



NEWSLETTER Spring / Summer 2013

Welcome to the latest newsletter packed with updates on all the amazing projects Down to Earth have been working on, with a special thanks to Imogen Shaw for our wonderful new logo (above).

We are also delighted to report that Amanda Godber has been awarded Environmental Champion 2013 by Stroud Town Council in recognition for her contribution to our community. Our thanks and appreciation go to Amanda for all the hard work she puts in on behalf of the group.

Despite a very late spring things are beginning to grow and we continue to work hard and even gather to celebrate the seasons (whether they're ready or not!).



Tea Lights at Selsley

Spring Gardening Event

On a wonderful hot, sunny Saturday in the Market Tavern Garden in Stroud, people could be seen wandering through a delight of gardening stalls and chatting about the varied activities that would help their garden grow.

Down to Earth invited local gardeners to have a stall or run an activity for the Spring Gardening Event.



Spring Gardening Event

As we were so close to the Farmers Market many people who knew nothing about us came to visit and a steady stream of interested customers kept the stall holders busy. Helen Pitel offered her own workshops and demonstrated how to make newspaper pots, Down to Earth had lots of plants, pots and gardening tips as well as Fred's complete composting table with everything from worms to dinosaurs. Transition Stroud's Edible Open Gardens team were encouraging gardeners to open their garden in July this year or come and visit other peoples' and there were cakes, jams, vines, hand-knitted socks, and many other tempting treats.

Fruit and Nut Tree Guardianship Scheme

Funding from the Cotswold Conservation Board for the feasibility study and first year of this project helped us get it off the ground.

Despite a dismal year for fruit and nut yields nationally, we were offered enough surplus or unwanted fruit from domestic gardens to make it viable with a bit of foraging too!

We created great self-employed opportunities for 3 food producers

and worked with new and existing volunteers to harvest and forage fruit. We also worked with a local illustrator and printing company for our labels. Part of the scheme included providing free or subsidised tree maintenance to ensure a healthy tree and good crops – we undertook this work in 5 gardens.



Dried fruit at Winterfest

The range of products we made included plum sauce, dried apples, pears and figs, fruit leathers, medlar cheese and a gooseberry & elderflower preserve. Everyone that donated fruit was given some of the products as a thank you. These products have been sold at events and are still being sold through Stroudco.

We're looking forward to the summer harvest and welcome any offers of fruit and or nuts.

This project has many benefits such as preserving and protecting our domestic fruit heritage, providing skills development, but also gives us the opportunity to map where fruit trees in gardens are.

Stroud District Council

Last year we were approached by SDC to deliver their Gardening Assistance Scheme for tenants unable through age or infirmity to keep their gardens tidy.

Although not strictly in our remit, it was and is important work which now has 6 self-employed gardeners working throughout the district with vulnerable people.

SDC are very impressed with the work we've done in our first year and have increased our funding allocation. Initially they also offered us funding to develop community allotments for tenants with communal gardens and a gardenshare scheme. Unfortunately these haven't been of interest to tenants so although still possible, no development work is taking place. However, SDC have said that they might be able to fund pilot projects in planting mini-orchards, projects that grow food in tenants' gardens and composting.

One of the tenant groups asked us if we could help them with a rather messy piece of land on Stratford Road. We agreed to create a wildlife friendly flower border with interest for the public and have sown seeds, planted bulbs, heathers and nectar rich plants and look forward to seeing it bloom.

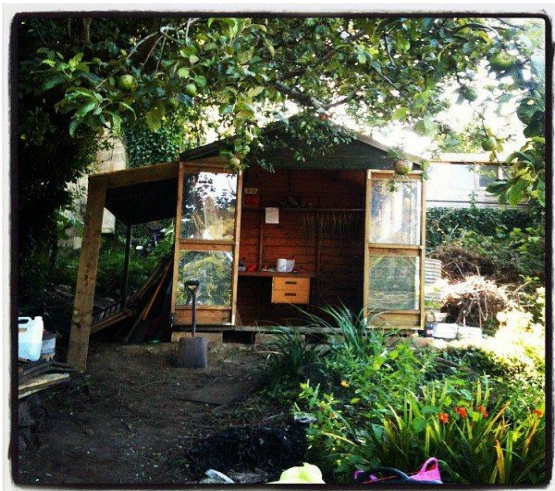
Community Composting Network

We were awarded Regional Training Hub status by Community Composting Network for a national Community Composting for Local Food Projects scheme funded by the National Lottery.



Amanda and Seb, Composting

The idea behind it is to help local food projects become self-sufficient in compost by setting up their own community composting schemes, reducing the need to buy compost



The shed at Selsley

and promote environmental benefits such as not using peat, reducing road miles, recycling waste products etc.

The first course ran in November in partnership with Bisley Community Composting Scheme. 11 people from 6 local food projects took part – of those all passed except one who left to take up a new job. Down to Earth has provided follow up visits to each centre (Malmesbury, Bristol, Worcester, Stroud, Cheltenham, Forest of Dean) and will be running a further workshop to monitor and support progress.

The next course will be run in October. If you'd like more information let us know.

Food Strategy Group

Throughout 2012 Down to Earth members worked hard to facilitate a food group in Stroud. This involved over thirty other interested people and began the process to formulate a 'Food Strategy' for the whole district. The year ended with a proposal to Stroud District Council requesting support and funding to make this work more formal. The aim was to

improve on local and sustainable food production within the area:

"As demand for food continues to increase, both locally and globally, there is a greater than ever requirement to intensify food production sustainably. This in turn calls for a strategy to advance the regeneration of the many different sectors in Stroud's local food economy."(Quote from Proposal, Nov 2012)
It is hoped that something will come of this and currently we wait to see what form the tender from Stroud District Council will be.

Selsley Allotment Gardens

After a year and a half, our Selsley project is developing very well.

We now manage 4 plots with the possibility of more. There are about 10 regular volunteers who come on Monday mornings rain or shine, to sow, plant, propagate, weed, dig, build and drink refreshments around the fire.



Brian at Selsley

During the winter we did some physical jobs such as steps up to the shed, so you don't slip down the

muddy slope; many soft fruit bushes were planted; and major clearance of perennial weeds.



Tea at Selsley

In March while it was still freezing, we planted about 120 square yards of maincrop potatoes. These are now pushing their shoots up into the light, and we have begun earthing them up. Subscribers to our potato club will be supplied with bags of spuds.

This week we planted out broccoli, Brussel sprout plants, beetroot and more.

We have a polytunnel which is 10 foot square which is bigger than you think! And it now has tomatoes two feet high. This was made with reclaimed materials, and built as a training workshop. It is solid and really built to last.

The challenge is now on to harvest rainwater, as we have no working tap on site. In order to water inside the polytunnel we will need plenty of it, and we have begun to collect water from the shed. We are seeking more water butts or blue barrels to further this process.

Composting, being at the core of our philosophy, is progressing. We are using garden waste, and layering in bays. These were recently turned,

and the heat generating process, though hard work, really produces humus which we can sieve and plant in.

We will be making a 'home composting demonstration area' which will show what people can do in their own gardens to compost garden and kitchen waste, in trouble-free ways.

Our seasonal social events are popular, with food, fire and drinks: including wassailing the fruit trees, and then a (freezing) spring awakening. It must be nearly time for a mid-summer chill-out I think.

Hope to see you up there,

And finally

If anyone would like to join our group we are looking for a secretary and a treasurer. We would be delighted to welcome you to the core group.

Later on this year we hope to create a **Seed Saving Circle**. If you are interested in being part of this, or in attending a workshop about it, please get in touch.

In the coming year we hope to have **Heritage vegetable plants** for sale – watch this space....



Raised bed demo

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