: "It's just wonderful. You can sit back to take a break from the gardening and gaze out at the views along the lake and over the mountain.

"It's also pleasant talking to walkers as they come through the garden – they all ask what you're growing on your patch. It's truly peaceful here and my plot's right in the middle of the garden – ideal!"

An additional plot is being cared for communally by a group of volunteers. They get together on the first Monday of the month, and also help look after the wider site – clearing paths and tending the soft fruit bushes, among many other ongoing jobs.

### **Springhill - County Londonderry**

#### **Personalities on the plot**

Can you tell a personality from a plot? At Springhill they like to think so. A year ago, the walled garden was overgrown. Backbreaking work by the estate team and volunteers has gradually transformed the area into 27 allotments. Local enthusiasm was immediate. This year, the plots are bursting with life, colour and personality.

The McCrystal Plot – Perfectionists, definitely. There's not a crumb of soil out of place or a weed in sight. The plot is admired by many. Seamus and Karen, helped by their four boys, have created a veritable vegetable heaven, complete with traditional lazy beds, sprinkler system, totem pole and an underground tandoor oven!

The Kelso Plot – Novices. There's an L-plate stuck on their plot gate, to show their status. Barbara and Wilfie Kelso are enthusiastic, positive and hugely inventive – they have a go at everything. The plot is crammed full with ideas: shelves to increase the

area of their plot; potatoes grown in barrels; compost bins; habitat piles, recycled cloches and bright bunting to keep the pigeons away.

The Stewart Plot – Retirement project. They have been Springhill regulars for years – as dogwalkers. Now, they often spend their entire day at the plot, stopping only to whip up a delicious meal using freshly picked produce, on their gas stove. They don't have the best of health yet they have managed to create a truly plentiful, and sociable, garden.

### **Tyfiant – Gwynedd**

In North Wales, National Trust staff have created a thriving growing space as a learning resource for local schools and community groups. At the Trust's office at Tan y Celyn, near the town of Bethesda, eight raised beds were originally set up for the use of the local charity 'Action for Children', which supports children looking after someone in their family.

The project keeps growing, and rangers at the site have now linked up with three local schools - Abercaseg Primary, Pen Y Bryn Primary and Llanllechid Primary – all of which come and grow food on a regular basis. As well as vegetable beds, the garden has a polytunnel bursting with tomatoes, cucumbers and herbs.

Ken Saynor, Warden at Bethesda said: "Growing food gives children the chance to learn outdoors in a stimulating, informal way.

"The kids really enjoy getting stuck in and getting muddy, learning that peas come from the garden and not from a tin. Even in winter they've thoroughly enjoyed making bird feeders, using lard and mixing it up with bird seed - messy and very popular!"

The approach has proved so successful as a way of learning that teachers have invited the Trust to come out to schools and do more of the same. Ken is now working with teachers and pupils to run activities and plan new veggie patches within school grounds.

Ken has created vegetable beds and picnic benches at Abercaseg Primary School along with newly planted trees, taking the benefits of the project way beyond the original Tyfiant site. Some of the older children have made bird, bat and bug boxes to put in their own school gardens

The school recently invited parents to help out at a planting day and as a result two mums, Denise Marsh and Leigh Parry, have become involved as volunteers, growing on seedlings at the National Trust garden ready to take into schools.

Leigh said: "Children are absolutely delighted by the activities. They learn so much from it because they can watch things grow, take care of them, and enjoy what the harvest brings. They're really proud of what they've grown at the end.

"It shows what you can do with just a little bit of soil and a packet of seed, and gives them the skills to be more self sufficient in the future. They're only half hour sessions, but they're really memorable."

Leigh also sees that it has a good effect on her own children's diets: "I couldn't get my kids to eat lettuce until we brought a bag home from Ken's garden."

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