

Nightingale News

For the Friends of Nightingale Garden

June–August 2022



Friends' house for play - thank you!

In late April, two garden volunteers spent a 'holiday week' constructing a 'house for play', funded by the Friends of Nightingale Garden (see photo above).

This has been in the planning stages for some months, as we asked garden users what they wanted. We aimed to size it for children but also make a place that an adult could sit in with them and maybe read a book together.

We managed to use lots of materials already in the garden, or leftovers from other projects, but needed about £380 of new materials: for decking, softwood for the stud walls and rafters, and roofing materials.

The cladding is made of dismantled pallets and the old cladding from the front of the club hut. Using these materials takes much longer to prepare and install but adds a certain 'rustic charm'. And saves money.

The house won't have a door or closing windows because these can trap little fingers. But we will spend time now adding features to make it fun and comfy to

use. We overcame our inclination to make it too pretty, deciding that we should leave it quite plain so children could decide for themselves what it should become - an 'imaginarium' (but scaled down a lot).

So far, we have upcycled a wooden screen - found some years ago in a skip - to make a large chalkboard. We have plans to decorate the 'little window' wall with a woodland theme. We will make some signs that can be customised by children and hung on it. We will add hooks, find some outdoor-compatible cushions, some crates as furniture and curtains and throws so 'dens' can be constructed.

Suggestions for use have included a grocery shop, cycle repair shop, ice cream kiosk, puppet theatre and a bus shelter. Or 'Julian's whelk stall'.

It has been great to see and hear the reaction to it so far - and we hope it will be enjoyed for many years •



“Moths and bats are coming - in July... see back page”

Photos from July 2017





Garden activities: Garden sketchers

In mid April, we started a new activity for the garden on Thursdays from 4.30 to 6.30 pm - urban sketching - but in the garden. It has been fun - and we aim to meet most Thursdays in the warmer months. All are welcome and there is no need to book. It is 'weather allowing', although we have some covered space in the garden. It is best to check the garden website before travelling far. We have chairs, small tables, we bring along some tap water and have a tray of simple resources, drawing boards and jam jars to borrow.

These are a few of the comments we have had so far:

Jill: "What could be nicer than setting aside an hour or two outdoors surrounded by nature? Couple that with having your favourite art materials and a sketchbook to hand, and you have a recipe for happiness. At least that's what I've enjoyed about attending the first few weeks sketching sessions at Nightingale Garden.



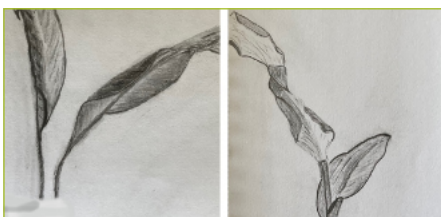
A chance to sit, observe and lose oneself in beautiful surroundings doesn't fail to lift one's spirits, and having the birds sing to you whilst drawing, is the icing on the cake.



For me, it's not so much the outcome of my sketching or painting that matters, but the fact that I have given myself time to slow down and just enjoy being here. The friendly fellow

sketchers and informal atmosphere makes for a very relaxing time, as does a flask of tea and bite of something nice to eat."

Terry: "Each week, I look forward to visiting the garden for a sketching session. Whether I spend more time taking in the wonderful colours



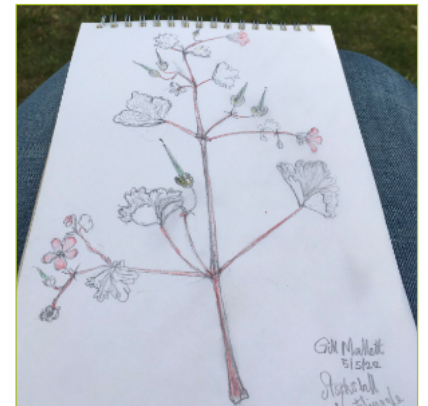
of the garden and surroundings, and letting nature absorb me, or in actually sketching, I cannot say. What I do know, however, is that I have found a quiet place in which to relax, perhaps even to call my own, and that the couple of hours that I spend here miraculously fly by.

At the start, I spend a few minutes walking around the garden to decide what and where I would like to draw and, having chosen, I then spend a few minutes more just sitting quietly.

As I start to sketch, time evaporates into thin air and I am all too soon enjoying a cuppa, exchanging experiences with the other sketchers and already looking forward to the next session."



Gill: "I enjoyed coming along to draw a favourite plant in the garden - a storksbill. From my 'flower surveying', I know the garden is full of interesting plants and flowers - both natives and garden varieties - and I look forward to capturing more of them in future weeks."



Jill and Terry Kennedy and Gill Mallett, garden sketchers •



Kate enjoying drawing the irises in early May.

In the garden: A roof garden in miniature



10 May 2022: replanted Minibeast roof garden

I joined the Nightingale garden volunteers in late December 2021. My first challenge was to look after the miniature roof garden on the Minibeast Mansion (see photo above). I'm interested in dry gardening and I love small plants, so it was a challenge I couldn't resist.

The Minibeast Mansion is at the East corner of the bowling green, next to the wooden xylophone and close to the polytunnel. It's a warm, sunny site, sheltered from East and North winds by hedges and trees.

The Mansion itself is made of a pile of pallets, covered in roofing felt with spaces at the front to stuff with bug-friendly materials. The inside of the Mansion is, therefore, a refuge for anything small enough to hide there - probably lacewings, earwigs, snails and a happy hunting ground for spiders. If the garden still had hedgehogs visiting it, it has a hidey place for them at the bottom. Or mice. The planting tray on top is shallow and filled with free-draining 'soil' but has the roofing felt base.

In May 2016, it was planted by a Gardening for Health group with a mixture of sedums, sempervivums, and alpines (see photo in Page 2 of the Feb/March 2022 newsletter). In subsequent years, the planting became very 'natural' (i.e. neglected): most of the alpines and sempervivums died and the more rampant sedums took over.

My first task, therefore, was to remove the too-successful sedums and take stock of what was left. It was a short list: two small sedums, a dianthus with pretty



10 May 2022: the height of the garden means you can get up close and personal with plants, including with a good camera - thanks John!

little leaves, and a few tiny sempervivums.

To be kind to new plants, I topped up the planting medium, adding grit, and we started to think about new plants. These would need to survive the challenging conditions in the roof garden: only shallow, low-nutrient soil, and little or no rain throughout the warmest months.

I've always regarded gardening as a series of experiments - you never really know how a plant will perform until you start growing it. Gardening in public spaces is another factor - it is usually more difficult to protect more vulnerable plants. If a plant doesn't seem happy, it's often best to find it another home and try something else. So, I've filled the Minibeast roof garden with plants that might work, and now we're waiting to see what happens, which is quite exciting for me.

In early Spring, we invested a donated garden centre voucher on some pretty alpine plants: three pasque flowers (see photo above), two sea thrifts, a campanula and a rock rose.

Some more plants were brought to the garden by volunteers charged with finding 'small easy plants' in their own gardens. They include white violets, storksbill, *Anemone blanda*, and a delightful little veronica.

I thought spring bulbs might also do well, not least because they're dormant during the dry summer months. We're trying tete-a-tete daffodils (donated by On the Verge), some crocuses, and snowdrops, also donated to the garden. The daffodils were almost in flower when planted and they gave us a very good show. The crocuses and snowdrops were planted 'in the green', so we'll have to wait until next spring to see how they get on.

At the moment, the roof garden needs just minor attention each week:

mostly weeding and

titivating, plus a meagre ration of water. We still have a few of the larger sedums and they have to be restrained a little from taking over. But the effort is small and it's certainly worthwhile. And we now have plans to re-stuff the bug hotel and smarten up its sides and back - to make it even more of a feature for the garden. **Anne Davenport, garden volunteer** •



March 2022: a pasque flower, with tete-a-tete daffodils behind.



10 May 2022: the seed heads of the pasque flowers are very attractive too.

Groups in the garden: Mindfulness in Nature

On 7 May, we hosted a very successful 'Mindfulness in nature' experimental workshop in the garden. It was led by David Lynch, who is a mindfulness coach - and he also leads the two walks that start in the garden. One of which is a mindfulness (silent) walk and the other a wellbeing walk, which can also have quiet times.

Together, we invited garden volunteers, Friends of the garden and any adult interested in mindfulness to come and join us on the Saturday morning. The intention was to try out some activities, get some feedback and then think about what to do next in the garden but also in other green spaces in the area and with other groups.

We were delighted to have 14 people contact us for the 12 free spaces and 100% attendance on the day.

Before the session, we asked people for their experience of mindfulness and what they hoped to get from coming along. Some people had no, or very, little experience and others practised meditation every day.

The chosen morning started in heavy and then light rain but progressed to sunshine and warmth. Helping us to get in touch with all weathers and notice how we felt about them.

After introductions, as David commented, the group moved gently towards "silent contemplation in soothing birdsong, tuning into our busy minds, with the explicit intention of inviting acceptance of who and how we are". As people moved from the polytunnel into the garden outside, they were invited to find a part of the garden that spoke to them and to enjoy it in silence for 30 minutes. As David said, "we settled into our safe place in the garden letting nature's kind hand still our mind".

We didn't close the garden to non-participants but explained to anyone using the garden why there were



Jill's mindful blackbird in Cherry Hinton Park, - used on the poster and garden website.

people sitting in silence, or lying on benches or on the grass. Saturday mornings are often not very busy and the garden users are often quite chilled so this worked well.

After this, people gathered back into a circle by the club-hut door and talked about how they found it and then filled in evaluation forms before they departed. Then, a few of us stayed and ate a packed lunch together in the sun, accompanied by birds and the sound of children playing. The evaluation supported continuing this experiment and we hope to announce further meet-ups soon. If you are interested in mindfulness coaching, David would love to hear from you: davidpatricklynch@hotmail.com •

AGM on 15 May 2022 – notes

Each year, we have an AGM for the garden's constituted group. Plus two planning meetings in Spring and early Autumn. This year, our AGM was on a Sunday afternoon in May. At the meeting, we elect officers, and review our finances, which are sufficient for our needs - especially due to the support of the Friends. We review our progress over the past year and look forward to new projects. We decide what to do the same and what we want to change. The agenda and notes are on the Gardening page of the website. This year, we had a special focus on non-gardening volunteering (see box to the right).

We are very keen that we keep the garden financially sustainable and having a wide range of regular volunteers is central to that - we don't need to fundraise for staff. But, we also know from our experience over the past eight years that volunteering is really positive for the individuals involved. It is part of 'Giving', one of the 'five ways to wellbeing' - and often you get to do some of the other four ways while you are doing it too. So, we'd like as many people to feel they can get involved, and when they have the time, energy and skills. There are new opportunities for activities in the garden (see box) but we need to make sure that they don't adversely impact on the garden or the experience for garden users and, in particular, overwhelm the volunteers •

Non-gardening volunteering

At the AGM, we had a session about how people do, and can, volunteer to support the garden and its activities without gardening. Examples included the people who open and lock the garden gates, Gill doing her flower surveying, Julia and local families with their Little Nightingale activities (including decorating the minibeast and Easter egg trails and helping out at the Learn and Grow sessions), writing for and proof-reading the newsletters, organising the mindfulness meet-ups (described above), supporting the garden sketching (page 2). And at events, including our bakers. All are equally valued and necessary to keep the garden open and active.

The session discussed how we can, and should, invite regular non-gardening volunteers to join our constituted group to help guide the garden's development - but without losing focus on making and maintaining the garden. And we discussed new activities we might like to expand and better support. The four themes suggested were (i) for families with young children; (ii) events that reflect the cultures of garden users; (iii) for wellbeing and (iv) for nature connectedness and biodiversity.

We will need to modify our constitution a bit and the revised version will be on the website soon •

'Better produce' project

We think our experiments in 'no-dig, module growing, crop-protecting' produce growing are going well. The plants look good - much better than in previous years - and those that have matured so far have been tasty too.

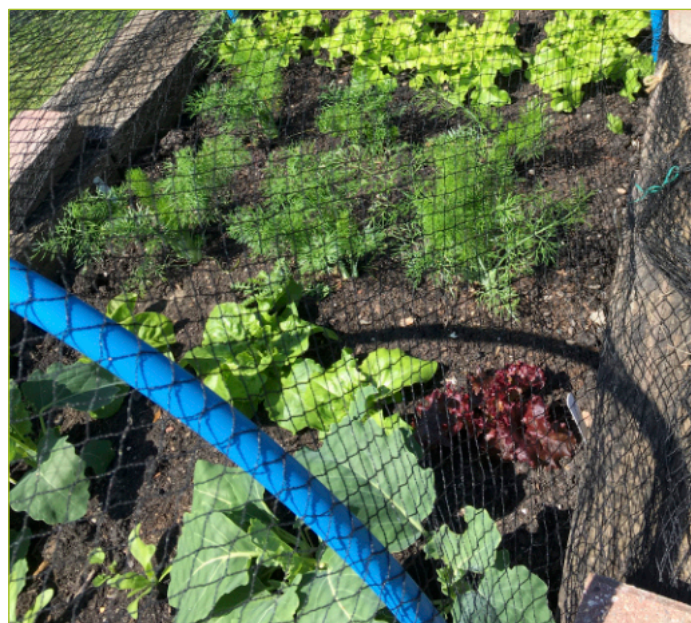
In some cases we have just 4 or 6 of one kind of plant growing - but it is nice for people to see them progressing and they can show children which plants grow what fruit and veg. We have also enjoyed experimenting with some new varieties - like giant Sicilian radishes, kohlrabi and Florence fennel - in part because they also look attractive.

Our over-winter crops have been good too: chard, kales, a lot of rocket. The annual herbs have been popular, as we thrust them towards people walking or running by.

Because we are growing 'fewer plants better', it works best if volunteers pick the produce and give it away to whoever is in the garden at the time. So, we are 'picking for the plant' and not just because someone fancies it for their tea. Now the risk of frosts have passed, the tender plants have been planted out, including in the polytunnel.



Our seeds are sown in small modules, often several per cell, and planted out as tiny plants with a dibber



Module-sown plants growing well under bird-netting

This means we need to focus on watering more. It has been an incredibly dry Spring and so there isn't much rain in the soil. Produce plants are thirsty •



We have been kinder to our Jerusalem artichokes this year: starting them in pots, making them a deep, compost-full bed and adding some dwarf red varieties too

Siva's garden kitchen - update and Summer holiday cook-outs

Subject to contracting and sourcing materials, we hope the kitchen will be built over the Summer and ready to use for outdoor cooking and other projects. We have cleared the space - we just need to take away some waste wood generated after the playhouse project (page 1). We are so looking forward to the kitchen being useable. And also to have fun fitting out the inside with lots of noticeboards. To get some good, easy-cleanable worksurfaces and also designing and making some attractive panels for the inside.

Linked with this, we are starting to organise some meet-ups in the garden in the school holidays. They will involve cooking with children - and Siva would have loved to get involved with this. We will try out the new pizza oven and a new firepit.

The meet-ups will be part-funded by the Friends. We

think we can host about 12 children for each session, with parents staying and helping out. We will need to book spaces. We would especially like to invite families who won't be going on holiday this Summer, and children who would especially enjoy coming to the garden for a couple of hours for a child-focussed activity.

They can also help us learn how to use the garden for cooking but, most of all, just have a fun and relaxing time in their school holidays. We will have two morning sessions, which are usually better for very small children, and two afternoon ones, which can suit older ones.

We are still just at the planning stages, but if you have some good ideas, and/or would like to help on the days, and/or know of local families who you think would like this, do get in touch •

Events: Midsummer evening picnic

In previous years, we have had some lovely Jo Cox 'Great Get Togethers' in the garden, including around the Summer solstice - so we can enjoy the long evening as a garden community. It is also a time of year when the garden is generally looking very 'fluffy flowers' (see photo below).



This year, on Saturday 25 June, we will have an informal bring-your-own, family-friendly picnic (from 5 to 7 pm) and then add some seasonal (weather- and volunteer-dependent) activities.

The national theme for the Get Togethers this year is 'welcome - extending the hand of friendship', which sounds very good to us. Our

garden users (and volunteers) come from all over the world and they are always very welcome!

We are looking for ideas and will need some volunteers too. Do get in contact. And hope to see you in the garden that evening •



CALENDAR 2022

Sunday 12 June, 2 to 4 pm	Fifth Learn and Grow Together session.
Saturday 25 June, 5 to 7 pm	Informal Midsummer evening picnic (see article to left).
Friday 8 July, 8 to 9.30 pm	Evening pond-dipping, setting small overnight insect traps and a moth trap. Watching and listening for bats as it gets dark (sunset is at 9.17 pm).
Saturday 9 July, 9 to 10 am.	Morning opening up of the moth trap (sunrise is at 4.54 am) and the small insect traps. Making a list of what we find.
Sunday 24 July, 10 to 12 noon	Sixth Learn and Grow Together session.
Thurs 28 July, Weds 10 Aug, Tues 16 Aug, 24 August (TBC)	Morning or afternoon picnics with cooking for small groups of children (see page 5). Will need booking.
Sunday 21 August, 10 to 12 noon	Seventh Learn and Grow Together session.

Events: July bioblitz

We are delighted that Ben Grieg from On the Verge has offered to help us do a moth, invertebrates and bat bioblitz on the weekend of Friday/Saturday 8/9 July (see calendar). These 'bat and moth' meet-ups have been amazing in previous years but are dependent on good weather. Fingers crossed •



Gardening sessions: will be held on most Sunday and Monday afternoons, from 2–4 pm, weather allowing and when co-ordinators are available. In Summer, we sometimes shift the times to avoid peak sun and use the evenings more. 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 - see below for how to join. To David for helping us to be much more mindful in the garden (see page 4). To Jill and Terry for supporting the garden sketching

sessions so well (see page 2). To Anne for bringing her enthusiasm and care for plants to the garden and making such a lovely roof garden (see page 3). To Bronwen, Gill, Julia and Tony for supporting the Learn and Grow sessions - they

are much more fun with you! To all the Easter-egg painters - so beautiful!

To all our other volunteers who look after the garden in so many ways, and even when the weather is not very kind •

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 (or use the QR code to the right). Also online on Facebook: [NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK](https://www.facebook.com/NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK)
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