

Elder Farm Garden Update 27 June 2013

We have been very busy since the previous update

First came the garden, then the new fence around the Steading perimeter which meant moving all the wood etc from under the leylandii, which meant bringing in the scrap containers to store stuff and then of course the Govan Fair event, plus the Shearer Bee Garden Project all in the course of a couple of weeks!!

There was a near accident which prompted the Council to gather and reconsider our presence in the garden. Fortunately they decided we were an asset, but decided to build a perimeter fence to stop children from getting onto or near the building which is Dangerous. This has meant welding the gate between front garden and the rest of the garden shut which means we will have to go round and tend the garden from the park. Michelle and MB worked in the garden to create a nice slate feature, and Chris and the team managed to jump in and give the garden a workover before the Weld We moved all the pallets and odd bits and bags out from the perimeter and Galgael came in to push the boat out – it looks very fine, landing on the Govan Road lawn under a tree and makes you feel like you are on holiday every time you see it

New containers

John Adams and Sons, George V Docks, Govan, have kindly loaned us two scrap containers. How to get them on site was the problem. But we spoke to Andrew Galt of Galt Transport Dumbarton kindly found a window that very Friday, and thanks to everyone, we had space to move them in without any mishap. There was a small problem to keys for the blue container which will be used chiefly for meetings and art works, but Daniel and Steven soon fixed that

We were delighted to find loads of extras in a table and benches – just what we needed for the Govan Fair, and some other useful items which had Steven and Daniel dancing in glee

On top of which we met Joe Harper junior clearing out a flat. Joe's parents, Vera and Joe, have passed away. There were a lot of interesting items in the boxes we found on the pavement, and apparently more to come. We suggested that Joe might like to take everything down to the garden where we could distribute stuff we couldn't use on the lawn, which he did, and because Joe Harper senior was a skilled craftsman, we ended up with some brilliant tools for our future workshops, and the community got some great stuff from the lawn distribution we held on the Govan Fair Saturday. Chris, Tiger and Steven have built a stone round table lay out for meetings and other spaces for the Govan Fair event, towards which we were all working til a fine Saturday dawn. The event was a fine turn out with easily 400 visitors over the day, many of whom enjoyed the scientific experiments and projects gratis Glasgow university Science Centre, and the fine treehouse, young and older alike.

Marks and Spencer gave us a £50 voucher which allowed us to buy food for the event, and Chris also brought food down to the garden. Generally the barb-i-q was enjoyed by all and we made around £30 in donations £10 of which went to pay for a guest's taxi, after missing the last bus home.

Shearer Candle Bee Garden

The Bee Garden Project has been moving along. We were invited into St Saviours and Riverside Schools to give a talk about bees and food and then took students along the road to view the site, inviting them to create a design for the Garden. We have been curtailed by information that Scottish Hydro no longer deliver / offer compost. So contacted Asda to see if they could help. Asda have offered a prize for winning design, but are not able to help with loads of compost, so we shall have to find topsoil or maybe just dig over the garden over the summer holidays and plant up slowly. Perhaps some parents and community members will help out. We plan to break ground before the holidays

Keeping the moisture in and the cold and pests out

Using the fleece has had very interesting results

We were inundated with leaf munching varmints last year and invested in a good roll of fleece and some small long net

polytunnels with help from Tommy this year, to protect crops from leaf munchers, while hopefully creating a wee micro-climate to keep out the cold and keep in the moisture. Steven took this to an art form, choosing a part of the inner bed to sow seeds galore and creating a fleece polytunnel using the old frame from an occupy popup – knew it would come in handy one day!!

The results have been an unquestionably huge success and Steven's patch is bursting with life in comparison to his chosen tyre seed beds which are virtually bare. We especially seem to be having trouble with thyme seedlings which start out great, and then vanish – whether withering or plain munched by some mouse or bird enjoying the sweetness of the seedlings. Luckily for us Steven has masses of thyme, parsley and chives with radishes, and other plants – all thriving under his polytunnel.

We have used the fleece with carrots and sweet corn, courgettes and cucumber and other seedlings with similar success. It really does seem to keep in the moisture and keep out the pests.

After watching the Carol Klein Cottage Garden Series, we were persuaded to invest in a bag of grit and another of topsoil to mix in with the compost. Carol also places a layer of grit over sown seed which stops seeds being washed away and holds off other weed which seems to work. Adding a layer of grit over a newly potted up plant and around the roses does seem to cheer them up. Some seeds still have not come up, but in general it seems to work

Soil improvement and compost

The wood chippings seem to be keeping down the weeds, definitely keep in the moisture, and may be preventing the slugs from sailing on into the crops. In clearing space to bring in the scrap containers from Adam, we moved and stored some chippings and used a lot to mulch up the tatties some of which have been planted quite close together. We were a bit fearful of using raw green wood chips, but the plants seem to like them in general.

It is very pleasant learning about stuff, perhaps in a few years we shall all have some good opinions of our own based on our own experiences and understanding.

On the advice of a friend who swears that this is all the compost he uses, we have tried more phacelia this year. This fixes nitrogen into the ground, has a pretty blue nectar rich flower, and is easy to dig back into the soil.

Quick Tyre on Clydebrae St kindly delivered more tyres to layout for seating for the Saturday Fun Day Event, and we made some tyre towers to hold compost materials – OK weeds – collected from around the garden. Previously, we noticed that pulled weeds bumped into tyre towers break down quite quickly into compost – perhaps the black tyres absorb the heat. Three of four stacked hold quite a few weeds which will break down until we are ready to bring them all up to the compost heap.

The Garden

So far this year we have been able to offer leeks and rhubarb to visitors and workers to take home and have been able to take some down to the Vital Spark for their Community Dinner Nights twice along with oregano and parsley, but now thanks to the rain and sunshine and Steven's green thumb we have been able to offer glorious tasty radishes and the odd kale leaf, while the cabbage, sweet corn, broccoli, parsley and chives are coming up all over the place. Moved some seedlings and plants around yesterday and hey then it rained – God is so good to us :)

The slug war does not really seem to have taken off this year. Slugs are being chucked over the wall – which seems to be a simpler and more effective solution to beer traps etc, but it is early days yet

We transferred broccoli, cabbage and sweet corn around the garden and into pots along with flower seedlings which have been grown for interest colour smell and bee friendly properties

Clumps of mint and lemon balm have been popular with visitors and we are happy to add in a few flowering plants to make their gardens grow

The young team of course have been busy taking home seeds and plants for their doorsteps and Nana's gardens, and more parents are coming in to see what all the joy is about

Because the young people are really enjoying the garden this year

Of course we haven't hit the holidays yet, but everyone is mostly joking and laughing and perhaps they are beginning to believe that we really are working hard to get to the stage when we can get the building upgraded asap. Which I believe is any time now.

Steven has bought a beauty of a watering can it holds a lake of water. He loves to water even after a big thunderstorm. Trouble is that you can overwater some plants and even make them water dependant. We have dug so much organic matter into the ground over the past 3 years or more so that plants can survive without watering. Plants that have a good root system pick up nutrients from the soil, making them tastier and also more filling – since they satisfy the body's need for trace minerals. Working out watering may not correct water too little – I generally judge it from the plant itself, and or the position . Recent events – plants whose roots systems have just been disturbed, I like to water in every day until it rains, or if they are wilting after a drought.

All the potatoes, except the very first ones planted, are coming up.

Sadly the peas and beans don't seem to be doing so well this year, or the sweetpeas. Usually they are very easy to grow.

Plants in the middle box in the pergola space do not seem to be thriving well. We have tried new plants and some seem to be OK while others which are thriving in the other two boxes are struggling here. It is a mystery, because all more or less got the same mix of leaves, compost, manure and wood chip covering. The big tyre planters are not doing very well either, well that is some of the plants don't seem to like the environment, especially courgettes and cucumbers, even though the pumpkins seemed very happy with tyres last year.

The roses are coming along, but a couple of the plants have been trampled

We have planted the surviving grape plant in one of the pergola boxes – hopefully this will be its final and successful home. It certainly has survived many disasters including over a year stuck in a pot hardly being watered at all

Steven, Daniel, Chris and the Total Ground Care Team, Chris and Tiger, and Rosa and family have all been terrific assets to the garden. Rosa is an experienced garden. Daniel and Steven are strong and able and so interested in the idea of building projects such as creating electricity etc, Steven is wonderful with the young people and has had them playing tig and other games. He is also a resilient member, soothing our worries with "it'll come, you'll see", and when tempers are heated he is the peacemaker, steadfastly staying friends with everyone and refusing to allow old issues to spoil the day.

Chris and the Total Ground Care Team have been in several times dropping off grass clippings, and mowing the outer lawn and keeping the orchard, the front garden lawn and hedges in trim

We have tried to keep a few groups of thistle and fireweed around and went out into the Park to create artistic groupings of the same in the bed outside the fence – one to keep folk from climbing the fences along with brambles and roses grown on the fence and two because the blooms are attractive, and nectar rich, and the birds like the seed. However LES have seen fit to strim these down so we shall have to think of something else – perhaps gooseberries would be an acceptable solution.