

Nightingale News

For the Friends of Nightingale Garden

August/September 2021



24 June 2021: The day we installed the green roof on the veranda.

The green roofed veranda is finished!

It feels like a very long haul since we first conceived the idea for a covered, paved area in front of the club hut – with a biodiverse green roof. But, in July 2021, we finally finished it. It even has some plants growing on it.

Now, garden users can enjoy views over the garden from the veranda chairs – and the view of the veranda is a lot better too.

The project was funded by a City Council S106 'developers' grant', which we applied for in 2018. The paving was generously donated by Manit Contractors. The project was complicated and delayed by needing to work with a structural engineer – green roofs are heavy and the veranda is free-standing.

The original plan was to use simple 'construction timber' but, when we started talking with Jamie

Cakebread from Cambridge Restoration, part of the team that won the tender, he suggested we upgrade to oak, which looks better and lasts longer. This meant further rounds of engineering calculations.

Just before the pandemic, Jamie installed windows and doors to the front of the larch re-clad club hut. Then the veranda build got bogged down with 'lockdown' and waiting for various contractors to become available. And then it took ages to find a time to fill the roof with low-fertility substrate and plant it up (see 'Brownfield' article on Page 2) for more information. The last stage, in late July was to fit rain chains, which act as 'more interesting' downpipes, and then add to the planting by sowing a variety of seeds. We might also add some bulbs later in the year. •

For families: what next after the 'rabbits on the run'?

After the surprising success of '12 small doors' in late 2020, for Spring/Easter 2021 we encouraged 10 rabbits to run into the garden... And they seem to be at least as popular as the doors. So... what should we do next... and then after that?

We are always delighted when people suggest new features for the garden, especially for families. Do keep the ideas coming! The past

18 months have been tough on everyone... But, it was very obvious at the start of the pandemic that the garden would be very valued by small children, who couldn't easily play indoors with people outside their household groups/bubbles.

Adults seem to like hunting the doors and rabbits too.

We'd like to make a new 'trail' in time for October half-term break and have some ideas and willing volunteers. Watch this space - or rather watch the garden. •



“Have you found all the small doors and rabbits yet?”

Garden design: what is brownfield gardening?

You might have noticed several areas of the garden with non-traditional 'soil' for growing plants. Some of these mimic brownfield sites, which are our common wastegrounds that, in time, tend to get built on.

Why are we interested in them? They are usually great for biodiversity – called 'open mosaic landscapes'. They can make the best habitats for minibeasts - and then everything else follows. From a gardening point of view, their low-fertility substrates are often low maintenance and



drought tolerant, which is very handy for a community garden cared for by volunteers and in (usually) very dry Cambridge.

The most recent open mosaic habitats we have made in the garden are our biodiverse green roof (see Page 1) and a ground-level version in a narrow bed (see photo right). We also have another narrow bed filled with just clinker – 'mined' from under the bowling green itself. This has already self-seeded with some poppies and woad (see photo left).

We also have a mound of clinker by the gate, which we are going to make even more 'mosaic' with some gravel and then plant or seed.

The last area is a mound of spare soil, with a clay cap, by the raspberry bed. This is a 'bee/beetle bank', designed as a habitat for minibeasts that like to burrow or sun themselves on a South-facing slope. In July, we were very pleased to have a white-tailed bumble bee nest in it (see article below). For more information about brownfield gardening, see the new webpage on the garden website. •



24 June 2021: One of our 'demonstration' brownfield 'narrow beds', filled with various heights of crushed ceramics ('basins and loos'), with added logs and slate. This is very similar to the green roof on the veranda. We have planted some drought-tolerant plants but will add some seeds and bulbs later. It is an experiment for us.

Habitats in the garden: bee nests

We like to design habitats for wildlife.

Since 2018, we have had at least three bumblebee nests in the garden: the first one under the club hut, before we built the toolshed.

In 2019, we had a tree bumblebee nest in a bird box – they like to make

their nests in former birds' nests. This was quite dramatic because there were a lot of bees flying in and out at eye level. They didn't stay long.

In July 2021, we noticed some very large bumblebees flying to and fro from the base of a raspberry plant, on the edge of the bee/beetle bank. This was before we even put a sign up to welcome them. This was less dramatic because you have to be patient and wait for them to fly. But they are big. And we see lots of them feeding on the flowers in the garden. They were also a star attraction when we welcomed two classes from Queen Edith's primary school in July for some minibeast hunting. •

Bumblebeeconservation.org.uk



Tree bumblebee.

Photo credit: Steven Falk. Bumblebeeconservation.org.uk



White-tailed bumblebee.

“2021 seems to have been a bumper year for bumblebees at Nightingale Garden...”

Four ways we have made the garden more fruity

1 | Raspberries

Our 'raspberry row' is very popular from July–November. It is a good place to hunt for berries to nibble or take home.

These perennial plants ('canes') are easy to start off and look after. Raspberries send out 'suckers', so ask anyone who has a bed for spare plants. We mainly have Autumn ones and 'primocanes', which fruit in the first year.

They don't need support if you don't mind them spreading. We just use wires to keep them a bit more upright. They need cutting back over Winter. Our few 'Summer' plants were donations from a local garden and fruit earlier.

We have red and yellow varieties. Both are very tasty and the yellow ones are ripe when they are soft to the touch. Enjoy! •



2 | Cordon apples

We love fruit trees. The first ones we planted were in our 'deeper' soil around the peripheral path. So they don't extend over the path, we have trained them to be 'narrow'. They also help us show how anyone can enjoy a fruit tree, even in a small space. We don't grow them in pots because they would need more watering.

Our very first espalier tree was a grafted Nottingham 'street tree' red-leaved crab apple, donated by another community gardener. This was followed by six bare root cordon apples (see photo of one of them).

We haven't had any edible fruit yet but really enjoy the blossom in Spring. It is very good for pollinators too. •

3 | Standard fruit trees

In our mini orchard area, we have two apples, a pear, a plum, a greengage and now a (donated) fig tree (see photo).

In time, we hope some of these standard trees will become large enough for small people to climb. At the moment, all but the fig still need tree supports to keep them upright.

In late Spring 2021, a garden near-neighbour donated a mature crab apple, which we are trying to

keep alive by the main gate, but it is causing much concern - it had a very small rootball and looks very unhappy. It is much easier to plant smaller trees and, also, to do this in the wetter months when the trees are also dormant. This gives the roots time to establish.

A favourite source of advice about urban tree planting is The Orchard Project charity - but there are lots of other good resources online too. •



4 | Grapevine

There is a local informal network of community gardeners and we especially like to swap and share plants: 'plants for free'!

In Summer 2021, we eagerly took up the offer of a spare grapevine, taken from a cutting from a local garden.

We are probably more interested in the leaves than the fruit, which can be 'all skin and pips' when grown outdoors in the UK. The beautiful large leaves, however, can be picked over a long period, blanched and

used to wrap a rice filling to make dolmades. And maybe we will get some fruit too someday...

We aim to train it along wires at the corner of our orchard area. In time, the gnarled branches will look very attractive. Maybe we can do something interesting with the supports - let us know your ideas, and if you make some tasty food with the leaves. •

New features: tree-shade bench and new, shaded, family play area

In late July, we made a new four-part bench under one of the mature Swedish whitebeam trees.

We had noticed that people had moved the more traditional brown bench under this tree. It has very good shade and they were also using the bench to help them climb the tree. This bench is now under the veranda.

We used donations from three sets of families to buy the larch sleepers. The same wood is used on the front of the clubhut, which was cut for us locally by Paul at Cottenham Sawmill.

The design is simple but we hope children will like running along it, and that a family or small group can enjoy using it for a picnic. It should be good for school visits too.

Our next steps are to clear the area around it to serve families better as a play place. We'd like to construct,



July 2021: local families starting to enjoy the new bench.

between the nearby trees, some kind of covered play house for small children. We are looking for ideas now. Hopefully, we can use up some of the wood we already have in the garden and help us tidy up a bit too. •

New project: outdoor kitchen and activity preparation area

In 2020, we were successful in a bid for S106 developers' funding, via the City Council, for an outdoor kitchen and activity prep area, with a portable pizza oven for use in the garden and with local community groups.

We have delayed thinking too much about this until the green roof veranda project was finished. Since August 2021, we will be refining the design, working with our volunteers and also local groups who might use it. We think it will be especially useful for school groups, home educators, cubs/brownies etc.

Then we need to find contractors. It shouldn't be a difficult or long build - it will be wooden on a simple decking base and won't have any services to it. But sourcing materials and expertise might be more complicated (and maybe more costly) at the moment. We need to finish it by June 2022.

In the meantime, we took

advantage of a 'Black November deal' in 2020 and bought the pizza oven and some associated tools. Two volunteers have been trying out recipes and working out how to scale them up for safe (and tasty)



April 2021: first attempts at pizza making - we needed to learn not to burn the crust.

use in community settings. The pizzas cook very quickly – in under two minutes - and it is easy to eat them just as quickly. •



July 2021: new mosaic table – designed and made by garden volunteers – ready for pizza making.

Volunteering in other places: Kindness Garden at Wulfstan Way

In 2021, lots of our volunteers have been working on a new 'kindness project'. See our website for more information. One part was the creation of a little Kindness Garden by the shops at Wulfstan Way (see photo), which joined the three other beds planted in 2017. With our volunteer Stepan, who now works for the City Council's Engagement team, we dug out the old shrubs, made paths, planted masses of plants and then made a bug hotel and some signs. Many of the plants were donated by garden volunteers and local residents who have also got involved in keeping the garden watered and weeded. Thank you to everyone who has helped brighten up this neighbourhood. •



For learning: lifecycle displays

We are really keen to support learning in the garden - for all ages and abilities. From an infant's first visit to the garden, through organised nursery and school trips, to families and older people coming to the garden for leisure... We are also used a lot by home educators.

Since we first started, around 2015, we have put simple signs up in the garden and try to chat to people as they visit - pointing out things of interest.

In July, one of our newest volunteers has added some 'lifecycle' illustrations: frogs, dragonflies etc. She bought these from Etsy (online) and we have permission from the illustrators to display them. They are simple but very attractive - great for small children. Do let us know of other ideas for displays too - maybe you'd like to draw some for us? •



July 2021: some of the lifecycle displays around the pond - with photos of what you might find if you dip.

Groups in the garden: 'DIY Little Nightingales' and health walkers

We are always delighted to see a diversity of people using and enjoying the garden - alone, with their family or friends, or as organised groups. And for all kinds of reasons.

Over the years, the garden has been used for: yoga, fitness, tai chi, gardening for health, social walks, cubs learning about gardening, birthday parties. And small and large organised events, including our Funpalace in 2017. This had about 400 people attending and so many activities we had to lie down in a dark room for a few days afterwards (almost).

In 2018-2019, we had a regular Friday afternoon, Little Nightingales group, supported by garden volunteers. It was lovely but the numbers dwindled and the weather was often very unkind. It was also more difficult to do before we had the shelter of the polytunnel and the veranda.

This July, prompted by a request

from a frequent garden user, we invited local families to meet face-to-face and think about a 'DIY Little Nightingales' idea. It was really useful to get feedback on when they wanted to meet and how they wanted to organise it (or not).

As a consequence, some small groups of families have already been meeting and making new friends, which is great. They just meet when the weather is kind and they are in the mood - they contact each other via Whatsapp.

At around the same time, local resident David, from NHS-funded Healthy You, recognised the potential of the garden for health-promoting activities. So far, he has organised a one-off mindfulness walk, starting in the garden, and the first of a series of monthly Wellbeing Walks. These are advertised in the Friday evening Queen Edith's e-mail and we also promoted them via our Facebook page.

Do contact us if you'd like to use



Our wooden xylophone, made from waste wood, has been very popular.

the garden for a group, or contact those who we know are meeting.

We don't charge a fee for groups but just like to make sure the activities are safe, kind to the garden and won't preclude the use of the garden by other visitors. For some activities, you might need your own insurance cover.

If they are for-profit activities, we will refer you to the City Council (Streets and Open Spaces; SOS) because they might want to levy a fee. This is true for the park too.

We will aim to help you. For example, we can make sure the gates are unlocked, open the club hut and get out extra chairs, tables etc. Just bear in mind we are all volunteers and don't have unlimited spare time, especially during our working week. •



July 2021: some hands-on nature spotting at one of the DIY Little Nightingale-inspired meet-ups.

Events/festivals: moon in September

We love an excuse to get together in the garden, which for obvious reasons has been tricky recently. We also like to learn about, and enjoy, festivals from all cultures/countries. See the photo for a bring-and-share spread for Solstice 2019.



This September, we aim to get together, or have a community-made 'display', to celebrate Chinese Moon festival, which is on 21 September. We have lots of Chinese/related people enjoying the garden. We have some ideas already but welcome yours - and your involvement. Do contact us and we can meet, plan and do.

We also have an idea for a lantern-making festival in November - see our next newsletter.

If you have a family tradition you'd like to share with garden users, do get in contact. We can use your ideas to help build an events calendar for

the year - with contingencies for any new COVID-19-rules and guidelines. We managed to decorate the garden for Christmas 2020 and Easter 2021 despite 'lockdowns'...

We have decided not to plant up the polytunnel this season, so we can use that space over the Winter 'for people'. Hopefully, we have learned a lot about staying virus-safe by now. •

CALENDAR 2021

Sunday
12 September

Nightingale Gardeners AGM 2-3 pm, in the garden (TBC).

Sunday
19 September

Music in the park: Waterbeach Brass Band (times TBC)

Tuesday 21 September

Moon festival in the garden (see article to left). Times TBC

1 October

Start of Autumn/Winter garden opening hours - at least 10 am to 3 pm.

23-31 October

School half term holiday.

Sunday
28 November

Last regular gardening session of the year.

Gardening sessions are held on most Sunday and Monday afternoons, from 2-4 pm (4-6 pm in Summer), weather allowing and when co-ordinators are available. Contact the garden co-ordinators for more info (see contact box below). Check the garden website for updates before travelling far (see QR code below).

A few thank yous for very recent support...

As always, to our **gate rota volunteers** who lock and unlock the gates every day - they keep an eye on the place too.

To all the other **garden volunteers** who dig, edge, grow, make, move, mow, prune, shovel, water and weed every week - and in all weathers. It is a pleasure learning with you.

To all those who have so many great ideas to make the garden a happy, creative place for families, and especially to **Julia** who is taking a lead in doing some of them.

To **David**, for seeing the potential in the garden as a place to start walks and be mindful.

To **Gill** for counting all those flowers every month for so many

years.

To everyone who has donated books to the **book- and seed swap boxes**. People love them.

To **Guy** and all the City Council staff for being so supportive of the garden since 2014, and designing and making us such a great green roof with **Graham**.

To **Manit Contractors** (via Martin) for the paving under the veranda.

To **Coton Orchard Garden Centre** (via Len) for the plant donations - used in the garden but also at Wulfstan Way Kindness Garden and St John's church garden.

To everyone else who has donated ideas, plants, water and

good gardening for the Kindness Garden and the wider kindness project.

To the **garden club** that meets at St John's for the very generous donation after their recent visit.

To everyone who has donated money to the garden - it is very helpful (see below for how to donate).

To the anonymous person/people who donated the replacement blackboard - a lovely surprise and already very well used.

To **Rebecca Brewster** (etsy: FiddlesticksEd) and **Leigh** (etsy: LuneBear) for permission to use their lifecycle illustrations in the garden. We love them! •

This newsletter is produced by **Nightingale Gardeners** a constituted group run by volunteers for the **Friends of Nightingale Garden**. Join for £10, or as much as you can afford, annually (see the website for details). This helps support the garden for expenses like insurance, tools and plants. One-off donations are also very gratefully received: Nightingale Gardeners, Lloyds Bank; Sort code: 30 65 65 Account number: 631 76568.

You can **Paypal donate** via the garden website: [nightingalegarden.org.uk](https://www.nightingalegarden.org.uk) (or use the QR code to the right). Also online on Facebook: [NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK](https://www.facebook.com/NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK)
E-mail: info@nightingalegarden.org.uk Tel: 07792 531 400.
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