

Nightingale News

For the Friends of Nightingale Garden

February/March 2022



Photos: Paul Herrington

Let's get together!

On 19 December and on New Year's Day, we held two 'get togethers' in the garden. Both were free for anyone to attend and we offered free hot drinks and sweet treats from around the world, with lots of home baking and very good company.

The first, in the run-up to Xmas, was organised with Queen Edith's Community Forum and we were delighted to have three woodwind players from Wind in the Willows join us to play carols. They played from a gazebo between the Swedish whitebeam trees. This is where we will, in 2022, be building a covered outdoor kitchen and activity preparation area (see page 6), which we hope will also be a small 'stage' for such events.

The December event was scheduled to continue after dark and one volunteer e-mailed afterwards: 'I heard little kids gasp with excitement when they walked into the garden and saw all the lights, music and festivities'. Garden volunteers also decorated our outdoor living Xmas tree and the polytunnel especially for the event (see photo below) and for the holiday period.

The second get together was organised at short notice to replace one postponed from Boxing Day due to very



unkind wet weather. It was very informal, very well attended and we had very kind weather! We also had held a mini get together, with refreshments, after the 23 December Wellbeing Walk in the garden, attended by regular walkers and some very welcome new ones (see article on page 3).

All these get togethers have been supported by a 2021 'kindness project' grant from the City Council South Area Committee, the Coop at the Marke on Hills Road and, especially, an amazing team of talented volunteers. There are several national schemes for get togethers, such as the Jo Cox Get Togethers and Eden Project Big Lunches. We are big fans of these and encourage anyone to think about organising one for their own communities. Check the websites for advice - or ask us. In this Jubilee year, we can also expect some extra special get togethers, funded by the City Council, in May/June - the deadline for applications was 28 January for our South area. We usually aim to have a Solstice event around 21 June in the garden, so haven't applied for Jubilee funding •

For families: a new robin trail

Just before the Festive event in December, eight robins flew into the garden to brighten the place up. They did surprisingly well, considering they are made of waste wood and paint •



New project: nature-friendly gardening/allotmenting

Several of our garden volunteers are also local allotmenters - and one is newly on the committee of Rock Allotment Society. A project for the Society - and probably other committees - is to develop a sustainability plan/strategy for the plots. One part of this is to research nature-friendly growing and promote it to plotholders. This chimes well with what we aim to do in the community garden so we are sharing tips and tricks on the Garden website to help both communities get up to speed. Look for the Rock Allotments webpage and links from it.

It is very easy to find amazing resources online - and there are many books too, including in local libraries. Favourites include Charles Dowding, Garden Organic and the RHS website. There are also local places to see nature-friendly growing in action - like some of the community gardens featuring in our newsletters. Cambridge Botanic Garden, especially the school garden and dry garden, is another inspiring place to visit with a camera, notebook and pencil.

It is more difficult to choose what to do first for your own growing location. It can be helpful to have recommendations from 'people like us' trying things out on local soil with local weather - so we will include these.

There are obvious things to do less of (like buying new plastic), things to avoid completely (like buying peat-containing products and using insect- and hedgehog-damaging chemicals) but also things to do more of (like planting pollinator-friendly plants) and do differently (like watering more wisely).

We all have a lot to learn - and we hope it will be fun to do it together •



A simple idea spotted on a neighbour's plot: an upturned dustbin lid filled with pebbles. Good for bees, birds and hedgehogs.

Local groups: On the Verge Cambridge

Since the Autumn, a couple of garden volunteers, along with the biodiversity team from the Council, have been collaborating informally with Ben Greig and Jo Scrivens from another local volunteer group: On the Verge Cambridge. We have met a couple of times at Nightingale. So far, we have shared ideas, bulbs, swapped bat boxes, played with willow together... And, especially, looked for ways we can work and learn together.

On the Verge Cambridge have a number of projects planned already, including a project in local schools. This project is funded by the Pebble Fund and Natural England's Nature Recovery Project. In Spring 2022, they will work in another five schools to install wildflower meadows, plan some long grass areas and do some habitat work to support beetles, birds and bats.

Ben and Jo have also been studying the bug hotels at Nightingale - so expect to see minibeast mansions (see



May 2016, the minibeast mansion at Nightingale, with its alpine flowers, planted by the Gardening for Health volunteers.



2021: local children enjoying meadows

photo) all over Cambridge (or at least one).

They also like the Kindness Garden at Wulfstan Way shops and have plans to do something similar at a location in the North of the City. We have offered to propagate some plants from Nightingale for them.

We are also inspired by the idea, developed in Bristol, of 'pollinator hubs'. Small patches that can be brightened up with plants chosen to be friendly for pollinating insects. But they are also great for people. Similar to some of the planting at Wulfstan Way shops. Some of those in Bristol have been in 'grot spots' that are very unfriendly for people but attractive for flytippers. Soon, with Ben and Jo and other help, we will aim to develop a list of plants that support insects throughout the year but are also robust and don't need a lot of care. We can use some of the information collected each month at Nightingale by Gill our volunteer 'flower counter'. We can share this via the garden website - watch this space. And let us know if you'd like to be involved •

In the garden: wellbeing walks

Our 23rd December Wellbeing Walk in the community garden was soon after the Winter solstice. What we lacked in daylength, we gained in hot drinks, mince pies and lebkuchen. Our disparate group of walkers meets on the fourth Thursday of each month from 10 am until 11 am but, this time, we added a small extra celebration - of each other and our collective achievements - over festive snacks.

The monthly walks are free to attend and open to anyone who feels they need more exercise and more company in their daily routines. The focus is on wellbeing, rather than walking performance.

We come together to connect with the beauty and gifts of the garden and park. We enjoy some gentle exercise but also the pleasure of listening and talking as we connect. This is at just a level that we're individually comfortable with: it is fine to stay quiet and walk alone, and it is fine if you choose to stop at the first bench to catch your breath, or just to have a quiet moment. You can come on your own or bring a friend or family member. To book your space(s) go to www.bookwhen.com/walksincambridge or if you aren't very confident using online booking you can phone the

Healthy Lifestyle team (Healthy You) on 0333 005 0093, leaving your name and contact details. On the morning, I will be there to greet you and lead this gentle meander towards ourselves. **David Lynch, walk volunteer** •



December 2021: David - and his hat - 'connecting with nature'.

Other green spaces to visit: Trumpington Community Orchard

Cambridge is very lucky to have several fantastic community orchards. Perhaps the largest is the one at Trumpington - the other side of the biomedical campus from Nightingale and just off the guided bus way that goes South from the main rail station.

Spring is a lovely time to visit orchards especially in later Spring when you might experience their beautiful blossom.

Trumpington Orchard is cared for by volunteers, with some help from the City Council, and new volunteers are always very welcome to join them at their sessions. Some of our garden volunteers have been along to help them (see photo).

The orchard volunteers meet twice a month on a Sunday and a Thursday (see their website for dates). Tools are available but best to bring your own gardening gloves and do bring any tools you especially like to use to weed, prune trees and tame brambles.



May 2021: Tzu Chi Cambridge Collegiate volunteers, weeding under a blossoming apple tree.

The orchard was founded in 2006 with the aim of enhancing biodiversity and creating a small green oasis in Trumpington. This was catalysed by the proposed new housing development by Trumpington village - now mostly built - and the new guided busway and

cycle and walking path to the area. Funding for the project came from a Big Lottery Breathing Places grant and a grant from Cambridge City Council from the southern area improvement fund.

The volunteers, most of whom live very near the orchard and some also have allotment plots next to it, planted Cambridgeshire heritage apple varieties and some other fruit trees. One of them, Susanna, grafted some of our Nightingale Garden fruit trees too - they are the ones that are

growing best! The orchard trees grow in a wildflower meadow and there is also a mixed native hedgerow around it. Features include an observation beehive with a good sized colony of bees, a swift tower with nesting swifts in the summer and a number of bird boxes scattered through the self-seeded cherry thicket.

The orchard hosts several events throughout the year, including a very popular January Wassail (see photo above).

The orchard has always been a popular spot for local families to visit, to have a picnic etc.

If you visit, do help them to keep this wildlife haven free from litter and damage - and think of volunteering too •



A wassail is a blessing of fruit trees. It often involves drinking and singing to the health of the trees in the hope that they will provide a bountiful harvest in the autumn.

Four ways to enjoy the Spring...

1 | Early Spring bulbs

Every February, we are proud and delighted when our early crocuses flower around the former bowling green. In 2018, several thousand bulbs were donated by local Rotary clubs - for Purple for Polio - and planted by local cubs - in probably the worst weather anyone has gardened in. We offered to postpone but cubs are apparently very hardy. Each year, we have to remind our garden volunteers where they will emerge to prevent

trampling and then they give a glorious purple display. We are especially keen on them because they provide very early Spring food for pollinators. Look out for bees and other insects, especially when it is sunny and they open out fully (see photo). And, at the end of the day, they close up. Isn't nature clever?

They are *Crocus tommasinianus* Ruby Giant and widely available from bulb suppliers. We love them.



2 | Frogspawn

Late February, depending on the weather, tends to be the time when we first see and hear frogs coming in quite large numbers to our nature pond to mate and lay spawn (see photo from 29 February 2020). It is a very exciting time for our gardeners. When we are in the garden, we will bring out nets and buckets and sometimes very carefully lift some spawn for people to see. Please don't help yourself to the spawn - it tends to be in the

slippery, deep parts of the pond - or disturb the frogs too much.

We tend not to find tadpoles later in the year - it might be that our newts eat them or they are just better at avoiding our nets. But we see and 'dip' masses of adult and baby newts throughout the year. And also find frogs in the garden hunting for food or just chilling out.

3 | Bird nesting

From about March, birds start nesting and so work on hedges and trees has to stop.

We have a few nesting boxes in the garden, installed early in the garden's development. Two were donated by a local woodworking project and decorated by our Gardening for Health volunteers. Two were made during a corporate volunteering group visit (see photo).

We have had some blue tits nesting in them and a tree bumblebee one Summer.

We could buy/make and install more - perhaps this should be a new project for this year. But we are not very good at working out good places for them and also maintaining them. Let us know if you'd like to help us with this project. 2022 could be the year of the nest box (or 2023...).



4 | Seed sowing

From 14 February (exactly), we will start sowing seeds for our Better Produce Project (see previous newsletter). Over the Winter, we have been busy studying gardening skills from Charles 'No dig' Dowding and that is when he recommends we start. In 2022, we won't try to direct sow many crops outdoors and we hope, following Charles' advice, we can have some produce growing right through the year. Yum. In Spring, we will try out using fleece to

warm the soil and protect seedlings, followed by mesh and netting to protect the crops from pest insects and birds.

We will also be sowing seeds for annual flowering plants for all the projects we are involved with. Phew. There is never quite enough space for growing plants under cover (see photo) but time is always found to care for the baby plants. We will be very happy if/when there is a rainbow of produce to enjoy.

Project updates: playhouse and kitchen or Playhouses?

Soon after Easter, we have scheduled to start to build the playhouse between the trees, near the larch bench. We have some plans (in pencil at the moment), the funds (thank you Friends!), and some resources, including under the green tarpaulin. We just need some time to finalise the design (in ink!), source the rest of the supplies and find a chunk of time to do the making. It would be easier if we had a power supply in the garden but we aren't holding our breath for the pavilion (where our power comes from) to be re-built by then. Probably, we will need to get the handsaw out - so please, no comments about our wonky cutting!

From February 2022, we are also hoping to make some progress on the outdoor kitchen/activity preparation area. It got a bit 'stuck' at the City Council, not quite knowing who would manage the funding. Now we have the names of two council officers to 'gently remind' and a shortlist of contractors to start to contact to tender. The project is supposed to be completed by September 2022, but we'd like it to be ready earlier. Especially, because we could use it for get togethers throughout the year (see page 1) and it should also be really useful for visiting groups, including school parties.

In December 2021, garden volunteer Julia Leong constructed a shadow puppet theatre for families to use



Shadow puppet theatre in action.

in the garden. In late December, they had a little performance of the Nutcracker from the veranda (see photo). This got us thinking that the playhouse - could be designed as a 'Playhouse' (with a curtain!) and the outdoor kitchen might also be a great place for performances. Let us know if you are interested and if you have other ideas for creative - and fun - uses of the garden •

Creativity in the garden: willow creatures...

We are hugely excited to occasionally see a single fox in the garden, often around 3 pm, going to and from neighbouring properties through gaps in fences/hedges. It might be one garden-fan fox or one from a family. It/they look young and healthy (see photo top right). And very beautiful - we are rather smitten but then we don't keep chickens.

Over the Winter, our garden volunteers have started to harvest willow from the community garden and a nearby allotment. We will cut the willow from the circle during the early Spring.

For some time, a few of us have been meeting outside regular sessions to learn together how to use willow. It has been quite challenging to find a time when we are all well, it isn't raining or, more often, freezing cold. We really need our fingers to be working well to handle the willow.



January 2022. One of Kate's willow stars decorating the polytunnel - made from dry and soaked willow.

We like making 'random willow' objects so thought we'd have a go at a fox - not having ever made animals before. With a newsletter deadline approaching, and what seemed like weeks of frosty weather, our first fox was constructed in a warm kitchen (see photo) rather than in the garden. We think we might try some birds next, maybe chickens, and also some plant supports. So watch the garden for more creatures and creations over the Spring •



'Fantastic Ms Fox' visiting the garden on an afternoon in December 2021. A muse for the garden volunteers.



January 2022: Spot the difference! A young garden visitor has named her Spaghetti, which we like a lot - even more than 'around the garden with Phileas Fox'.

Events: Chinese New Year in the garden



Happy New Year - from Rosie the horse and a friendly water tiger - both wearing red. Illustration by local artist Susan Abbs.

Weather (and virus) allowing, we will for the first time celebrate Chinese New Year in the garden. This year it starts on 1 February but we will meet the following Saturday morning, from 11 am to 1 pm.

2022, is the year of the water tiger, last celebrated 60 years ago, which is about the age of Nightingale Recreation Ground and bowling green. Although many people now refer to it as a park - and, of course, a community garden!

On the day, we will have a tiger theme... and red and yellow/gold are typical colours for Chinese New Year. It can

be traditional to wear something red - just if you wish.

We will have some family-friendly activities: make some decorations, sing and enjoy some stories.

If it is flying weather (i.e. windy), bring a kite along to fly together in the park.

We will have some Chinese hot drinks and, hopefully, a food demonstration around mid-day. Bring a picnic lunch if you will want to stay over lunch and if the weather is friendly.

Most of all, it will be another excuse to get together (see page 1), learn about other cultures and traditions - and have some fun •

CALENDAR 2022

Saturday 5 February 11 am to 1 pm	Chinese New Year celebration in the garden (see article to the left).
Thursday 17 February, 10 am to 12 noon	Family-friendly get together for half-term school holiday. CHANGE OF DATE.
Sunday 13 March, 2 to 3 pm	Spring 'planning' meeting of the Gardeners group.
Sunday 17 April (TBC)	Informal get-together for Easter break.
Sunday 15 May, 2 to 3 pm	AGM of Gardeners Group.
Saturday 25 June (TBC)	Informal evening get-together for Midsummer. CHANGE OF DATE.
Friday/ Saturday 8/9 July (TBC)	Friday evening bat and insect watching and setting an overnight moth trap for Saturday morning moth spotting.
Sunday 11 September, 2 to 3 pm	Autumn 'planning' meeting of the Gardeners group.

Gardening sessions: 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).

A few thank yous for very recent support...

To everyone who has donated and/or signed up as a Friend of the Garden - one has even set up monthly donations (see below for how to join).

To everyone who helped out before, during and after our get

together events in December and January (see page 1), especially the decorators, bakers and musicians.

To Peter Clarke and family for donating the planters - we hope to use them in the polytunnel this year.

To the volunteers planning the

Chinese New Year get together, including Susan Abbs for her wonderful illustration (see above). And, as always, to all our many volunteers who make the garden a special place for everyone to enjoy every day •

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.

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