



HOW TO MAKE YOUR URBAN GARDEN YOUR OWN PLACE ?

Challenge

There is no other space in the urban landscape that allows people the potential to personalise to the same degree as an urban garden. Urban gardens are not only spaces for growing vegetables and flowers; they are also places for growing connections and allow people the potential for creativity through the personalisation of plots or gardening spaces. While these two related processes are easily achievable by some, they become a challenge for others.

Challenge for gardeners: many people start their gardening journey by renting out an allotment plot or joining a gardening club with keen interest, however they sometimes struggle to maintain enthusiasm. This creates a challenge that can lead to a decline in interest and a neglect of the gardening space.

Challenge for garden organisations: garden organisations need to explore creative and effective ways to engage gardeners more fully in collective activities, so they feel part of the garden community, but at the same time be respectful to each gardener's individuality and identity.

This factsheet aims to address the above challenges through an exploration of:

- How to make the garden *your own place*?
- How to develop your *own identity* in the garden?
- How can the garden site become a place in which gardeners develop a sense of attachment and belonging?



Image 2 - Personalising plots, Weaver's Square Allotments and Community Garden, Dublin. Photo: Mary Benson



Image 3 - Personalising plots, Moor Green Allotment, Birmingham. Photo: Susan Noori

Message to Gardeners

- Develop your own personality in the garden.
- Make the garden your own place – a 'home' away from 'home' or a retreat from the bustle of city-life.
- Invest meaning into your garden.
- Visualise your garden – visualize how you want it to look and what aesthetic you desire. Aesthetics can differ depending on motivation and socio-cultural factors.
- Be creative.
- Encourage your family and friends to visit and become involved.
- Grow connections with other gardeners.

"I think one of the things that Edible Eastside communicates is space... space for you...it is not perfect, but it looks nice, and there is room for you as an individual... that is the kind of thing I hear from people all the time."
(Plot-holder at Edible Eastside)

"It is my own place, the place to rest and grow my own vegetables ... my flowers. It is my little piece of paradise."
(Plot-holder in Warsaw)

"... when I come here I like to remember the times when I was in Brazil doing fieldwork in the nature reserves so my plot can look like a nature reserve than like a farm."
(Plot-holder at Walsall Road Allotment)

You should:

Think of your garden as your 'home' and decorate it to suit your own individual taste:

- Name your garden.
- Choose your favourite colours for decoration.
- Grow plants and herbs that you like to use and that have a personal significance.
- Place ornaments, other personal items and symbols within your garden that will help you to feel a sense of belonging to your garden.
- Put a chair into the garden to enjoy the seeds of your labour.
- Just as there are many rooms within a home your garden can be divided into sections and each section can be arranged differently.

Remember:

- Your garden should be flexible so that you can change it.
- Do not lose motivation – growing and personalization takes time and energy but it is worth it to watch the seeds of your work blossom.
- Show the garden and your harvests to other gardeners around your plot.
- If you have any experience in gardening, share seeds and knowledge.
- Use communal spaces to speak with and get to know other gardeners.

Learn More

Case study

Walsall Road Allotments is a typical example of a British urban allotment garden.

It is a large, multi-cultural allotment site set in beautifully landscaped grounds in North Birmingham.

Plot-holders are from many different national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As well as traditional crops, plot-holders grow things from all over the world, e.g. Pumpkins and Callaloo are very popular with West Indians, while Italians like to grow artichokes and 'Cuccuzza' (Sicilian Snakes), or Bangladeshi plot-holders have a very clever way of growing climbing squash Kadu (bottle Gourd) up a bamboo frame. Each plot is organised and decorated differently, inspired by, and is a reflection of, the plot-holder's personality and cultural background.

There is a large pavilion with a kitchen for the use of the plot-holders and ample indoor and outdoor seating provisions to encourage interaction between gardeners. The Management Committee hold annual competitions, charity plant sale events, crop donation to local soup kitchens, summer fairs, etc. The allotment has an informative website which is updated regularly:

<http://growit.btck.co.uk>



Image 4 - Summer garden party, Queen Bona Community Garden, Jazdów, Warsaw.
Image, Beata J. Gawryszewska



Image 5 - Notice board for sharing information, Edible Eastside, Birmingham. Photo: Susan Noori

Advice to Policy Makers

- Facilitate socialisation between gardeners.
- Develop communal spaces to engage gardeners in shared activities.
- Be open to people's cultural differences.
- Organise social events to help people meet and interact.
- Create tools for inclusion, for example show special elements to visitors and other gardeners such as unusual trees and plants, provide information and name tags.
- People tend to have their own place in the garden so try to encourage their expressions of personalisation.



Image 6 - "I like to grow things in clumps ... and I mix stuff ... unusual stuff ... it looks better, it looks more natural ... like a forest or a wild field", (Plot-holder at Walsall Road Allotment). Photo: Susan Noori (picture taken with permission for public use)

You should:

- Provide a communal room or shelter that allows interaction between gardeners.
- Use social media to inform gardeners about events, gardening advice and other news, but remember not everyone has access to social media so don't forget the 'good old' notice board.
- A shared mural can give people space to be creative in a fun and communal way.
- Provide a cooking area.
- Ask gardeners to take pictures of their products, gardens, and specific section of the garden they like. These can be displayed in the communal room and shared on social media.



Image 7 - Providing communal space for social events and shared activities, Walsall Road Allotment. Photo: Beata J. Gawryszewska

Learn More

Useful readings

- Bell, S., Fox-Kämper, R., Keshavarz, N., Benson, M., Caputo, S., Noori S., Voigt, A.,** 2016. Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe. New York: Routledge
- Noori, S. and Benson, M.** 2016. Urban allotment Garden: A case for Place-making. In S. Bell, et al. Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe. New York: Routledge
- Crouch, D.** 2001. The Art of Allotments: Culture and Cultivation. London: Five Leaves Publications.
- Lucy Chamberlain,** The art of allotments. The Guardian, 26th August 2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gardening-blog/2009/aug/26/gardens>
- Cresswell, T.** 2004. Place: a short introduction. Oxford: Blackwell.
- The Dublin Guide to Community Gardening, 2013. <http://dublincommunitygrowers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/FINAL-City-Guide-to-Community-Gardening.pdf>

AUTHORS

Mary Benson¹, National University of Ireland, Ireland

Beata J. Gawryszewska, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland

Susan Noori, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

¹corresponding author: mary.benson@nuim.ie

INFO SERIES | ISSUE 1 V. ENGLISH | DATE OF ONLINE PUBLICATION: 20 JULY 2016

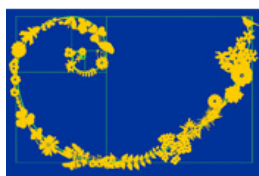


COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a pan-European intergovernmental framework. Its mission is to enable break-through scientific and technological developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contribute to strengthening Europe's research and innovation capacities.

www.cost.eu



COST is supported by the EU Framework Programme Horizon 2020



Acknowledgement

This factsheet is based upon work from COST Action TU1201 Urban Allotment Gardens in European Cities, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology)

www.urbanallotments.eu



Join urban gardens in Europe

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/825421310826607/>