



Down to Earth

Newsletter
December
2014

Welcome to the round up of this year – it's been very busy and productive!

Potato Day – February

Another successful Potato day! A big pat on the back for all Down to Earth and Transition Stroud Volunteers who made it happen. We sold 450kg of seed potatoes with people travelling in to buy them from all over the district. Put it in your diary – Potato Day 2015 is on February 7th at Merrywalks. If you'd like to help out on the day get in touch – 01453 700011.

Fruit Tree Sale – February

Cainscross car park became the venue for people to buy and / or collect their trees and shrubs. We had advice on aftercare and pruning, as well as support stakes . We're going to be running this event again this year so keep an eye on our website and blog for the date and information on pre-ordering.

www.downtoearthstroud.co.uk

Spring Gardening Event – April

It was a cold day but many people visited our stalls outside the Subrooms.

Other participating stall holders included Glos. Wildlife Trust, Transition Stroud and Glos. County Council.

There was a lot of interest in the organic heirloom and saved seed plants, with many visitors knowledgeable about the impact Monsanto and others are having on our choice of seeds and food grown.

On our stall we had available 4 varieties of tomatoes, 7 varieties



of hot and sweet peppers, Aquadulce and Siberian Black broad beans available - all from our own saved seeds and some of them heirloom varieties. We also had Bunyards Exhibition broad bean plants, 4 different mints, walking onions, a range of herbs, tayberry, strawberry and gooseberry plants along with a range of ornamental recycled plants. We also had a quince tree as a raffle prize.

Community Composting Network – Composting for Local Food Groups L2 Training Course

We ran two courses in 2013, with the final submission of learners work in early 2014. The Big Lottery grant has now come to an end and we're waiting to here how CCN will progress this programme of learning.



Composting

Down to Earth has Master Composters on the team and works closely with the county council to support domestic composting.

Our home composting demonstration site at Selsley has been moved to Stroud Valley's Project community allotment at Bisley Old Road Allotments – access is much easier for the public at this site and we welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with SVP. Well done Fred!

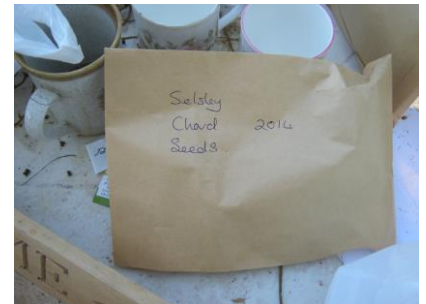
Get in touch if you need any help with your own composting.

Selsley

This site has been developed as an example of best practice in community growing schemes. Our core team of volunteers are

dedicated and turn up in all weathers. Thanks to all of them!

Our focus this year has been on saving our own seeds to help us become completely sustainable and if we need to buy seeds in, we only buy organic. There's a lot of research about companies using environmentally unsustainable coatings on seeds and the effect on bees. Hybrids are for farmers and GM is a serious issue. Seed saving it is then!



We have a composting system that should produce all the compost we need to ensure healthy nutritious crops. For a small fee, we can also collect and remove your garden waste to recycle at Selsley.

Applewood at Cashes Green – Old Hospital Site

Down to Earth was asked to meet with prospective allotmentors and answer questions about how to make fertilisers and improve soil health and quality.

As a follow up to this we were invited to attend the Applewood Open Day in October. It was a great event and we got to meet a lot of the new residents as well as look



around this eco development.

Gardening Projects

We have a Service Level Agreement with Stroud District Council to run their Gardening

Assistance Scheme for vulnerable tenants unable to do their own gardening. Through this work we also do bespoke gardening at different housing schemes. This is a before and after of an overgrown waste patch



being turned into a communal meeting area.



We also have a number of private clients who like the fact that all our gardeners go through a Disclosure and Barring Service Check with the police.

Down to Earth has 9 self-employed gardeners with 2 new ones coming on board next year.

As a not-for-profit community organisation, we're keen to develop opportunities for self-employment and have a number of new initiatives in discussion. Watch this space!

We undertake a range of ornamental and horticultural gardening activities. These include

- ✓ Garden clearance
- ✓ Removal of sheds and greenhouses
- ✓ Pressure washing patios and sheds
- ✓ Painting (fences, decking, wooden furniture)
- ✓ Creating wildlife ponds
- ✓ Hedge laying
- ✓ Wildlife areas / gardens
- ✓ Rotivating
- ✓ Creating compost areas /

solutions

- ✓ Tree and shrub pruning
- ✓ Landscaping
- ✓ Living willow installations
- ✓ Advice

If you want to find out more about our services, please get in touch. We'll be happy to come and visit your garden to discuss your needs with no obligation. We can also assess and create a bespoke report for you about your plans in relation to what your garden can support.



Coming up in 2015 Community Orchards

As you all probably know, we at Down to Earth love fruit, especially local fruit! So much so that it's our mission to do all we can to increase access to local fruit (and nuts) and in doing that also fulfil another mission of ours – reducing local food waste and increasing local food security!

Helping to develop more community orchards seems the perfect step forward for us; combining experience from our two main projects – Selsley Community Growing Scheme and Fruit and Nut Tree Guardianship Scheme.

So, what exactly will we try to offer in 2015 for those wishing to develop an orchard?

- ✓ Support in developing an existing or new orchard.
- ✓ Support with finding funding, sourcing trees and advice and guidance.
- ✓ How to set up a



community orchard group.

Fruit & Nut Tree Guardianship Scheme

This project was so successful in 2013 that this year we took what we'd learned and have updated it for next year keeping the essential elements - taking surplus or unwanted fruit from domestic gardens and create a local fruit product. **The Fruit Exchange** is on it's way!

Organic & Heirloom Veg Plants

We will continue to grow vegetable plants which we will make available for donation. By early spring we hope to have a list of plants available, as well as a pre-ordering service.

International Year of the Soil 2015

With colleagues from SVP, Bisley Community Composting, Stroud Food Bank and Transition Stroud we will be arranging a series of events to celebrate soil.

Seed Guardians

If you're interested in growing crops specifically for saving the seed and becoming one of a select and important team (!), please get in touch.

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