

# Nightingale News

For the Friends of Nightingale Garden

December 2021/January 2022

Photos: Bethany Kelman



## Garden alight for St Martin's Day!

On 11 November, we hosted our first family-friendly St Martin's Day event. As someone said on the day, it was 'a massive success', with people of all ages and nationalities enjoying getting together in their garden.

We had some time in the light but it was especially good to see the garden in the dark, illuminated by all kinds and sizes of lights and lanterns. Even by a huge willow goose (see photo), made by local families from Nightingale willow. All together, it was a 'magical experience'.

We had some singing of traditional German and English songs, accompanied by a guitar and violin; a dramatic enactment of the story of St Martin on Rosie the horse, including tearing a cloak in two; and a lantern parade around the garden. And lots of time to just explore the garden and make new friends. We were very lucky with the weather, but had a toasty fire to warm us up. We invited a plant-based, pedal-powered coffee cart along. Some volunteers brought home-made parkin, savory treats and toddler- and goose-shaped biscuits to share.



Pumpkins from the Cyrenian's Allotment.

This was an event created by your local community - see the 'thanks' on Page 6 for a long list of volunteers. We hope to do it again next year, and maybe at a weekend so even more people can join us •



Petit Dejeuner the St Martin's Day goose welcoming people to the garden.

## For families: Mostly beetles, 15-minibeast trail



For October half-term, several local families painted a new trail for the garden. It is almost all beetles... with a few other minibeasts to keep them company. It is linked with the beetle habitat work we are doing (see page 3). By request, or to avoid a mass revolt, we have kept the 10 rabbits and 12 small doors and hope you enjoy spotting them all •





## New project: developing a better produce garden at Nightingale

We know people like to see produce growing at Nightingale, alongside our 'fluffy flowers'. We overhear people talking about it to their friends and families. And nibbling it, especially our raspberries.

In general, we think it is good for people to see where food comes from. We especially want produce to be available in the garden for children to see and maybe try (see photo to the right). But we don't have a lot of free space now and much of our soil isn't very good for produce growing. So, anything we do will be mainly as a 'demonstration' and much less about producing a weighty harvest or addressing any kind of food poverty.

Other community gardens in Cambridge grow produce brilliantly - see the article about Empty Common Community Garden on page 5. To be honest, the produce we grow at Nightingale is often a bit of an embarrassment to the volunteers, who have often been growing it in their own spaces for decades, at least reasonably well. We just don't have the spare time to focus on it. Produce is, in general, more demanding than growing flowers, and usually needs more watering, which we try to minimise at Nightingale (see page 4).

In some years, we manage to grow delicious tomatoes, knobbly pink fir apple potatoes (see photo to the right), an array of winter squash, tasty courgettes and a wide range of annual herbs like parsley and coriander. Other years (i.e. in 2021), the tomatoes get blight, the winter squash disappear before they are ripe, the courgettes get crowded out by random 'gift' plants and the herbs don't get sown. Or we plant things ourselves, forget to label them (or the labels disappear) and we can't remember what they are. But, for 2022 (at least), we have a plan:

First, we need to understand why we aren't very good at produce growing at Nightingale. We think it is for many reasons, some more easily tackled than others.

Second, we need to be realistic about what we can grow, and choose easier plants and varieties that are valued more highly like herbs (see page 3).



November: a first start... protecting plants (and labels) under netting.



Third, we need to communicate better with volunteers. So we don't all water plants that don't need it on one day and then ignore the thirsty ones for weeks.

Fourth, we need to communicate better with garden visitors. Make it clear which plants we'd like them to help themselves to - but not take too much so others can see some growing. And



Photo: Julia Leong

One of our youngest garden volunteers with a mid-October 2021 mini harvest at Nightingale. Elliot says carrots are his favourite vegetable and he hadn't tried 'rainbow' chard before. He enjoyed preparing them both as part of a tasty dinner - with a bit of extra soil retained for a more interesting texture.

which ones aren't ready or that we are saving for a good reason.

Fifth, we need to protect plants (and labels) better from birds and butterflies, including with netting (see photo to the left).

To start this off, we have made a list of what is feasible to grow, where and when. We also have some new volunteers who seem keen on growing produce, which is very helpful.

We would love to grow a greater diversity of plants (see photo to the right), and reflecting the diets of our volunteers and garden visitors. It makes it more interesting for volunteers to try new varieties and we can learn from each other. Some of the more exotic plants might do better in our changing climate. You can help us here - let us know what you grow and how - and maybe donate some seeds to try.



We have invested in seeds for unusual varieties.

It would also be great to link what we grow with sharing food together in the garden. Maybe we need to grow some 'pizza plants' for when we cook them in the garden? So... watch this space - and the raised beds in the garden as we try to try harder. And let us know if you'd like to join in •



## New features: perennial herb bed

We love herbs - partly because they make everything tastier and better scented, partly because they tend to do well in our thin soil, but also because they are usually very good for biodiversity - especially minibeasts.

In late October, a small group of volunteers started a new all-year-round herb bed. We adapted an area of the garden that already had some good specimens of hyssop, oregano, rosemary, sage and thyme. We moved the non-edibles out and transplanted in some more varieties, like lavender and Chinese garlic chives; these seem to do really well in Cambridge: 'even better than in China', we have been told. We have added some other perennial herbs and veg like Welsh and walking onions. And, next Spring, we will aim to plant some of the more frost-susceptible herbs like French tarragon and lemon verbena.

We will also think about ways to sign this bed, which is next to the oak raised beds. One of which we will use to grow annual herbs like basil, coriander, dill and parsley. This is part of our 'better produce' project (see page 2). We'd also like garden visitors to learn more, with us, about herbs. They can then help themselves to a sprig or two - either to fragrance their day/diet or to start off their own herb gardens •



15 November: part of the new perennial herb bed, with mature rosemary plants and some biennial parsley to over-winter.

## 'Green team' comes to Nightingale Park

On 18 November, four of us, as a City Council Streets and Open Spaces (SOS) 'green team', spent a long morning working in the park. Earlier in the year, we had suggested SOS came to give some extra care to the remaining four 'public art' apple trees planted a few years ago, near the garden.

The group was led by Stepan Slavin, a Community Engagement Officer, who has volunteered with us in the past. First, we removed the crumpled chicken wire, damaged tree guards, stakes and ties. Then we cleared a circle of grass around each tree and did a modest prune. We then mulched the trees with Nightingale compost, a layer of cardboard and then a thick layer of woodchip. We added some new tree stakes to encourage the trees to grow more upright. And applied some new rigid



October: 'before'...

protection - including to keep the park's rabbits away.

We hope these trees will grow better now and we will try to keep an eye on them over the next few years •



18 November: Jo and Stepan with a happier tree.

## Habitats in the garden: dead hedge

We are delighted to announce we met our (self-imposed) October half-term deadline and finished laying the dead hedge. This also, happily, shrunk our rather towering slow-rot bin. Now, it is a cosy home for beetles and other minibeasts. There are rumours of decorating it with 'willow loveliness' over the Winter but Julian and Terry say they will probably leave that to more nimble-fingered and creative volunteers •





# Four ways to garden more sustainably...

Following COP26, we thought we would highlight some ways we are trying to garden more sustainably at Nightingale. So you can look out for what we are doing and maybe this will help you try your best in your gardens and allotments.

## 1 | Wiser watering

Collecting rainwater is an obvious choice to save our very precious mains water. We were donated unwanted wheelie bins to make into water butts (see photo) but it is (fairly) easy to source butts from DIY stores or online.

It is very easy to use more water than needed, especially when there are children around who enjoy 'water play'. We try to focus this enthusiasm on our new trees - they

are often thirsty. Young people like trees and it is also an opportunity to talk about where to water - not on plant leaves but, at the roots, on the soil itself.

Most adults find watering a chore so we aim to grow drought-tolerant plants - look online for lists - we like the Beth Chatto Nursery. Newly planted plants need watering but maybe just twice. Check the RHS website for guides to wise watering.



## 2 | Use fewer resources, and source locally

We aim to 'buy less' and try to buy and source locally. Our wider garden community have offered us all kinds of unwanted tools and materials: Rosie the horse (see photo) was rescued from the Council depot and re-painted. Freecycle, Gumtree and Nextdoor are good online sources for second-hand and, even free, goods. Emmaus, at Waterbeach, is always an

interesting visit and supports their community.

Allotment 'shops' are great for local supplies and will often accept associate members.

Churches, libraries and schools often have fund-raising plant sales; some of our best plants have come from them. And, we like to give away spare plants and seeds from Nightingale too.

## 3 | Make less waste and keep it nearby

Gardens generate 'waste', but much of it can be very valuable if turned into compost, leaf mould (see photo) or mulch. This transformation can be slow and needs space, which isn't possible in many small gardens - or smaller allotments.

Communal composting would be great to see in our area. It uses less energy compared with taking green

waste away in lorries. People living in flats have brought kitchen waste to our compost bins. We have collected coffee grounds from a local cafe and have had donations of lawn cuttings from nearby garden contractors too.

Tree surgeons donate their woodchip to our local allotments and we cycle it to the garden for mulching our trees.



## 4 | Be kind to nature...

Encouraging biodiversity is a key part of sustainability, alongside global warming targets and addressing waste and pollution.

Probably the best feature we have developed is our nature pond (see photo), which is full of pond plants and creatures but is also somewhere for visiting bees and birds to drink. It has a hibernaculum too for overwintering amphibia.

The wide variety of plants we grow, alongside the mature trees and hedges we inherited from the

bowling green, are also very nature-friendly. We aim to have as many flowers as possible throughout the year, especially in early Spring, for pollinators.

And we aim to not be too tidy, which is very easy for us to do!

We have deliberate areas of tussocky grass, short grass and scruffy meadow beds over winter. And we develop other habitats for creatures to lay eggs, hatch, raise young, hibernate and hunt. The garden is a busy place for wildlife •



## Volunteering for other places: St James Church garden

On three Wednesdays and a Sunday morning in October, a 'crack team' of Nightingale volunteers have enjoyed working with other church volunteers in the gardens of St James Church on Wulfstan Way.

Some of us are regular church attenders and others just visit from time to time but we have got to know many of the church community there and at Nightingale Garden. We all enjoy gardening, of course.

Autumn is a good time to divide plants and lift bulbs so we were able to donate to the church lots from Nightingale and also from the beds by the Wulfstan Way shops. All chosen to be easy to grow, favourites with garden visitors and great for pollinators. We hope they will help enhance the church's outdoor space for everyone in the community to enjoy.

This refreshing of the church greenspace is part of their wider project to be more sustainable and 'nature-friendly'. The church also has early plans for long-grass areas, pollinator-friendly planting, fruit trees, rainwater collection, woodpiles and bug hotels. And we look forward to playing our small part in them •



*The church has six of these rather 'retro' concrete planters, which are quite labour- and resource intensive. We offered to help them transition to more drought-tolerant plants - better for the planet. We hope the Mediterranean herbs and penstemons will be happy there. But, in the short-term, we have also filled them with locally grown violas and wallflowers - because they cheer us all up over Winter, which is also important.*

## Other community gardens to visit: Empty Common



Cambridge is very lucky to have Empty Common Community Garden. It was one of our first community gardens and somewhere where lots of local volunteers have learned to garden, especially learning about permaculture, including from the hugely experienced Charlotte Syngé.

The garden is very different to Nightingale: it grows a lot of food of all kinds in a backdrop of beautiful mature trees, with a stream on either side. It has different challenges including horsetail and visiting deer. But, like Nightingale, it also grows flowers, has wildlife habitats and a pond (see photos - from their website).

It is a project of Transition

Cambridge, who use it for events of all kinds. They have a very good weekly e-mail, which is well worth subscribing to.

The garden is just off Brooklands Avenue, at the end of the allotment path but is also accessible by the path along Hobson's Brook. It is always open so is easy to drop by to visit.

Volunteers meet on most Sunday mornings but there is also a rota for watering between times - see the website for details. You will be warmly welcomed and should learn a lot too •





## Festive get together in the garden

### UPDATE!

The garden volunteers are very happy to be collaborating with Queen Edith's Community Forum and Cambridge Junction on a family-friendly get together, which is **now in the garden**, on the afternoon of Sunday 19 December.

This date is the December full moon, called the Cold Moon. But we hope to make the event a very warm and friendly one, for everyone to enjoy. It will be free and all are welcome.

We will have festive outdoor activities for all ages, which will be weather dependent. But we hope to have, at least, some music, craft activities, and a professional juggler.

We will decorate the garden, including the polytunnel, for the holiday season and add



some lanterns for the day. There might be some new robins to spot too.

In case it is chilly, we will have hot drinks and a toasty fire for marshmallows. Bring a lantern or torch along if you will stay until dusk. Julia's fantastic guide to lantern making is still on the garden website.

You could come early and warm up with a walk around the park, return to the garden for a hot drink and see it lit up with lanterns. It was 'magical' on St Martin's Day (see page 1).

Most of all, we hope you will drop by the garden and catch up with neighbours and friends at this festive time of year - and at any other time •



## CALENDAR 2021

### Winter break from regular gardening

We will take a break from 29 November. But continue to meet up socially and for one-off working parties, if the weather is kind.

**Sunday 19 December, 2.30 to 4.30 pm**

Family-friendly meet-up **in the garden**. With Queen Edith's Community Forum (see article to the left).

**Sunday 26 December, afternoon**

Very informal Boxing Day tea - mainly for volunteers. Weather allowing - see website for updates (TBC).

**16 January, from 2 to 4pm**

Our first volunteer session of 2022 - weather allowing.

**Gardening sessions:** from 16 January 2022, will be held on most Sunday and Monday afternoons, from 2-4 pm, 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 the QR code below).



November: a 'confused' globe artichoke....

## A few thank yous for very recent support...

To everyone who has donated and/or signed up as a Friend of the Garden (see below for how to join). We have raised enough funds to pay our annual insurance and buy the materials needed for a playhouse.

It has also been great to hear from people who have moved away from Cambridge but want to stay in

touch with the garden.

To all the talented minibeast painters - they look great!

To everyone who helped out before, during and after our St Martin's Day event: the willow goose makers (Ana, Francesca and Julia); the several regular garden volunteers, plus the music team: Jane, Jennie, Jennifer and Julia. A

special thanks to Kerstin from the Cambridge German Church for the story telling, To the guys from the VG coffe cart for delicious drinks and treats. To Bethany and Jeremy for the great photos. And, as always, to all our many volunteers who make the garden a special place for everyone to enjoy •

This newsletter is produced by **Nightingale Gardeners** a constituted group run by volunteers for the **Friends of Nightingale Garden**. Join for £10 (or what 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.

### Sign up for this newsletter via our garden

**website:** [www.nightingalegarden.org.uk](http://www.nightingalegarden.org.uk) (use QR code to right). Also online on Facebook:

[NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK](https://www.facebook.com/NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK)

E-mail: [info@nightingalegarden.org.uk](mailto:info@nightingalegarden.org.uk) Tel: 07792 531 400

Visit us: **Nightingale Community Garden**,

Nightingale Park, Nightingale Avenue, Cambridge CB1 8SG UK.

