

# Nightingale News

For the Friends of Nightingale Garden

September–October 2022



## Siva's garden kitchen and shelter

On 4 August, Jamie and Matt finished their construction work on the kitchen/shelter, which is mainly made in Scottish larch and is 'very handsome'. We have dedicated it to Siva Mahalingham, a much missed former garden volunteer and local resident who died in 2020. We think she would have enjoyed preparing Sri Lankan delicacies in it for our garden community to enjoy.

This project, including the portable pizza oven used in the two pizza cookouts (see page 2), was funded by S106 'developer' funds via the City Council. It is on a 'floating' base, because of the mature tree roots, and so has stepped access. We are working with City Council officers to make it accessible to all ages and abilities. We need some kind of ramp on at least one side and we might add some new planting to provide a visual barrier and 'soften' it a bit.

The shelter will probably remain empty of furniture to enable a wide variety of activities, both organised by and

with us but also for informal events organised by garden users. It has already been used for at least one birthday party in the recent heatwave and it is large enough for a small group to sit in a circle. There are chairs in the polytunnel that can be moved into it and the blue wooden Adirondack ones look great there. We have made some simple shades, from an old duvet cover for the front and aim to source some rain-proof material too.

Next steps are to decide how to fit out the interior. We'd like to put some boards up for newsletters and notices, including to help it be used as an 'open studio' gallery space. We'd like to add some artworks, maybe some mosaic friezes - possibly designed and made by volunteers. If we decide it needs to be more weatherproof, we might add some windows. So, it is still a work in progress but we like these slow projects because they can include the ideas and talents of lots of people. Get in touch if you have ideas or want to be involved •



Over the Summer, we made a treasure/scavenger hunt and colouring-in sheet to use at meet-ups. We also wrote up some of the activities we did at the chillouts (see page 4) and have recently made a minibeast 'key'. These are all on the Resources page of the website for anyone to use. The webpage has all kinds of downloads - even some videos of the garden from when it first started, which are interesting to watch •

**“New online resources for families to use in the garden”**

## Pizza cookouts

On 10 and 16 August, we held two pizza cookouts in the garden for up to 12 children. They were free to attend and 'first-come, first-served'. Some of the kit was funded by the Friends and we also searched local charity shops. Garden volunteers grew or bought the ingredients - some from the garden itself. The spaces filled quickly with



*Foxy pizza*



*Sweetzza with love*

children aged 2–10 years. We had a lot of fun together making individual savory pizzas of all shapes and sizes. We made some with funny faces too (see photos). They all tasted really good. The sweet-zzas (dessert pizzas)



*Piglet pizza*



*Happy pizza*

were also very popular, with a first layer of mashed banana or

strawberries and (not too many) chocolates and marshmallows as toppings. The first session coincided with very sunny weather but the garden has lots of shade under the Swedish whitebeam trees - and we also used the new garden shelter (see page 1) to sit and eat the

delicacies. The second session narrowly dodged the first rain shower in weeks - phew! Now we have the kit and some know-how, we hope to do more of these for, and with, people of all ages •



*Young pizza chefs at work.*

### New firepit in the garden

For the Midsummer get together on 25 June, we bought a new firepit so we can do twisty bread (see photo) and also toast marshmallows. It was well used on the evening but also for a cub group later in June. It has a wide rim that stays cool so lots of children (and adults) can cook safely at the same time. We look forward to using it throughout the year •



## Grow your own fruit

In 2021, Joe and Guy our 'best digging volunteers' planted in the 'orchard' area of the former bowling green a small donated fig tree and a rooted grapevine cutting donated by residents of Rock Road. This area features long grass - to be friendly to insects, especially crickets - but small plants do get lost in it all until the grass is scythed later in the year.

In early 2022, I was tasked with reversing some of this neglect. I trimmed back the grass from both plants, made a rickety willow-and-string wigwam to support the



grapevine (see photo to the left) and, during the Summer drought, have been giving them half a can of water each week. The grapevine is now growing strongly and we are hopeful of a good crop next year of, at least, leaves to stuff for dolmades.

Julian has promised to design and make a better structure for the climbing vine, which can also add a visual boundary to that aspect of the orchard area.

The Brown Turkey fig



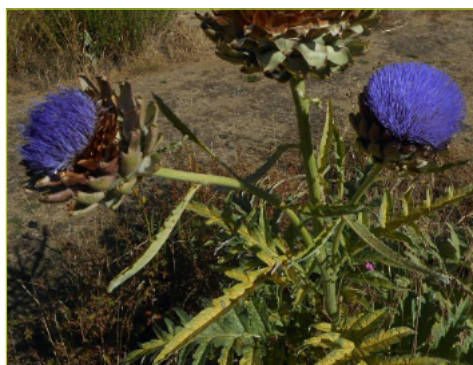
(see photo above) will become a free-standing tree, which shouldn't need support. It is also growing strongly and it already has some tiny fruit.

We just have to be patient and hope it over-winters well in its 'open' site. The same variety grows well against a North/West facing wall in a volunteer's garden (see photo to the right) **Anne Davenport, garden volunteer** •



## In the garden: learning from Summer drought

This summer's drought has played havoc with the garden - and our volunteers. The water butts soon emptied - not helped by some late-Spring vandalism. By early Summer we were dependent on our mains supply, which we consider very precious. We use a hose to top



*Globe artichoke flowers survived the drought without watering but 'went over' earlier than usual. They are admired by both bees and people. We think we need more of them in the garden from seed next year.*

up the nature pond but generally use only watering cans filling them from the trough and then only for spot-watering.

Most of the garden has been left to cope without extra watering - we crossed our fingers and hoped not to lose too many plants. And also to learn which ones are drought

resistant - in the knowledge that this drought won't be our last one.

Mature trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials have extensive root systems - even in the thin soil of the bowling green area. Once established, most should be well-placed to survive drought.



*The rejuvenated Minibeast Mansion is small in area and so easy to keep well watered. We have also buried a reservoir of water for efficient watering.*

We decided to plant only two or three trees a year and our most recent 'planned' ones are from 2020. The crab apple near the gate was donated in flower in April 2021. It had a

difficult start but flowered and set fruit this year. All our young trees get a full watering can when we have volunteers free. It is a good activity for keen young waterers.



*The spiky blue balls of Echinops ritro have been a feature this year, contrasting well with the drying perennial meadow beds.*

We aim to grow some annuals each year - they add welcome splashes of colour - and also tasty produce. But they can need a lot of water, especially when young.

It is tricky to decide if this drought should put us off growing annuals, because there is a high risk of failure. The produce plants tend to be 'extra

### Going vertical and for better watering

In July, we saw an advert for PlantBoxes, which are a system of modular planting boxes. They are made in the UK of recycled plastic from the UK. They can be attached to a wall or fence to make a vertical garden. They have a wicking system and water indicator, and we think they might be a good way of growing thirsty plants at Nightingale. Maybe this is a project for after this year's drought •



*8 August: annual and woody herbs, pelargonium and sunflowers thriving in a 'test' PlantBox in a local garden, which is North facing. We later harvested basil for the pizza cookouts (see page 2).*

seedlings' from a local allotment so aren't a lot of extra work but we are very aware that the mains water we use might be wasted in the long run.

Or we could grow annuals in more water-efficient systems (see PlantBox above).

We know people like to see unusual produce plants growing. We have added some new slate labels to help people work out what they are (see photo to the right).

And it helps the volunteers too. **Anne Davenport and Rebecca Jones, garden volunteers** •



*Although the mid-Summer produce has been very stressed (or dying), we are optimistically planting for a better Winter crop. Here we have very slow growing carrots, multi-sown baby mooli and radishes - with some established chard next to it.*



*Early August: tall late-flowering perennials like golden rod resisted the drought, in contrast to the grass in the garden and park.*

## Creative activities: Summer chillouts

On 28 July and 25 August we hosted two Summer chillout afternoons, which are new activities for the garden. 'Chillouts' in response to the first heatwave and the idea of doing anything strenuous not being at all appealing. They evolved from being activities for families with children to ones for all ages, mainly because the adults amongst us wanted to join in too.



*Jill being creative with dried material from the garden.*

In July, we had a flower and leaf theme - just at the point when most of our garden flowers had dried in the 39°C heat and many of our leaves were very brown and crispy. So we harvested all the dried material we could from the

garden and made posies to take away (see photo above). Julia spearheaded decorating the playhouse from anything fresh we could find in abundance (see photo to the right).



*Playhouse looking very Summery.*

A very popular activity was using Das air-dry clay to make small vessels, decorations and



*Air-dry clay.*

simple jewelry, including pressing sage and geranium leaves into the material (see photo to the left). Emma brought along some brightly



*Hapa zome plant prints..*

coloured pressed flowers, which worked well. The creations could be



*Lavender and hop bags..*

taken away 'damp' and, after a few days, painted and varnished (PVA glue works well).

We also tried hapa zome (see photo above) to extract colour from some delicious flowers from Emma's garden onto fabric. And we made very simple no-sew lavender and hop sachets,



*God's eye in progress.*

highlighting the scent from plant oils (see photo above).

In August, we had a tree theme. We used dried willow sticks from the garden, charity-shop yarn, coloured garden twine, coloured feathers, pompoms left over from yarn bombing in the garden and coloured paper tape.

Under the shade of the trees - it was really hot and sunny - families

made 'God's eye' weavings (see photos) and lucky wands (see photo below). They were really popular activities: wrapping yarn and tape of all colours around sticks proved to be a gentle way to spend hours.

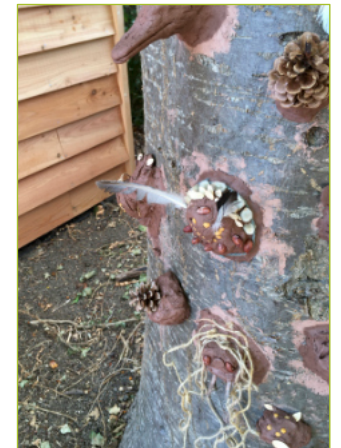
Emma brought some wooden disks and we harvested some fresh elder and willow from the garden.



With these simple materials, people of all ages could shave the bark using potato peelers, make holes in the wood with a hand drill, hollow out the central pith in the elder with a tent peg, use secateurs to make beads and colour the disks with wax crayons to make medallions (see photo below) and other jewelry.

We also used some donated 'natural'

terracotta clay to decorate two of the whitebeam trees with human faces and animals (see photos below). We had recently been advised by Kenny the City Council tree officer that it was good to remove the ivy off the mature trees. We decided to strip all of it off some trees and leave a little on others - for wildlife. This meant we had a blank canvas of two tree trunks for our creativity that afternoon. Children showed fantastic imagination with their choice of subjects and materials. Using feathers, seeds, twigs and recycled twine, they made a Rapunzel, several hedgehogs, mice, unicorns and some quite scary faces and creatures. And the adults had a lot of fun too, trying to remember what foxes, ducks, lions and squirrels looked like. In the very welcome rain the next day, many of the faces slid off the trees, We have picked up the clay to re-use as 'mini meadow balls' (with flower seeds) •



*The fox got the bird - an inventive use of materials.*

## Biodiversity: Bats, moths – and moths again

On Friday 8 and Saturday 9 July, with Ben from On the Verge Cambridge, we held a mini bioblitz in the garden - and into the park. On Friday night, we did some focussed pond-dipping, looked for and listened for bats with a range of detectors and set an overnight moth trap. On the Saturday, we opened the trap and identified the moths. All 40 of them, our best list yet, including a magnificent eyed hawkmoth (see photo above).



*The star of the July trap: an eyed hawkmoth.*



*Another July moth.*

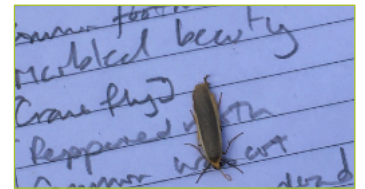
We were so pleased, we decided with Ben to repeat the moth trap in late August, which is the first time we have done this at this time of year. We spotted 28 species and 10 new ones for the garden. And because the days are shorter in August, we don't need to get up quite so early to throw the white sheet over the trap. This is to prevent early morning robins from making an easy breakfast on the sleepy moths.



At each morning ID session, we carefully peel back the sheet covering the trap and put the moths into covered pots for ID (see photo to the left). Then they are released to fly away. There are hundreds of moth species and many look quite similar so it is essential to have at

least one person (Ben) with good moth knowledge, lots of specialist moth books - and phone apps like SEEK are also really handy.

A volunteer takes a list (see photo to the right) and counts how many of each species. After the session, we double-check the names, write it up and send it to local survey collectors. We also put the list on the garden website.



*A moth helping with the July list - we often find crane, caddis and waterboatmen in the traps.*

We are able to do these traps because the Biodiversity team at the City Council have a flat-packed moth trap with a battery and light sensor control (see photo bottom left), which they can lend to any community group able to use it safely. Contact ([parks@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:parks@cambridge.gov.uk)). Many thanks to Vic for helping us out with the trap and kit •



*Favourite moths from the August trap.*

### The nature pond has fish!

On 14 August, Julian caught two small fish with his first dip of the net. We were delighted because we haven't seen any fish in the pond since it was first made. Guy Belcher, City Council Bioersity Officer, seeded the new pond with some wildlife from his home pond, including a few sticklebacks. We don't know if these are grandchildren of those fish or maybe have arrived on bird feet. Do let us know if you catch any more - but please don't add any new wildlife to the pond - it can spread infections and we want to keep our pond healthy •



## New projects: Nightingale orchard

We are making some steady progress on the new orchard project for the park. But are still very much at the research stage. Busy Summer holidays don't help.

We want the trees, and other plants to be healthy, long-lasting additions to the park. We'd like to learn from other orchards in Cambridge. To find out what works and any pitfalls so we'd like to visit them and talk to the people involved. We also need to agree with the Council where to plant and when; what we can remove and what must stay. And if they can help us remove some of the tired shrubs and dead trees.

We want to choose groups of plants that are good for biodiversity - especially pollinators. Varieties that will thrive in a changing climate - especially in drought. And we need to find people with skills, experience and

enthusiasm - and also the time to spend on the project.

We will have an article, including the orchard, in the September 2022 Queen Edith's Magazine. We will go to Skip Day (see page 6) and also organise an orchard-themed get together for October half-term holiday. All opportunities for us to reach the wider local population and to gather ideas. Even if we don't plant anything very soon, we can organise some meet-ups in the park for learning about the existing planting, the wildlife it attracts and gather good ideas for fruit-bearing trees, bushes and canes that are tasty and reliable in public areas. We also want them to enhance the park for people who would rather picnic under a shady tree than make pies and jam from fallen fruit. We will make mistakes but we can learn from them. And we will need your help •

## Events: Queen Edith's Skip Day

Skip Day used to be the social highlight of the Queen Edith year... for some, it probably still is ('stuff for free!'). This year it is on the morning of Saturday 10 September.

The garden volunteers will be there again with an (action-packed) table and chairs.

We like to go along to Skip Day because it is a chance to find out from a good cross-section of local people what they like and want from the community garden. And also how they'd like to be involved. We get this feedback throughout the year but often are distracted by serving tea (or making pizzas) at events or the regular gardening-related tasks.

Last year, we launched the Friends group and, this year, we hope it will be a good opportunity

for people to renew their membership. Julian, our Treasurer, will be happy to receive any spare banknotes or cheques.

We have some ideas for projects for the coming year that can be supported by the Friends - but we would really like to hear your views. Some of them are necessary but a bit dull, like replacing our compost bins. But we could also attach projects to the new kitchen/shelter. We'd like to make a child-sized picnic bench. And we are wondering about a bird theme for the year. We will also have a planning meeting of the volunteers on 18 September. We would especially like to gather ideas about the new orchard project for the park and find partners to ensure it is a success (see page 5) •

## CALENDAR 2022

**Saturday 10  
September,  
9 am to 1 pm**

Queen Edith's Skip Day by Wulfstan Way shops (see article to the left).

**Sunday 18  
September,  
2-3 pm**

Autumn planning meeting for garden volunteers.

**Saturday 1 and  
22 October,  
10 to 11.30 am**

Mindfulness in nature taster workshops. Free, need to book. See Wellbeing page on garden website

**24-30 October**

School half-term holiday: 'something about orchards' (TBC).

**Gardening sessions:** will be held on most Monday afternoons, from 2-4 pm, weather allowing and when co-ordinators are available. We have stopped the regular Sunday sessions but will add some weekend or evening working parties. 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).

### Minibeast Mansion - re-stuffed

In August, we stripped out most of the original material from the front of this bug hotel, which was looking very tired. We cut some foxglove tree stems, which are hollow; drilled 5 mm holes in some damson tree branches for solitary bees to lay eggs; and used some leftover dried flowers and stems from the first Chillout session to fill in spaces (see page 4). We also secured it all with chicken wire. We have found an open-fronted hotel is a bit too tempting for little fingers •



*Our first veranda-climbing passion flower.*

## 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 all our volunteers who look after the garden in so many ways, and even when the weather is not

very kind. It hasn't been easy keeping the plants alive this Summer and we are very grateful to everyone who has walked back and forth to the water trough with full cans of water. And huge thanks to all the volunteers who have helped

out at our Summer holiday events, including Ben, Emma, Doug, Gill, Jill and Julia. We know summer-time is very precious for families and are very grateful to you all. And it has been fun too •

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 **donate** via the garden website: [nightingalegarden.org.uk](http://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](mailto:info@nightingalegarden.org.uk) Tel: 07792 531 400.  
Visit us: **Nightingale Community Garden**, Nightingale Park, Nightingale Avenue, Cambridge CB1 8SG UK.

