2015 A year of collaboration and transformation
Welcome to our Annual Review, covering the achievements of our team of staff and volunteers during 2015.

The year saw exciting progress being made across all our areas of work, including our project at HMP Rye Hill and the social and therapeutic horticulture we are providing at Ryton Organic Gardens.

I spent a good deal of 2015 out and about visiting members and supporters in every region of Great Britain. This gave me an invaluable insight into the fantastic projects, big and small, that are contributing to our vision of an organic and sustainable world.

I would like to extend my grateful thanks to everyone who welcomed me into their meetings, projects, homes and workplaces – I was immensely encouraged by the progress in organic growing and gardening up and down the country.

Your charity continues to promote the benefits of organic growing and gardening to a wide variety of audiences, from major landowners to the inmates of HM prisons, and including innovative and inspiring organic growing projects supporting schools, housing associations, community groups, disadvantaged communities and individuals, making meaningful improvements to people, plants and communities.

I hope you enjoy reading about the transforming work you are supporting. Our members and supporters are the lifeblood of Garden Organic, and with your support I will continue to lead an organisation that remains true to the vision of our founder, Lawrence Hills.

Yours sincerely,

James Campbell
Garden Organic Chief Executive

I'm gradually getting used to working with others
Supporting positive recovery at HMP Rye Hill

Different to normal gardening...
Supporting dementia care through social and therapeutic horticulture

You wouldn't believe it's the same estate.
Discovering the transformative power of collaborative growing

To learn more about Garden Organic's work and help us to grow even more:

gardenorganic.org.uk
enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk
024 7630 3517
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Every order from The Organic Gardening Catalogue helps to support Garden Organic's vital work. Order online at www.organiccatalogue.com or call 01932 878570.

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James Campbell
Garden Organic Chief Executive
Our organic food growing and composting programmes are at the heart of what we do at Garden Organic. We are fortunate enough to be able to support a network of inspirational and enthusiastic volunteers who pass on our food growing and composting messages to their own communities around the UK. The projects that we deliver may vary in style, and work with different target groups, however they all carry the core message of organic gardening and help to create healthy and sustainable communities.

**Master Composters**

Our network of volunteer Master Composters spend time promoting organic home composting in their local communities. Through their dedication and passion for environmentally friendly waste management practices, they encourage householder to take up composting and guide those already composting to continue doing so effectively. Master Composters come from many backgrounds and age groups; they are not always gardeners but their unifying feature is their enthusiasm for compost.

During 2015, we supported 521 volunteer Master Composters, working in collaboration with 11 local authority areas in the UK. Together the Master Composter volunteers contributed an estimated 18,756 volunteer hours and communicated the home composting message to 15,000 people. If only 50% of those people now compost at home, it would equate to an estimated 1,125 tonnes of household waste managed sustainably – that’s the equivalent weight of 187 African elephants!

**Master Gardeners**

The Master Gardener programme, supporting individuals and communities with organic food growing, remains one of our flagship projects. Commissioned by Public Health boards as a way to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community, Master Gardener networks continued over 2015 in seven areas of England; the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, Warwickshire, Lincolnshire, Breckland, Medway, Leicestershire and HMP Rye Hill, near Rugby. You can read more about the HMP Rye Hill project on page 14.

Master Gardeners are experienced organic growers who pass on their knowledge and passion for food growing to those around them. As well as teaching practical growing skills, these volunteers also help to overcome barriers to food growing, bring together communities, build confidence and help with funding and support from the wider community. They share the charity’s belief that anyone can grow food, whether in a garden, allotment, windowsill or communal land, and that food growing is important for a healthy diet and lifestyle, saving money, learning skills, and bringing communities together.

During 2015 there were over 200 Master Gardeners volunteering within the seven regional programmes, all trained and supported by Garden Organic. Between them they inspire people to grow organic food in almost every setting imaginable, from schools and allotments to housing estates and care homes.

In July 2015 we launched a new programme in Croydon, commissioned by Croydon Council within their Food Flagship programme. As part of this project 20 food growing mentors (Master Gardeners) will be introduced, supported by 12 Food Buddies. Food Buddies are typically volunteers who have previously been supported by a Master Gardener, and now want to pass on their skills to engage others. This new format is just one way in which we have evolved the traditional Master Gardener programme to meet the varying needs of local areas. We are looking forward to seeing the impact of this project in 2016.

**Golding Homes**

In 2015 we were approached by Golding Homes to establish and support a community garden within the Walshaw and Telford estate in Maidstone. The project had two simple aims: bring together residents living within the two blocks, and empower them to grow their own organic food.

The community garden was run through regular growing sessions led by Garden Organic covering a wide range of food growing subjects. 20 weekly sessions took place, inspiring residents and passing on all the knowledge they need to be able to continue to manage and develop the gardens themselves for years to come. The sessions proved exceptionally popular, with a total of 140 adults and children attending. The result is a beautiful garden that’s captivated the passion and enthusiasm of the local residents and created a shared space they enjoy today.

A fitting testament to the success of the Walshaw and Telford community garden was when Kent Wildlife Trust awarded the garden ‘Highly Commended’ in their 2015 Wild About Gardens scheme.

**Growing Health**

Growing Health is a national project run jointly by Garden Organic and Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming, and is funded by The Tudor Trust. Growing Health aims to make community organic food growing a natural part of health and social care services, and provides a network of support for health professionals, commissioners, academics and food growing projects. Through 2015 we have worked to support community food growing groups to develop links with the health service and gain commissions for their activities.

We have also worked to raise awareness among commissioners and health professionals about the benefits of using community food growing as part of the health service provision. The Growing Health website, www.growinghealth.info contains information on a large number of case studies, the evidence for the benefits of community gardening on health and wellbeing, and a tool kit to support community groups. In collaboration with the Groundwork-led Communities Living Sustainably programme, we have recently developed a guide for evaluating health and wellbeing outcomes for community growing programmes, Which tool to use?, which is also available on the website.
Sowing New Seeds – the next generation

Talking about experiences and passing on knowledge of growing exotic crops has proven to be a successful way of working with ethnic minority groups and hard to reach communities. This area of work is becoming increasingly important for Garden Organic, as it seeks to support asylum seekers and refugees.

Following on from the successful activities in 2014, funding from the Patsy Wood Trust has enabled further activities to continue and develop during 2015. These were centred on practical training events, providing opportunities for people to learn together about growing and using multicultural crops.

The work was designed to empower growers of the future with the skills to produce organic crops from a wider range of cultures; increasing their access to fresh produce and their participation in growing their own activities. This was done through delivering a course of training sessions and further developing educational resources.

Participants from a range of backgrounds attended this course, including growers from schemes such as:

- Community supported agriculture.
- A cooperative supporting young growers setting up businesses on small plots of land.
- An educational charity providing training for growers in the community.

In addition, we delivered community outreach sessions to a wide range of groups. This focused on deprived areas with a high proportion of ethnic minority groups, including asylum seekers and refugees.

Having the chance to grow organic foods from their own country has been shown to increase the wellbeing of individuals in such groups, particularly when they have been placed in stressful and uncertain situations.

Growing from your Roots captures the stories of people from the following countries:

- Jamaica
- Sicily
- Malta
- Cyprus
- Guadeloupe
- Russia
- Ukraine
- Kenya
- Tanzania
- Taiwan
- Zimbabwe
- Iraq
- Pakistan
- India
- Ethiopia
- Uganda
- Chile
- Malaysia
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Syria
- Palestine
- Israel
- Iran
- Afghanistan
- Pakistan
- Bangladesh
- India
- Sri Lanka
- Malaysia
- Indonesia
- Thailand
- Philippines
- Vietnam
- Cambodia
- Myanmar
- Korea
- Japan
- China
- Taiwan
- Hong Kong
- Macau
- Russia
- Ukraine
- Poland
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Greece
- Turkey
- North Africa
- Middle East
- North America
- South America
- Asia
- Africa
- Oceanic

Volunteer Support

Volunteers play an essential role in the ongoing success of Garden Organic. From our Master Gardener volunteers supporting life-changing organic growing projects around the UK, to administrative volunteers keeping things in order at our offices - each and every volunteer enables the charity to reach more people, achieve more successes and run more smoothly.

2015 saw growth in the number of volunteers at Ryton Organic Gardens, helping within the office, gardens and onsite projects. We also actively encouraged involvement from students at local universities, and working closely with them to develop roles complementing their studies.

As well as helping the charity, volunteering can be a useful stepping stone back into work. To this end we support volunteers with the development of their CVs and applying for jobs. Indeed we often find volunteers moving into a paid role within the charity as these become available.

Of course, volunteering isn’t just about hard work – we have also developed the social side of things. In 2015 we were lucky enough to have a number of outings, including a visit to Feldon Farm (a local organic farm) and Waltham Place (an inspirational organic garden). These outings are just a small way of saying thank you to our volunteers for their invaluable contribution.

Volunteer of the Year

In March 2015 Garden Organic volunteer, Eric Barnes, was crowned the Great British Growing Awards ‘Volunteer of the Year’. Eric is a familiar face at Ryton Organic Gardens, having worked here since the day it first opened in 1986.

As well as his paid employment, Eric has volunteered with Garden Organic’s social and therapeutic horticulture project, Growth, since it started over a decade ago.

The Volunteer of the Year award was judged by James Wong. “It was both the length of service and commitment in the face of adversity that made the winner stand out” commented James. “What a hero!”

Ever humble, Eric said: “It’s an honour to be selected for this award, but I still can’t comprehend that there isn’t anyone else more worthy of it.

“I’ve been involved in horticultural therapy for a long time now and I still get a buzz out of it. All of the people in our group have been coming here for years, so you get to know them really well. We’re just a team. I get as much out of it as they do – gardening is therapeutic for all of us.”

For information on our current volunteer opportunities, visit gardenorganic.org.uk/volunteer-vacancies
Passing on our knowledge of organic growing is an essential part of the work we do - whether through teaching the next generation of growers in schools, or helping experienced growers fine-tune their techniques through our online advice. 2015 was a busy year for education and knowledge sharing and saw us reaching more people than ever.

**Food Growing Schools: London**

2015 was the second year of this three year project and saw the team plough ahead with a wide range of activities; working in a variety of ways to engage London schools and connect them to the resources and support they need to start and maintain their organic growing.

Through the year we ran a number of events and training sessions as part of this project. These included forums in Lambeth and Croydon (Greater London Authority food flagship boroughs), Give it a Grow at Countryside Live, a conference in Barking and Dagenham, and the Richmond Food Education Day, as well as joint workshops with Waste Authorities, Team London and Healthy Schools.

We held our popular Schools Marketplace events in July and October at City Hall, including a competition for ‘Best Enterpriseing Project’ and ‘Best Dressed Stall’. The competition had a fantastic influence on engaging and inspiring the pupils involved.

Towards the end of the year we ran an experiment with 45 schools to grow, cook and eat oca. Experiments such as these help to integrate organic growing within a wider range of curriculum activities, and encourage pupils to try new foods. Results will be published in 2016.

To unite and inspire participating schools, we launched the Growathon – a challenge to record exactly how many students are growing in schools thanks to this project. You can track progress via our Carrot Totaliser at www.growathon.org.uk.

To signpost schools to support within their borough we created an online directory of stakeholder organisations who can help with food growing. We also held a stakeholder networking event in November to engage a wider group of organisations who work with schools. Both these pieces of stakeholder engagement provide schools with a lasting network to support them long beyond the lifetime of the Food Growing Schools: London project. Although this project is due to finish at the end of 2016, we are looking at ways to extend our work here into 2017 and beyond.

**Training and resources**

During 2015 we reviewed our training programme for adults and staff working in schools. We now have an improved programme of organic gardening sessions, alongside sessions to support volunteers and schools to work together. We have also developed a session for increasing awareness and understanding of social and therapeutic horticulture.

To show the breadth of our education work and the impact it delivers to staff and pupils, we have published a collection of case studies on our website, available to view at www.gardenorganic.org.uk/education

**Online information**

At the beginning of 2015 we started a project to collate our existing organic information and research, translate it to make it relevant to organic growers, and publish it online.

In September we unveiled this work. Within the ‘growing advice’ pages of our website you can now find advice and information on organic growing, alongside research articles and information on topics such as neonicotinoids and glyphosate. We also increased our activity on social media as we know this is becoming increasingly important as a place to reach organic growers.

Celebrating Earth’s own earth

Soil has always been the lifeblood of the organic grower. As our founder, Lawrence Hills once said, fertile soil is ‘one which will continue to produce good crops indefinitely.’

So when the UN announced that 2015 was their International Year of Soils, to raise the profile of this humble but essential resource, it was only right we supported this initiative.

To help growers and gardeners understand why their soil is so critical to successful growing, and how to manage and improve it the organic way, we created a Soil Information Pack. This work was made possible by your generous donations, so thank you.

The Soil Information Pack includes factsheets on:

- Soil health
- Knowing your soil
- Managing your soil
- The function of plant nutrients
- Surveying the soil on a new growing site.

It also features activity sheets on the application rates of soil improvers and testing soil and improving fertility, alongside the Soil Information Pack booklet, produced in conjunction with Cotswold Grass Seeds.

As well as being available to download from our website, these packs have been handed out at events throughout the year – helping to improve soil organically across the length and breadth of the country.

Ryton Organic Gardens

Throughout 2015 we welcomed groups of adults and children to Ryton Organic Gardens to learn from our team, and ran courses in a range of organic growing activities.

To support school visits to Ryton Organic Gardens, we developed a new garden trail and activities structured around our Organic Gardening Guidelines, ensuring pupils experience an educational and enjoyable visit.

Reinstating Ryton Organic Gardens as one of the world’s top centres for organic horticultural education remains a high priority. Towards the end of the year we launched our gardens redesign project by recruiting a team to oversee the design work – at no cost to the charity.

This project will take several years to complete. Keep a look out on our website, www.gardenorganic.org.uk, for updates.

**Soil Information Pack**

The Soil Information Pack is available to download at www.gardenorganic.org.uk/soil-information-pack. Alternatively, send an email to membership@gardenorganic.org.uk to request printed copies.
Achievements in social and therapeutic horticulture

Growth
Garden Organic has continued to provide Growth, an overarching social and therapeutic horticulture (STH) programme, for over 20 years. The service was set up for adults with additional learning needs and in the last 3 years has expanded to include provision for young people from special schools and colleges, including pupil referral units.

Our sessions are delivered at our headquarters, Ryton Organic Gardens, where our horticultural therapy groups maintain dedicated areas, including a specially designed, accessible therapy and sensory garden. The sessions are delivered by a qualified horticultural therapist and supported by a Garden Organic volunteer who has experience with the charity’s other social and therapeutic horticulture programmes.

During 2015 a positive new partnership with Carers Trust Heart of England was established. Garden Organic piloted social and therapeutic horticulture sessions for clients diagnosed with early stage dementia, achieving extremely positive results. More details can be found on page 16.

Growing Enterprise
The Daylesford Foundation have funded Growing Enterprise (our STH programme for young people) for several years. In 2015 we also secured funding from additional grants and trusts which meant that we were able to continue to deliver a range of horticultural, communication and business sessions to 127 young people, over half of whom attended for more than six weeks – allowing progression and development in their skills. Many of these students used experiences at Ryton to support qualifications being achieved through their schools or colleges.

Young Carers
We received funding from Children in Need to continue our work with Warwickshire young carers, with 14 more activity days during school holidays in 2015-16. We have worked with young people aged between six and 12, leading activities such as nature exploration, organic growing, harvesting and cooking skills. All sessions are designed to encourage the children to socialise with each other and enjoy a break from their responsibilities.

HMP Rye Hill
2015 was another successful year for the prison garden at HMP Rye Hill. There are currently 17 prisoners involved within the garden, all residing on the drug and alcohol recovery wing. Of the 17, six are now working towards an NVQ Level 1 in Organic Horticulture delivered by Garden Organic and awarded by Manchester college, who provide the education programme at Rye Hill.

As well as continuing to support the participants with their personal and social development through organic horticulture, 2015 was an important year for the project as it saw the publication of a major report on the impact it is having. The results of this report are featured in detail on pages 14 and 15.

Due to the success of this project, the team are now pushing to expand the project’s remit to develop and maintain new areas of the prison. We hope to be able to start work on this in 2016.
Achievements of our Heritage Seed Library

We’re pleased to report that the Heritage Seed Library, our unique and much-loved seed conservation and sharing programme, continues to thrive. A phenomenal amount of seed was grown by, or donated to, us and subsequently passed on to members and seed swap networks during 2015, ensuring these wonderful varieties remain available to enjoy.

As well as the essential work growing out, collecting, cleaning, storing, documenting, packing, processing and distributing seed, the following are a few highlights of the year.

Returning varieties to commercial sale

In 2015 we began to look at the potential of selling HSL varieties commercially. There are a number of varieties that were previously only available through the HSL, but due to the introduction of a new category in the European Common Catalogue, have now been listed by commercial seed companies, making them widely available and no longer needing our support.

As we hold stock of these seeds, it presented an opportunity to sell them ourselves. Selling seed will never be a priority for the Heritage Seed Library, however any profits will be used to generate income to support our conservation work.

We have been granted a Seed Certificate from the Animal and Plant Health Agency enabling us to sell seed, so will be able to move ahead with this in 2016.

Developing regional gardens

As part of our charity-wide focus to deliver our work nearer to our members, we encouraged a number of locations to introduce heritage gardens, featuring varieties originating from their local areas. In addition to the heritage gardens already established at Le Manoir Aux Quat’Saisons in Oxfordshire and at Ryton Organic Gardens in Warwickshire, Dumfries House in Scotland and the National Botanic Gardens of Wales will showcase local HSL varieties in 2016.

Learning from our European neighbours

2015 saw final visits to European partners through our Leonardo & Grundtvig funding. We met seed growers and savers in northern France, eastern Croatia and southern Spain, exchanging best practice and learning ways of encouraging a new wave of seed savers across Europe.

Financial review

We finished 2015 ahead of financial expectations, with an unrestricted surplus of £151,867.

This was achieved primarily through savings on expenditure whilst still generating predicted income.

By generating income through a variety of funding sources, Garden Organic has a comfortable level of resilience against economic instability. Our improved performance has led to an increase in our net current assets, from £309,058 to £335,948 – reflecting an increase in our cash balances. We have also repaid £94,718 of debt in the year, whilst taking on a new loan from Triodos Bank to support our investment in a biomass boiler at Ryton Organic Gardens.

Unrestricted reserves

At the end of the year, the charity had unrestricted funds of £1,115,213. After making allowances for commitments and working capital requirements, our unrestricted reserves were £414,659. Reserves are needed to bridge the gap between the spending and receiving of resources and to enable the charity to cover unplanned emergency expenditure. Although this amount is slightly below our agreed recommended general reserve of £500,000 (the equivalent of three months of unrestricted, non-trading expenditure), it marks considerable progress on previous years.

Restricted reserves

Restricted income remains central to the work of Garden Organic. At the end of the year we held restricted reserves of £339,963, which are not available for general use but are put aside for specific projects. During the year we continued to run our restricted projects to further the charity’s work in a variety of areas, whilst developing opportunities for new funding. The award of these restricted funds will enable Garden Organic to work in areas we would not otherwise be able to reach.

Fundraising

During 2015 our members and supporters kindly donated a total of £85,455 to our appeals, enabling us to carry out vital work including educating people on good soil management through the development of the Soil Information Pack (page 9), expanding the work of the Heritage Seed Library and developing our citizen science through Members’ Experiments.

2015 was a challenging year for charity fundraising, with the spotlight cast brightly on those not meeting the high standards expected of the sector. Here at Garden Organic we strive to exceed best practice in our fundraising activities. We support tighter regulation and are happy to confirm that we do not use external fundraising agencies, make direct fundraising calls or sell our contact lists.

Thank you

We are very grateful for your generous support, whether through a one-off donation, regular giving, leaving a gift to us in your Will, topping up your membership subscription, or helping us to spread the message about organic growing. With your support we will continue to fight for an organic future for us all.

Garden Organic – Annual Review
“I’m gradually getting used to working with others.”

Supporting positive recovery at HMP Rye Hill

Following the launch of a prison garden at HMP Rye Hill in March 2013, Garden Organic has continued to develop this pioneering project following our successful Master Gardener model.

The garden project forms part of the prison’s suite of interventions to support prisoners recovering from substance and alcohol misuse and is overseen by Garden Organic horticulturalists, working in partnership with the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team.

To assess the impact of the project, a team from Coventry University undertook research and consultation with participants and staff at the prison and in 2015 published a comprehensive evaluation report.

The research found that the Master Gardener (MG) programme led to a wide range of positive outcomes. In the following article we will explore just one impact the garden has had – that of building a recovery community.

Building a sense of community

The research found that the garden was driving a commitment in participants to work together to achieve shared goals – both with regards to developing the garden and with demonstrating the importance of having the programme within the prison setting. It was recognised that life in the MG programme was not simply limited to growing; but that working together, building relationships, sharing ideas and challenges, and looking out for each other were all important for the programme’s success. Although considered essential for integrating within a community, these are all experiences that participants may not be exposed to elsewhere within the prison setting.

Successful team working often provides the opportunity for support, not only with staff supporting participants, but also from participant to participant. During their visits, the research team noted participants supporting each other in a myriad of ways, including assisting with gardening tasks, helping with literacy and numeracy, and offering emotional support to someone having a difficult day. Life in prison is almost always a very individual experience, however the way in which the Master Gardener project encourages team working highlights a common bond between participants, creating a shared sense of community.

In addition, staff were accepted as being part of the community, working alongside participants rather than instructing or observing. This creates a strong community spirit, fostering a sense of togetherness and contributing towards a positive working environment. Although this environment brings about positive change within the prison, the ability to form part of a community is a skill that is likely to have an immeasurable impact on life after release for many participants.

“I’m gradually getting used to working with others, I would not have done this before as I’m very much a loner.”

Building self-esteem and confidence

One of the key outcomes of the MG programme is providing participants with a chance to take part in an activity where they, and others, are able to see clearly what they had achieved. Participants spoke about the sense of pride, achievement and self-worth they gained from this project. This was often felt to be particularly important due to what they perceived to be a stigma associated with drug users. This sense of pride in turn helps to build an individual’s confidence.

“I have more self-confidence... it gives me something to talk about on visits with my family.”

Creating an environment that supports change

The reported sense of ownership and desire for the project to succeed has a knock-on effect on how participants work towards their recovery.

Among the most encouraging impacts of the project are the changes the staff noticed in the behaviour of participants, and their engagement and compliance with the prison regime.

Feedback also highlighted how the garden project led some participants to consider their future. They reported that engaging in the programme helped to prepare them for life after prison and their re-entry into the communities they left behind. The research found that for some participants, involvement in the programme has caused them to consider making changes in offending behaviour on leaving Rye Hill.

As further evidence of this we have been contacted by a number of individuals after their release from Rye Hill, asking for information about gardening initiatives they can get involved in on their release. One participant is even considering setting up his own garden maintenance business.

“The garden has been hard work, I have messy fingers and my hands are sore, I still have to remind myself to drink water. I feel more positive and more relaxed. I can also use my learnings to support others in the community. I would like to use the garden to help others grow their own food and feel more positive and more relaxed.”

Development skills and interests that are transferrable after release have a considerable impact on the participant’s ability to integrate back into society.

Conclusion

The benefits of being active and outdoors on a garden or allotment are widely understood, however the real strength of this project is the way in which it helps to build a positive recovery community as participants begin to be more open, empathetic and supportive of each other.

Although this change in behaviour is initially noticeable in the garden setting, as time goes on it is evident outside of the garden; on the wing and in other areas of prison. And we believe that this continues beyond the project, delivering lasting benefits to the participants when they leave Rye Hill.

Many of the shelf substance misuse interventions are time bound and specific, and do not suit all offenders. Our Master Gardener programme is unique in that it is tailored to the needs of individuals. Participants make links between what is being learnt in the garden, their personal development, reflections on their behaviour, past offending and how they envisage their future and, for some, this includes a life without offending. In addition, the enjoyment found in being part of this project has been taken forward to other prisons and, most importantly, to future life outside prison.

The full evaluation report is available by request to membership@gardenorganic.org.uk or by calling 024 7630 8210.
“Different to normal gardening...”
Supporting dementia care through social and therapeutic horticulture

During 2015 a positive new partnership with Carers Trust Heart of England was established. Garden Organic piloted social and therapeutic organic horticulture sessions for clients living with early stage dementia, achieving extremely positive results.

These sessions, delivered at Ryton Organic Gardens, were designed to provide enjoyable and meaningful activities for those living with dementia, allowing their carers respite.

Adjusting to a “series of losses”
Garden Organic recognises that living with dementia can have a big emotional, social, psychological and practical impact on a person. We want to support people living with dementia, who describe these impacts as a “series of losses” and help them to meet the challenge of adjusting to these.

There is evidence to suggest that as mental capacity changes in people some will function more on a sensory level rather than an intellectual level, which means that plants and gardening can provide valuable interactions. Our sessions allow the group more time to complete tasks in a calm, relaxed atmosphere to combat anxiety.

Participants have enjoyed the programme of activities, learning gardening skills and socialising with others in a similar situation to themselves. We discovered that while smaller groups were ideal for the gardening sessions, everyone enjoyed a larger group for socialising and chatting during lunchtime. We allowed for this with the morning and afternoon groups overlapping for a shared lunchtime.

Jogging long-forgotten memories
The activities were carefully selected to meet the needs of the group. We incorporated an awareness of generational specific topics, such as the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign during World War 2, old fashioned vegetable varieties and scents such as lavender. This has assisted in memory jogging and has prompted some enjoyable conversations amongst the group.

Providing a suitable environment
When establishing the sessions, Carers Trust were clear that providing respite for the client’s carers was a high priority. It is important for the carers to know that their loved one is safe and enjoying a meaningful activity while they have some time off from their caring role.

Due to the age of the group, clients often have mobility needs. We ensure that our garden areas are accessible and appropriate to their needs, using, for example, raised gardening areas and wheelchair-accessible paths, and running tabletop activities. Some medication related to dementia can make people sensitive to bright sunlight so we make sure there are covered areas available for working in sunny weather.

Over the course of the sessions, clients and their carers became increasingly more comfortable and engaged with the activities. The simple act of gardening helped several to recall similar activities they had carried out earlier on in their lives, and the inclusive and relaxed atmosphere helped to address the feeling of isolation that so often goes hand in hand with a dementia diagnosis.

We’re thrilled to report that this work has been extended into 2016. We are confident that we will be able to build on the 2015 pilot, and hope to develop this to provide sessions for carers to attend too.

Peter’s story – enjoying every minute
Peter attended 10 sessions during the autumn of 2015, accompanied by carers from The Carers Trust Coventry Team. He particularly enjoyed the physical tasks; being active and using tools.

During one session Peter took some pea shoots that he had sown back home and in the weeks that followed he told us about how he had enjoyed eating them.

He was able to recall activities done in previous weeks and really enjoyed the social atmosphere of the day.

The project gave Peter the opportunity to recount growing-related memories to the group. He delighted in telling us all about scrumping fruit during the war with his younger brother. Peter spoke about how he stood watch while his nimble little brother scrumped, and one week they were caught, but Peter managed to get away and so avoided being in trouble!

When the sessions came to an end Peter became quite emotional about the project finishing for the year and made a little speech. He said he had enjoyed every minute of the programme, and couldn’t wait for spring when the next sessions would start. He said it was different to normal gardening, that we made him feel welcome, that we are very patient and that he loved the relaxing atmosphere of the sessions.

Peter will continue to attend with the Coventry group for the 2016 sessions and has been delighted to be back in the gardens, meeting new people and continuing to learn about organic vegetable growing.

Photos: Participants on our dementia care project
Discovering the transformative power of collaborative growing

Three Close Tenants Residents Association’s community garden sits in Orwell Close, at the heart of a Raglan Housing Association estate in Loughborough. Residents struggled with vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, and the estate was even referred to by locals as ‘Colditz’ or ‘Beirut’.

In 2011, a small core of residents, led by Josie Falconer, decided that they were tired of living in these conditions and began growing ornamentals with help from Glebe House, an independent charity that supports people with learning difficulties. They quickly transformed the area and received much acclaim for their achievements, but it was hard to sustain their work with only a small team of older residents. Helen Burgess took on her first assignment with the programme. She offered her knowledge and experience of organic food growing and advice on how to draw in more of the younger residents. Helen quickly became a part of the community, convincing them to include some edible crops among their prized flowers. Josie admits her initial reluctance:

“I was against doing a kitchen garden because I knew it was going to be a problem for us, but having Helen here to give us that guidance, we know we can take it on now… we’ve learned what to put in and when to put in… only to grow what we know we’ll eat.”

In 2015 the garden went from strength to strength.

With Helen’s support the residents secured £2,400 of funding from Leicestershire County Council’s SHIRE Grants which they used to add another 9 large raised beds.

They have planted a local heritage apple tree, created a large composting heap, gathering leaves for leaf mould and painting planters, have been drawn in to the planting too.

“We’ve got no end of cherry trees here and nobody ever gets up to harvest them but this year we made cherry jam, we’ve had pies. We’ve had loads of stuff made off it and now people on the estate are doing it. Maggie, she got up one before her back went. She got loads down. She made £50 on cherry pies and sold them for the funds.”

Residents and visitors now approach the flat through fabulous displays of flowers and vegetables. The residents even achieved a level 5 ‘outstanding’ in the RHS in Bloom ‘It’s Your Neighbourhood’ awards.

Helen’s support for what they proudly describe as their ‘kitchen garden’ has had an impact beyond the residents themselves. The Community Payback team, who started out constructing compost heaps, gathering leaves for leaf mould and painting planters, have been drawn in to the planting too.

“They do the proper digging. But they do like to do a bit of planting, because it’s nice for them to plant as well. I mean we had one young woman here, who was with the probationers; she’d never done gardening before. When we planted the pots over there she loved it. She said ‘I love to see the plants. Don’t they look lovely?’ She’s kept it up now.”

These young people are finding that they are being drawn into the community, while learning new skills, and the level of anti-social behaviour in the area has dropped dramatically. Residents are now likely to challenge those who damage the planting or drop litter, and the younger residents are more invested in their community. Josie remembers a recent conversation with her hairdresser:

“When I go down Braddon Road and see our planters and everything, he says sometimes I think we should do a collection for your plants Josie because it makes the access to our own homes so much pleasanter.”

The success of the Three Close Tenants has been such that they have become a flagship for their housing association, which is encouraging similar growing schemes in other estates. The confidence and inspiration that Helen has brought to the Three Close Tenants has contributed to their well-deserved RHS Award, in which the judges particularly noted the level of community involvement and inclusion of edible crops. A remark from one of the judges, overheard by Sue, sums up their achievements:

“I heard him remark, he said ‘I know this estate’ and he said ‘you wouldn’t believe it’s the same estate’.”

Helen’s work with the Three Close Tenants shows the transformative power of growing together and is now providing inspiration to communities across Leicestershire and beyond.
Garden Organic was only able to enjoy such a productive year in 2015 because of our fantastic supporters who believe in our work and are committed to helping us.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our members, volunteers, project participants, local groups, Seed Guardians, Ryton Organic Gardens visitors, Organic Open Gardens supporters, donors, sponsors, partner organisations, Trustees, Ambassadors and many others for all of their support.

Organisations recently funding our work:

- The 29th May 1961 Trust
- Abel and Cole
- The Alan Edwards Higgs Charity
- The Anson Charitable Trust
- Baron Davenport’s Charity
- Big Lottery Fund
- Breckland Council
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Carers Trust Heart of England
- Chase Organics
- Children in Need
- CHK Charities Ltd
- Coventry City Council
- Coventry University
- The Daylesford Foundation
- Defra
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- DJ & M Wood Trust
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- The Edward and Dorothy Cadbury Trust
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- EU – Leonardo Lifelong Learning Programme
- EU – Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme
- EU – Seventh Framework Programme
- The Eveson Charitable Trust
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- GLA (Greater London Authority)
- Gloucestershire County Council
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- The Phone Co-op
- Rural Development Plan for Wales 2008-2013 (Supply Chains Efficiencies Scheme)
- The Saintbury Trust
- Salvia Foundation
- Savoo
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- Warwickshire County Council
- The William A Cadbury Charitable Trust
- William Dean Countryside and Educational Trust
- Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc
- Worcestershire County Council
- WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme)

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