



Your community Your gardens

Food4Macc, Cheshire

The New Year is an ideal time for making fresh resolutions, and this was certainly the case for a group of keen gardeners from Macclesfield. In January 2010, they formed Food4Macc, and got to work creating community gardens around the local area.

The volunteers come from all backgrounds, working and retired, some with vast horticultural knowledge and some with none, but they all share an enthusiasm for producing home-grown food.

Food4Macc has been a way to share gardening knowledge and meet new people, but there's a longer-term aim too.

The rising cost of supermarket produce, which has travelled vast distances, means it's more important than ever to produce food locally. Debbie Townsend, the group's secretary, explains: "In 2009 I read an article about why we don't grow food anymore and it introduced me to the problem of peak oil – the point in time when the maximum rate of extraction is reached, and the price of oil rises dramatically."

"We need to relearn the food-growing skills that are gradually being lost in this generation, and I thought community gardening would be a good solution."

Now Food4Macc organises monthly public meetings and 'how to' demonstrations on growing, composting, and even hen-keeping.

'We need to relearn the food growing skills that are being lost'



FACTFILE

► Today about 40% of the food we eat is imported. That includes 95% of our fruit and most of the wheat in our bread.

► Food4Macc comprises three community gardens and one orchard.

► Visit the group's website at www.food4macc.org.

A mobile display with the scarecrow mascot, 'Patches', is used at local libraries to increase awareness of the project.

In a short space of time, the volunteers have created three community gardens.

The first working party started early in 2010, tidying up an overgrown orchard in the grounds of a care home. The volunteers built raised vegetable beds near the apple and pear trees, and planted rows of raspberry canes. It is a lovely secluded and tranquil spot for residents and their families to enjoy.

The next big project was to improve the grounds of a local primary school by installing raised vegetable beds. The parents, teachers and children are involved in the care of the project, and recently a 'planting picnic' was held for school children to plant individual sunflowers, in an attempt to grow the tallest.

The third site is at another established care home, close to the centre of Macclesfield. Work started in March, and now the plot is home to four large vegetable beds, blackcurrants, redcurrants, gooseberries, jostaberries and

raspberries. The garden has benches so residents can enjoy what has been grown, have a chat and even pick and taste the produce too.

Although each site is different, the volunteers have followed a basic

plan of building a trio of wooden raised beds for vegetables and herbs as part of a three-year crop rotation, with a fourth bed being used for permanent crops such as artichoke, strawberries and asparagus. At each location, double compost bins have been built from recycled pallets.

"By June we were already harvesting and sharing crops of lettuces, rocket, spring onions, radishes and courgettes and then replanting," says Sara Wreford, volunteer project manager. "It has been very satisfying to see and taste the results of all our hard work so quickly."

Food4Macc has applied for various local grants, but so far



Food4Macc.org



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This month Food4Macc will receive a bumper gardening pack, worth over £350, from Thompson & Morgan. Next month it could be you!

The prize comprises a mix of flower and vegetable seeds, handy tools, hanging baskets, fertilisers, and fantastic plants such as clematis and bamboo.

For more information on Thompson & Morgan's range, visit www.thompson-morgan.com or call 0844 573 2020 to request a catalogue.

COMMUNITY GARDEN OF THE MONTH



The site of the third community garden



Putting in the raised beds



The crops start to grow



Watched over by a scarecrow, the crops thrive

nearly all the plants and building supplies have been donated or sourced locally. The composted manure is from a local farm, and free topsoil was found through Freecycle. Fundraising activities have included car boot sales and a plant sale, while volunteers help out by donating unwanted plants from their own gardens.

The volunteers are keen for more Macclesfield residents to get involved with producing their own food, and a 'garden sharing scheme' has been launched to link people who are looking for space to grow with those who have larger or unused gardens.

Next year, the group aims to encourage even more volunteers to have a go at growing their own produce, whether on site or in their own gardens at home.



The raised beds at the first care home, full of produce

DO YOU HAVE A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

If you're a member of a local community or school gardening project we would love to hear from you. Post or email a synopsis of how your project started and what you have achieved with some before-and-after photos to Laura Fanthorpe, Garden Answers, Bauer Media, Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA or email gardenanswers@bauermedia.co.uk

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