

## **Garden Update 22 October 2013**

It has been quite a while since the last report for which I apologise, and this report will be a bit raggedy, probably because we have had such a lack of interested parties to work with committee stuff which is very disheartening. So apologies for the very bitty info, but we move forward, because permaculture is alive and kicking ass

Generally we have had a pretty long hot summer, and stricter job centre rulings insist that we are not supposed to spend more than 16 hours on voluntary work, which makes what should be simple and easy and lot more complicated. Technically the point of the garden is to give a person experience, and chance for reference along with a breathing space to forget about the trials and tribulations of being unemployed, along with which, gardening is not really a clock thing. On top of which, it is not practical to weed or disturb plants during the day firstly because of the bees but also because disturbing roots or plants during the day endangers the connection between plant and the microbes and moisture in the beds. As a result, it seemed more sensible to chose evening to spend allowed hours, which means it has not been open during the day, which has disappointed many potential visitors.

### **Water**

Well it does seem that all that composting on site, - well I call it trenching – that is digging a trench, adding a generous mix of manure, and organic matter and mixing it all up at the bottom before filling in with the next trench dugouts etc,- seems water wise to have been a success. We had around 18 days without water and frankly a lot longer considering the lightness of the rain, and during that time only watered in new plants, until almost the very end when some of the plants were definitely beginning to wilt, possibly because some of the beds are not so very deep. The whole garden got a thorough drenching again one evening with the hose at this point trying not to disturb any bees, who seemed to be quite happy and accommodating throughout the process. They had been getting a little crabby after the water was run off and we found ourselves unable to fill up the small dishes and butt covers left out for them to drink from Shortly after that it began to rain again and we have more or less managed pretty well apart for not having water to offer dogs, wash pots or hands, etc We always used to have secret stash of rain water collected in the large tyres standing around the garden but someone keeps putting them away

Early August the MacLinnges battered their way into the blue container so it does not have a lock anymore – for some reason they decided to break the glass instead of sliding it back for access. They also broke into the red container smashing everything up inside, making off with several cherished items including chisel and drill sets, pickaxe, stand pipe and key. Since the kids are not often allowed in these days, we tend not to need the pickaxe to help them get out of the boiler pit when they get stuck inside, and have been able to borrow a pipe and key on occasion to fill a couple of water containers. However as soon as we filled up the butts the MacLinnges run it off again. Plants collected for other projects including St Kenneths once the long awaited compost arrives, have also been smashed up.

### **Compost Bee Garden and Kugel Beds**

Yes we do have a compost connection again. Scottish Hydro kindly arranged for a delivery of 12.6 tons of super warm compost for the Shearer Bee Garden. There are a few trees in the garden which have been blocking light and rainfall from the garden. With help from the brilliant Payback Team, limbs hanging very low were taken down, which increased light to the garden. These limbs were neatly cut up by the Payback Team, along with half of the cherry damaged by the Xmas fire, and brought up to Robinson Road along with any organic composting materials we could find, including a large number of very smelly bags of what was once grass clippings, and now more or less silage.

Sheets of cardboard were laid in bed shapes, and the chopped branches and organic materials added. Galgael was raided for three truck loads of beautiful logs, which were used to contain the beds, and all filled with this

roasting compost. Now looking at the Kugel kraft material on you tube I realise that it probably would have been better to put the logs in the centre of the beds, and that our small heap of chopped wood was pretty pathetic, but we are in touch with the arbour department and thinking about a Kugel upgrade in a couple of weeks. We waited for St Saviours to come and add finishing touches but time tables could not be stretched, so finally decided to hose down the beds to put out that fire, enticing the interest of a couple of foxes who had been warming their derriers on the warm soil all week, planted up and watered for a couple of days until the rain took over.

Pleasingly the [Yacouba Sawadogo bed](#) created at the end of last term had survived and looked sweet, and sturdy although the plants were quite small. In all the bee garden doesn't look brilliant, and definitely needs the young magic. We need to put collective thinking hats on and arrange regular connection with the school. Once the leaves fall, we may be able to upgrade it to ensure that nutrients and water will last. The larger the wood core the greater the organic materials, the more chance of an endless supply of nutrient to the garden for years and the more chance of sweet smelling nectar rich plants. As other plants and fruit trees are introduced, hopefully wildlife will be attracted and this will add more nutrient. And that's permaculture design folks. Funnily enough, we seem to have built a swale along the edge closest to the building. It is funny how you do things because it seems a logical answer, and then find others do it too and have a name for it. These permaculture videos have offered a much clearer insight into why and what. It is great to get video from the true masters, who make it so simple

The garden plants started late this year and trees are only just beginning to turn. So we have a few weeks before that good resource is truly available. Am very keen to get in as much organic matter as parks and friends can throw at us and see if we can get some real Kugel beds in – apparently Kugel mean “huge”, so now is the time to plan and design and see if we can fit in some of these huge wood core beds in the garden. We have made a start on a couple and may have chance of getting in some real tree trunks if we can get enough folk to cart them to the right spot – O I forgot Payback Team – awesome resource.!!

We used grass clippings and woodchip for mulch this year, and am already looking at the woodchip path and thinking about adding that to beds, if we can find a source to replace, fingers crossed. Am also definitely going to promote the chop and drop, which again I nearly incorporated this year but feel weird because everyone else is taking to compost. Now I know there are others out there doing it and making it a success am fired up to go. Of course there has to be a compromise between appearance and what appears to be true permaculture, but then surely that is also part of permaculture design – there are guidelines, understanding and then needs. Perhaps we will even interest parks in making a couple of Kugel beds in Elderpark or around for the games – unless they are already heading in that direction. I have my sights on a couple of beds in the riverside for experiment.

### **Plants and crops**

Clumps of seedlings have been appearing all over the garden thanks to friends and especially Lyndsay and Stephen. Lift a plant leaf and find loads of wee onion chive leek cabbage seedlings. Thanks to which we have loads of onion sets grown from our seed in our garden for next year start.

Our courgettes rapidly turned into gigantic marrows, our cucumbers were delicious, and our carrots, beetroot and potatoes a screaming success. I think the difference this year is we have not interfered with plants at all. No taking off males, no constant prodding and removing leaves. There was an early threat of the leaf thing which may be due to drainage / excess moisture, but we added in a yarrow plant and that seems to have helped or else the weather dried up.

Thanks to Stephen we have a lot of thyme plants around the garden and more onion coming every day Stephens

cherry tomatoes were delicious and I hope we have some seed from them. The rest of the tomato story is as usual sad – they grow then they blemish, - added to which tomatoes were late this year. But we still have not added calcium to the soil. I am ignorant – perhaps bone meal is the answer. I cannot find anyone to offer a real opinion. Previously I have never had this problem, but then previously I have always had a bag of calcium aggregate to add to my trenching mix. Here in the city it is either extortionately expensive or hard to find. I have tried potash, chicken pellets, and considered over and over again powdered plaster, but chickened out.. Finally from this wonderful mix of permaculture info on YouTube, it seems crushed rock even old cement will do. Drat we have loads of that lumpy stuff that got wet in the red shed. Ah well next year

We tried corn again this year – thanks to Stephen, and this has been a semi success. The plants were magnificent, getting the ears to turn to something edible was another matter. Probably due to lack of right nutrients, and will replan with wood core next year. Apparently along with many permies am trying to find perfect mix without need for additional artificial nutrient. Apparently, sweet corn is nitrogen hungry – maybe there was a nitrogen lockup, maybe not enough manure, but next year we can try it out in what was this year's patch for beans and peas (but actually mostly phacaelia). Bet the phacaelia comes up again next year. With enough carbon in wood chip and weed matter added it should be interesting .

We are still digging up potatoes, have a number of cabbages, good looking leeks and loads of kale

We have planted in new leeks and also cabbages. The birds ate a lot of the brassica plant leaves this year, so we covered a couple of rows with net. The plants grew big, but were covered in slug poo. Whereas the other plants grew back leaves and looked pretty appetising. Think we will protect the seedlings for a while and then leave nature to it.. It is a great pity we cant have hens so pigeons are the next best thing. Thinking along those line possibly if we bought them some grain they might leave the leaves alone

We have a couple of rats in the garden which is a little worrying, but last years wasp problem turned out OK, so perhaps this will also work itself out. This year the wasps have been nesting further down in the front garden this year amongst the nasturtiums and good luck to them as they defend an access point !!

We have supplied veg to the Vital Spark, and more recently to the Gazelle a couple of times and once to the Dinner Nights, the Galgael and the Preschall. We have also been giving visitors and workers veggies, mostly potatoes, and of course plants galore. Several passers by have offered to come in and help but have not reappeared, lives are very busy, but fingers crossed the survey which goes out through local schools etc over the next week or so may invite more active participation. As always we long to open the gates, bring down the barriers and have this place jumping with families and friends

We may have another shot at a voucher from M&S and are considering an event in the future possibly in connection with all hallo's bonfire night or midwinter solstice