



Hyphen 69

News from the Office

Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux
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Diversity in unity

Malou Weirich



More than two million families of allotment gardeners unified in the International Office cultivate an allotment with love, joy and diligence. This is what unites us throughout Europe and Japan.

In the issue n° 68 we have already seen that the garden shapes and the cultivation methods as well as the sensitivity of the allotment gardeners for projects vary a lot. Some allotment gardeners are more active in the social field, whereas others are more active in the nature and environmental protection field. This is what makes allotments so exciting. No monotony, but diversity in unity.

Also nothing is carved into stone, but creatively and innovatively the allotment garden movement adapts itself to each époque with its specific accents.

From the utility and nutrition garden passing by the recreation garden to an oasis for a human, peaceful diversity, an animal and plant refuge, an ecologically valuable place in the midst of densely populated cities, everything can be found and varies according to time.

In this issue 69 you will find additional examples from other countries on the topic of diversity as suggestions for new projects.

“If you stop dreaming, you are dead” said pedagogue A. S. NEILL.

The allotment gardeners do not stop dreaming. They have all the ingredients for success.

The following examples show how they innovate in order to stay modern and attractive. And these are only a few examples of the great diversity existing in the thirteen affiliated federations ...

*Dear allotment gardeners
Let yourself be further inspired and leave your foot prints.*

*Dear readers and friends of the allotment garden movement
Let yourself be further surprised by the diversity of our activities
and continue to support us.*

Former Office president from Switzerland passed away



Bild: Werner Fricker

Werner SCHÄUBLIN at the occasion of the international congress in Lausanne in 2000 with the presidential chain, offered to the Office by the British allotment federation. The international flag, offered by the Austrian federation, was exposed during the Swiss presidency in the townhall of Birsfelden.

On December 5th 2019 Werner SCHÄUBLIN passed away at the age of 82. With him we lose a personality for whom understanding, unity and the preparation of the future were very important, both in his federation and in the Office.

Werner SCHÄUBLIN was active in his local association for many years and was president of the Swiss federation. He represented the Swiss interests and explained the specificities of his federation in the Office from 1995 till 2005. He was international president from 1998 until 2000. Till the end he participated in the national events, so for example in the assembly of delegates in June 2019, where I could still meet him and found him in good spirits.

He was also convinced of the necessity of the Office and its positive effects for all. Thus, he supported the Office actively wherever possible. He always tried to take part in the international meetings with a strong Swiss delegation, so that the Swiss representatives could both share their experience with the others and bring home new insights and ideas. During the

successful international congress in Lausanne, important subjects for the allotment gardeners in the 3rd millennium could be discussed. During this congress we unanimously decided to send a letter to the Polish authorities to preserve the Polish allotment law and not to privatise the allotment sites.

Besides his activities as Swiss delegate and Office president, Werner SCHÄUBLIN was an appreciated colleague, a friend of all and was always ready to make a joke to make our meetings pleasant and to ease the atmosphere, if necessary.

We thank Werner SCHÄUBLIN for his tireless engagement and will keep him in best memory. To honour his memory we will work hard to push our movement forward in the interest of the Swiss and European allotment gardeners by adapting to the new needs and by taking into consideration the changes in our society.

Malou WEIRICH
Secretary General of the Office
International du Coin de Terre et
des Jardins Familiaux

Germany: Integration in the Neighbourhood, Eagerness to Experiment, Women Power, Innovative Spirit



Saxony **Dresden**

Population: 551.072

Surface of allotment gardens: 793 ha

Allotment garden sites: 366

Allotment gardens: ca. 25.000

Allotment garden site *Flora I* **Foundation:** 1910

Surface: 4.2 ha

of which garden area: 3.9 ha

Allotment gardens: 203 of which two are school garden plots

Allotment "*Flora*": Vegetable lovers in a traditional garden

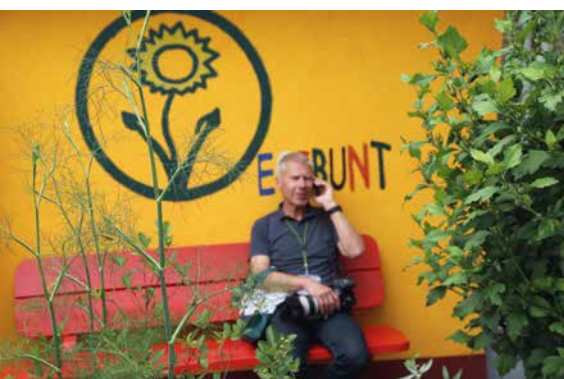
The stately Dresden is shaped by water and forest. The majestic Elbe river is, of course, especially present, but some smaller confluents flow through the city, too. The name "Florence of

the Elbe", that originally established itself because of its similar Baroque architecture and the important art collections also fits climatically, because Dresden is one of the warmest cities in Germany, as there is an especially mild micro climate in the Elbe valley.

So, the conditions for gardening at

the Elbe river are perfect and the allotment site "Flora I" breathes nearly as much history as the whole city. The allotment dates back to the "Gründerzeit" (economic period in the 19th century Germany and Austria-Hungary before the great stock market crash of 1879) and spreads over three small garden areas in the intermediate vi-





city – in the midst of a densely populated residential area.

The allotment gardeners also have good contact with their neighbours. They have several cooperations – for example with a children’s home, two elementary schools and with the “Ecumenical Senior Citizen Aid Dresden”. For the latter, the allotment gardeners, with the support of the solidarity of the people, converted the garden of encounter into a barrier-free area. That way, many events for the seniors can take place here, from the dementia group to the painting group and to open meetings.

In a community garden the summer kiosk “VERGIBUNT” has been installed, where different events took and take place. Amongst them are a seminar about old fruit varieties, a vegan barbecue regulars’ table or the monthly “veggie meeting” of the allotment gardeners’ youth (Schreberjugend) under the motto *“Out of the garden onto the table”*.

The love for a vegetarian lifestyle often brings a love for nature with it, and because of that, several nature

protection projects are implemented at “Flora I”. At a wetland biotope it quacks and hums, several six-legged friends find a new home in the insect hotels and nesting aids are installed for birds. The beekeeper of the association gladly lets others look over his shoulder and, additionally, supervises a beekeeper trail. Especially children like listening when he informs them about the small honey producers. Many of them have already come to know the association on their first day of school, because already for a few years, the allotment gardeners have been picking and binding summer flower bouquets for the first graders’ enrolment at school.

The allotment gardeners also like it colourful with their facades. The toilet building was designed as homage to the founder of the allotment, Emil Klein – by his great-grandchild who lives in Dresden as an artist. One more example of how “Flora I” combines tradition with modernity.

The association’s motto is: *“Gardening is the only philosophy that fills one’s stomach.”*



**Lower-Saxony
Hildesheim**

Population: 103.970

Surface of gardens: 196 ha

Allotment garden sites: 94

Allotment gardens: 5.220

*Allotment garden site:
Gartenfreunde Ochtersum*

Foundation: 1972

Surface: 1.53 ha

of which garden area: 1.12 ha

Allotment gardens: 36

*Allotment Ochtersum:
enthusiasm for experimenting
and female power*

With the rose the people of Hildesheim already wear a piece of gardening art on their coat of arms. Even though there is not an unusual number of roses in the city, there is a particularly special one: the thousand-year-old rose bush. But even though the dog rose at Mary's cathedral is presumably "just" about 700 years old, it is – thanks to climbing aids – an impressive ten metres high and, especially, in the flowering period just splendid.

As special as this rose bush is the allotment site of the "Allotment gardeners Ochtersum". Name giving is the town of Ochtersum, which was

mentioned in a document for the first time in 1132 and today belongs to the city of Hildesheim and has grown immensely since the 1990's. Located once in the middle of lonely fields outside the doors of the town, it is now the centre of a newly developed building area. At least the city planners had enough foresight to not sacrifice the allotment gardens to the building mania. That way the people of Ochtersum can enjoy a green meeting place in the midst of the residential area. That the local residents very much like to drop by to visit the allotment gardeners is especially due to the openness and energy of the allotment gardeners. In this context the female allotment gardeners have explicitly to be mentioned. In fact at the Ochtersum association especially women are leading by example. Four of them, for example, once a week of-



fer homemade cake at the garden of encounter. This is a highlight for the seniors of the area.

Also, a real showcase project of the people of Ochtersum is being lead by a woman: Dr. Stefanie Mannsdotter is the expert gardening adviser for the association and imparts far more than just knowledge about gardening. In fact she supervises a research garden in cooperation with the "New School of Wolfsburg". Here the children dedicate themselves to important topics of the future like "Is cloning of vegetable plants something for reality?", "Alternative energy generation in the city and in allotment gardens" or "Food of the future – we experiment with produce from our garden". As part of a project, planting soils from various types of fallen fruit, leaf mixtures and woodcut were produced and it was





shown how plants can be organically cultivated, harvested and processed into new food products of the future with the substrates and fertilisers they produced themselves.

However, not only the spirit of research is awakened in the next gen-

eration, but gardening is also on the agenda. The Renata-Schule Ochtersum has been provided with a plot of land this year – and the pupils manage it perfectly. Here the young people get to know the diversity of nature and also perform something good. They donate the fruit and vegetables

of their garden to the food bank. This is yet another example that in Ochtersum, love for nature and love for people go hand in hand. "Because the association is only efficient with the power of women!" Motto of the association



Hamburg
Hamburg

Population: 1.860.759

Surface of gardens: 1.829 ha

Allotment garden sites: 312

Allotment gardens: 34.780

Allotment garden site GBV
Döhrnkamp – 314 –

Foundation: 1915

Surface: 3.3 ha

of which garden area: 2.7 ha

Allotment gardens: 77

Rent a patch

One of the most famous daughters of Hamburg has stood up her whole life for nature and especially botany: Loki Schmidt was a real plant lover – after her death the central botanical garden was even named after her. However, even in the boomtown Hamburg one has to be careful that the necessary

housing construction isn't played off against the allotment gardens.

Protecting allotment gardens despite a lack of space is no easy task. Hamburg has developed a reasonable solution for that: very big plots are divided into several smaller ones. In that way people can garden, without space being lost for flats. If the allotment sites are being modernised at the same time, both the association and the city developers benefit from it.



In “Döhrnkamp” in Hamburg-Lokstedt the goal to create win-win-situations is pursued in a specifically consequent way: Here too as many people as possible should profit from the green oasis. However, the old allotment site from the Wilhelmine period was narrow and built without many open spaces. And free gardens in the city are searched for in vain. The allotment gardeners found a solution with a great community spirit: each leaseholder gives up a little piece of his plot and suddenly there is space for cosy sitting areas and the creation of useful pathways.

But a cosy bench alone doesn't make a new allotment gardener. Because of that, the people of Hamburg have thought of something special: everywhere in the allotment where space could be found, raised beds were built. These can, freely following the motto “Rent a Beet”, be rented for one season by everyone who wants to. Whether they are seniors, for whom a whole garden is too much work, gardening newcomers, who like to explore a new hobby, or neighbours, who are just looking for a patch for their herbs and mini-vegetables – the raised beds are the perfect solution for many. The association is pleased, too: In addition to additional income for the association's treasury, it can offer some sort of “trial membership” for gardening enthusiasts.

The circle of those who profit from the green areas of the city also increases, as well as through the school garden area that is maintained together with an all-day school. Especially in a growing city the opening of the allotment site is a very clever move: More people learn about and learn to love allotment gardening – and they support the association. An idea that should especially be implemented in urban areas.

“We see again and again what a community can do if everyone helps.”



Finland: The Diversity of Priorities

Text: Outi Berghäll and Tina Wessman

Pictures: Heli Ahola and Anne Mattsson



Suomen Siirtolapuutarhaliitto (The Federation of Finnish Allotment Gardeners) has pledged to participate in the Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development (Sitoumus 2050), an initiative launched in 2013 by the National Commission on Sustainable Development. Within this framework, a wide variety of actors from the public, private and non-governmental sectors have made commitments to promote sustainable development in all their work and with concrete actions. The programme is guided by eight goals, which cover the wellbeing of humans and the environment, health, sustainable economy and sustainable lifestyles. Each commitment covers one or several UN Agenda 2030 goals.

The federation's commitment consists of a project aiming at mapping, planning and training actions supporting sustainable development in the Finnish allotment gardens. Attention

is paid, for example, to sustainable cultivation practices, energy and water use, recycling and the preservation of biodiversity.

As part of the project, the federation carried out an extensive survey in the summer 2018. The target group of the survey was the individual allotment gardeners. Approximately 700 gardeners responded, which gave us a respondent rate of 19%. In a complementary survey, the boards of the allotment gardeners' associations were approached.

Allotment gardeners are nature lovers

One of the questions included in the survey was "What is important to you in the allotment garden?" Almost all respondents emphasised the proximity of nature. Many gardeners told us, that they enjoy observing the change of seasons and watching the sum-

mer progressing. Beauty was often mentioned separately. The allotment garden is nature in the city and easily accessible. Your own plot, place of peace counterbalance living in an apartment during the long winter.

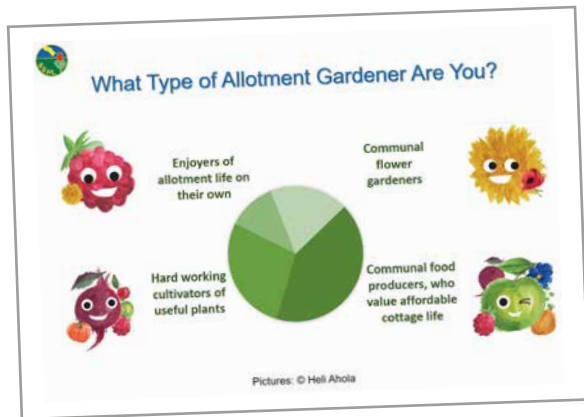
A statistical grouping analysis was carried out on the question of priority responses. As result we found four different types of allotment gardeners. These types helped us learn more about the ways in which allotment gardeners enjoy the closeness to nature and about the reasons for and methods why and how. In the allotment gardens there is also diversity based on the motives for being a gardener.

Food producers, cultivators, loners and flower gardeners

May we present – The four types of Finnish Allotment Gardeners:

Communal food producers, who value affordable cottage life

This is the largest group, representing two out of five respondents. Growing one's own food is of utmost importance for people in this group, but they do like flowers too. Affordable cottage life is important for everyone. In Finland, having a place for summer – the "summer cottage" – is a central part of the Finnish culture. Most people in this group also take part in common work on the site. Furthermore, they are active participants in common meetings and more than one of four has some designated position within their own association. Being part



of the garden community as well as relations with neighbours and garden friends are highly appreciated.

Hard working cultivators of useful plants

This is the second largest group – almost every third respondent. The age structure of this group focuses on gardeners younger than the average. Cultivating vegetables and other food plants is important, but not in terms of actual food production as in the previous group. As in all the groups, also flowers are valued. Most attend common meetings and take part in common work at least occasionally.

important. Almost half of those in this group are pensioners. These gardeners are rarely involved in any joint activities.

Communal flower gardeners

Almost every fifth respondent is a flower gardener, i. e. growing flowers is the number one issue for them in their garden. They pay less attention to growing food, even though there are those for whom also cultivation is quite important. An affordable cottage is essential for most. The flower gardeners take actively part in common work and two out of three attend the common meetings.

Enjoyers of allotment life on their own

This is the smallest group: somewhat over a tenth of the respondents. For many in this group, cultivation is quite important, but a narrow majority consider flowers the most

The allotment garden sites in Finland are of varying size and milieu. What was surprising in the results is that the place of residence has no effect on to which group the gardener belongs.

Considering the results, one should bear in mind that the distribution of respondents is likely to differ, at least to some extent, from the actual distribution of allotment gardeners. The federation has, unfortunately, no knowledge of the background of the gardeners. Nevertheless, the respondents represent a wide range of different age groups and a varying degree of experience of allotment gardening.

The most important result of the classification study is perhaps the insight that there are many types of allotment gardeners. As such, the survey results provide a good basis for considering the ways and means of reaching different gardeners and identifying practices that encourage everyone to attend and work together for the common good at the allotment site.

Sweden: Newly opened allotment garden invites the neighbours

Ulrika Flodin Furås



It's hard to get hold of an allotment garden in Stockholm, you have to wait around 20 years to get one. At the re-opened allotment garden Årstafältet they wanted to do something about that and opened a community garden where they invited the people on their waiting list to join. This was also a way to get people from different generations to cultivate together.

The allotment garden "Årstafältets koloniområde" (the Årsta meadow allotment garden) just outside Stockholm city centre re-opened at the end of May 2019. The former allotment garden had to move from their previous premises as the city will build new apartment blocks on the site.

Stockholm is the fastest growing city in Northern Europe with some 100 000 new inhabitants each year. Today the city has more than 2 million residents and there is a huge lack of apartments. Therefore, a lot of land is being exploited. Due to the favour-

able lease agreement that "Koloniträdgårdsförbundet" (the Swedish allotment garden federation) has negotiated for, the allotment garden could move to a new site.

"There were a lot of things and details to be discussed but in the end it all went very smoothly", allotment gardener Linda Fredriksson says, *"although it's sad to leave a garden, the new site has given us new opportunities."* She adds that the municipality arranged so that the allotment gardeners could bring the trees, bushes and perennials they wanted, as well as their small cottages.

On the new site, the one that was inaugurated in May, the allotment gardeners wanted to make the garden a place where the neighbours feel welcome to stay, maybe have a picnic or just stroll around. There is no fence around the garden and an open space just by the entrance and there will also be chairs and tables, if someone that is passing by wants to have a rest.





It's very hard to get an allotment in Stockholm. To get hold of one you have to wait in a queue for maybe 20 years! It's a long time, however, if you want an allotment without a cottage outside the city, you only have to wait for about 8 years.

Due to this, the Årsta allotment gardeners decided to create a community garden on the premises and invite the people on their waiting list. This has been proven a success. Now future allotment gardeners are cultivating together with allotment gardeners.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to be able to cultivate while waiting for an allotment", says Anna Jeppson, one of the persons on the waiting list, ***"at the same time I'll get to learn a lot about***

how to cultivate and I get to know new people." Anna also says that it's great for her daughter to come and play and cultivate at the community allotment garden.

"Here we meet different generations", Linda Fredriksson says, ***"it is so nice to be able to offer this to the families on our waiting list. At present we have 100 people or more on the list. That's a lot of people".***

In the community garden they grow vegetables, old Swedish varieties. In that way the gardeners also introduce these varieties, both to the rest of the allotment gardeners as well as to the people visiting the allotments.

There is also a fruit tree garden with ordinary fruit trees, such as apple and cherry, but also more rare fruit trees, such as peach and even quince.

The Årsta allotment garden has an open atmosphere, the design is made so that one feels welcome to walk through it. In the middle of the garden there is a nice tree alley and already you can see that the neighbours have embraced the allotment garden, as they stroll along the path, curiously watching the allotment gardeners getting their allotments ready for the season.



Facts about "Årstafältets koloniområde":

- Situated in Årsta, just outside Stockholm city centre
- Inaugurated 2019 (moved from one site to this new one)
- 95 allotments (7 more compared to the old site)
- Approximately 100 people on the waiting list
- The cottages can be up to 8 square meters
- One allotment is around 250 square meters
- The Årstafältets allotment garden has the Swedish Allotment Garden Society's environmental diploma.

Austria: Biodiversity in allotment gardens and its promotion

Friedrich Hauk



Allotments can play an important role in biodiversity. These green oases do not only provide habitats for numerous plant species, but also for insects and small animals. The influence of humans is very important due to the mostly intensive use of the allotment gardens. It defines the garden design and maintenance and thus also the composition of the plant and animal world. It is, therefore, all the more important, to raise awareness for biodiversity in allotments.

Biodiversity study in Vienna

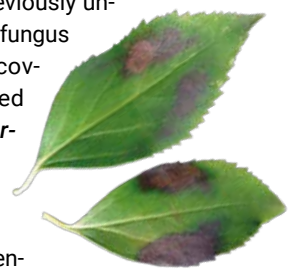
The study on biodiversity of the AGES (Agency for Health and Food Safety) in Viennese Allotment Gardens in 2019, commissioned by the Central Federation of Allotment Gardeners of Austria, issued a good report: The plots are true oases of diversity. The



scientific investigation revealed 391 plant species, 109 bug species and 76 species of cicadas. At the same time, a previously unknown leaf spot fungus was discovered. In fact, however, these results have only been gathered on a very small area of Vienna (0.15% of allotments in Vienna of the Central Federation of Allotment Gardeners in Austria), so that a higher biodiversity can be expected for the almost 24,965 allotments in Vienna.

For the three-year study, AGES examined allotments in four Viennese climate regions and found that roses, tulips and lavender, for example, are cultivated most frequently. Fruit, vegetables

and herbs can also be found in many places. ***“The more different plants there are, the more insects find a habitat”***, says Swen Follak from AGES. Dr. Gerhard Bedlan (AGES) also announced that in an allotment garden in Hietzing a previously unknown leaf spot fungus had been discovered and named ***“Asteromella forsythiae”***.



A total of 373 plant species/genera from 112 plant families were found in the study. This plant diversity is essentially related to the structural diversity in the allotment gardens. There are numerous niches in the individual allotments which provide a habitat for annual plant species). Plant diversity is also brought about by the introduction of garden and ornamental plants, often from non-European, sometimes subtropical countries. In addition, there is



the cultivation of food plants such as fruit, vegetables and medicinal and aromatic herbs.

Since many cicadas and bugs are bound to certain food plants, a high plant diversity also means a high variety of bugs and cicadas. Consequently, due to the high plant diversity in the sampled allotment garden plots, a large number of bug and cicada species were to be expected. The majority of the sampled allotments offer numerous food plants and strata or habitats for bugs and cicadas, but the number of species is also determined by the design, location and type of use of the gardens. The most species-rich are “hobby gardens”, near-natural allotments and those with a high intensity of use. In the small sample alone, 12% of all bug and cicada species known in Austria were found.

In addition to the leaf spot fungi, which are caused by many different fungus genera and species, the largest group of plant pathogens found on the allotments, which were surveyed, is the powdery mildew fungi, followed by rust fungi. A total of 126 different pathogens were found, 19 of them rare, 2 of them migrated from warmer areas, a first evidence for Vienna, 3 first evidences for Austria as well as a worldwide first description of a new fungus and 2 different hyperparasites. In the small sample alone, 12% of all bug and cicada species known in Austria were found.

How biodiversity can be promoted

Tidying up is heavily overestimated – at least in the gardens, as disorder promotes the diversity of species. However, we allotment gardeners can do even more to attract as many beneficial insects as possible. This starts

with the variety of insects – of course there are also some pests -, continues with frogs and toads to hedgehogs and ends with birds that can colonize a natural area like our gardens. Your own garden can easily be transformed into a home for many different species of animals. First of all, it is important to make an offer as large as possible with the choice of plants.

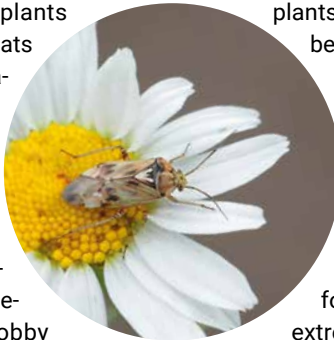
Native plants

It is recommended to rely on native plants – and there should also be some fruit-bearing woody plants. Due to their susceptibility to new diseases and pests, thuja hedges are almost obsolete and have recently been increasingly replaced by cherry laurel hedges. Unfortunately, cherry laurel is extremely susceptible to mildew, which doesn't necessarily make this exchange advisable. So why not plant a wild fruit hedge made from dirndl bushes, rock pear and other native shrubs?

Foreign species escape only too easily from our own gardens and spread unintentionally – the Hercules shrub is an example of such a shrub which is almost dangerous because of its phototoxic effect. However, especially with perennials and annual flowers, you should make sure that there are as many flowers as possible throughout the year – this is beneficial for the pollinators. For wild bees, for example, sunflowers, sage or thyme should be planted and leek and bulbs should be allowed to bloom.

Do not use poison

To do without poison is an essential step towards a species-rich garden. This has become almost easy these days, as there are hardly any poisonous products left for us small consumers to buy. If, for example, an invasion of aphids threatens to destroy your favourite shrub, you can help yourself differently until enough





beneficial insects arrive. And the few snails that attack your own salad can also be controlled without poison.

Allow a little disorder

An untidy garden is often the best species protection you can have. For example, a larger piece of leftover wood in a garden corner may serve as shelter for a hedgehog. There may also be room for the stacked pruning of trees and shrubs – the wren and some lizards will be delighted. And withered sunflowers as well as other shrubs, if they are not affected by mildew or other fungi, have not necessarily to be cut off. Wild bees in fact like that. Leave some foliage here and there, leave withered perennials and watch the natural development with interest rather than displeasure. Sometimes interesting animals or beautiful wild plants suddenly settle here and reward you with their sight.

Creating nesting aids and stone walls

The swallows and swifts, which have already become rare in Vienna, are happy to accept nesting aids at home and are grateful if they find water with a lump of clay in a larger coaster. And we allotment gardeners can also provide boxes for the bats. To lure a goldfinch into the garden, there must be only its favourite food: the seeds of the prickly thistle and insects that suck on plants. Since the majority of its habitats have disappeared in recent years, the population of the goldfinch has also collapsed. Lizards, on the other hand, are offered a habitat, for example by building a dry-stone wall or by piling up a partially planted stone heap in a sunny location. If you want to promote butterflies, it is sufficient to plant a butterfly bush as a food source, but some species in the caterpillar stage (for example) also need nettles as a food plant.

Against decline of species

With these tips it is possible to make a contribution to biodiversity, at least on a small scale. However: We alone

will not stop the loss of species, because the majority of the damage takes place elsewhere – not in our gardens. Nevertheless, it is important to get involved, to familiarize yourself and your children with many different species, because you only protect what you have taken care of. A garden that seems wild at first glance, where nature can unfold, does not please everyone. Nonetheless you can plan and lay out a garden for the longer term, because neither a lushly growing wilderness nor an exact image of nature should be a near-natural garden. The goal should rather be to create an artificial microcosm in which humans, animals and plants can live together in harmony – although a life of one's own is certainly desirable. The "order" in such a garden is rather carefully created and the care and maintenance of the garden is, therefore, limited to the strict necessary.

Great-Britain: From Flat caps, Ferrets and “her indoors” to an Intergenerational League of Nations: Diversity on UK allotments

Diane Appleyard



For many years in the UK there persisted a stereotypical view of an allotment holder, male, blue collar, middle aged or more likely retired, spending time on his plot or in his shed to avoid the domineering wife or, as she was affectionately known, “her indoors”. In the early 1990s perhaps 10 % of plot-holders were women and many of these intrepid souls, who were brave enough to rent a plot in this period, report being met with disbelief and disdain; especially if they tried anything that went against traditional allotment practice. Thankfully, in the 21st century that no longer rings true and allotment

sites are now, in the main, a reflection of the local community with women, younger people, families and, if the area is multi-cultural, plot-holders from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Allotment authorities collect demographic information from time to time and these studies show that although white men still predominate, the percentage of men to women on sites is balancing out and, as many families now garden together, the plot-holder may be male but the whole family is likely to be using the plot. I live in an area of Bristol that was built to house

workers for the nearby main railway station and the allotments, where I rent a plot, were created in the early 1900s to serve the families who lived in the densely packed terraced housing. There is a high proportion of 25 to 39 year olds in this area now and a low proportion of people over 65; 13 % of the population belong to a black and ethnic minority group, lower than the Bristol average and these figures are reflected in the ethnicity and age of my fellow plot-holders. 7 % of the local white population are from the EU, mainly from Poland and I have been stopped at the gate many

times by Polish people asking how to get a plot – the site is on the walking route in to the town centre. On my site I can confidently say that more women than men walk past my plot near the main gate and many of them come along with their children; and of my plot-neighbours – 2 are women, 2 are families and 1 is a group of young men in their 20s. Judging by the profiles on the site’s facebook group most people seem to work at one of the 2 universities in Bristol and there is a range of nationalities. Sol next door is from the Canary Islands and claims the figs from my fig tree are the best she has ever tasted!

Where the local ethnic make-up is more varied the make-up of plot-holders will be too. Walsall Rd Allotments in Birmingham has been described as a League of Nations. They also have an allotment cat who recently fought a valiant battle on Twitter to support their fight against closure, and they won. Well done Robert@Allotment-Cat and the people from Bangladesh, Brazil, England, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mauritius, North Cyprus, Pakistan, Poland, West Indies and Zimbabwe who garden on the site. In areas of Bristol that have a higher proportion of BAME residents many plots were rented by Jamaican migrants from the Windrush generation, these were mainly men and as they have left their plots younger Jamaicans have not taken their place. Other City councils, such as Birmingham council, have also noticed this phenomenon and there are concerns that the ethnic mix on allotments will suffer. However, Mark Barnaby from Bristol who is of Jamaican heritage did take over his father’s plot and is now using social media to encourage younger people to join him. Mark grows broad beans, butternut squash, Caribbean pumpkins and Callaloo, a Jamaican spinach.

One of the benefits of a range of ethnicities amongst plot-holders is the increased range of crops that are grown by all plot-holders. In 2010 and 2011 Garden Organic and Coventry University undertook a study -“Sowing New Seeds” at 31 allotment sites in Birmingham that recorded 107 participants growing more than 170 exotic food cultivars on 145 plots. 27% of plot holders were ‘black Caribbean’, 8% Asian Indian and 12% of further ethnicities.

Some of the headline findings from the study were:

- The percentage of growers over 70 was far higher for Caribbean growers than British white growers. This is a clear message that the knowledge for cultivating exotic crops is in danger of being lost as information is not passed on to younger generations.
- The research found that significant proportions (38%) of the exotic crops are grown from self-saved seed. This is important as it indicates that these crops are diversifying and adapting to local conditions.
- That 73% of growers swap seeds with others—another way of increasing crop diversity, and ensuring that rare varieties are grown and not lost.

The executive summary of the final study report concludes that allotments are particularly important storehouses of exotic crop diversity and there is therefore a strong imperative to protect the sites from development. These crops are an important part of the UK’s social and cultural heritage as well as being a significant component of our plant genetic resources for food and agriculture—the plant diversity that we

depend on for food security and the economic stability and growth of agriculture. The report also highlights the multitude of benefits that growers obtain through cultivating exotic crops, which are not only related to nutrition and culinary requirements, but also to general health and well-being, culture and a range of other forms of life enrichment.

However, Britain has an ageing population who increasingly live alone, are physically inactive and face health problems or disability. The 2016 “Gardening and Health” Report by the Kings Fund quotes many studies that show gardening in older age can help to improve cognitive function and memory, ameliorate loneliness and improve gait and balance. Allotment gardening offers benefits to address many challenges of older age, not least the opportunity to eat more vegetables! At the moment only 31% of adults aged 65+ eat 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Loneliness can have a significant negative impact on well-being and quality of life and is associated with an increased risk of dementia and early death. Falls cost the Health Service billions of pounds a year and many older people never return to pre-fracture mobility. It is projected that by 2030 22% of the UK population will be over 65. So, it may be that in time to come we will be encouraging the older generation to rent a plot and the balance will shift once more.

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/sites/www.gardenorganic.org.uk/files/sns/SNSReportFinal.pdf>

https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/Gardens_and_health.pdf

The allotment association “Nooit Gedacht” from The Hague (NL) received the diploma for ecological gardening



One of the beekeepers



Medicinal herbs

The natural garden park of “Nooit Gedacht”

In August 2013 “Nooit Gedacht” in The Hague has won the National Quality Mark for Natural Gardening with three dots. The fourth dot has been added in October 2018. What is there to see and discover at “Nooit Gedacht”? On the property are lush borders full of flowers and plants that are attractive to birds and insects. There is an insect hotel, a bee garden, branches around the grounds and a butterfly garden. And there is a forest path, a herb garden and a flower meadow. They receive children from the Tamar school in The Hague and after-school care to teach them about nature, bees, plants and flowers and gardening.

Lush borders

The borders are full of flowers and plants that are attractive to insects and birds. In the butterfly garden there

are asters, for autumn butterflies and hoverflies. You find here speedwell (Veronica) for the bumblebees and honey bees. Angelica for solitary bees, flies, hoverflies and beetles, catnip, salvia and storks bill for bees and butterflies. There are also many bushes that have value for birds, such as barberry and guelder rose. Firethorns are planted at the Flower Clock and the club sows wild flowers and sunflowers. It offers food and protection for birds. Many bulbs have been planted on the entire site, such as daffodils, grape hyacinths, wild hyacinths and wood anemones.

Annuals flowers

In the herb garden, annual flowers are placed in a box for edible flowers, such as starflowers, marigold and love-in-a-mist. In the Flower Clock are marigolds, tricolour convolvulus and ice plant. Wild flowers are behind the

Flower Clock in the flower circle. In the various borders are annual flowers such as viper’s bugloss and snake and white mignonette.



School gardens at Nooit Gedacht



Children with nesting boxes



Insect hotel



Education for school children: making Christmas pieces with material from the garden.

Ditch sides

The banks and ditch sides are allowed to become as wild as possible. In consultation with the municipality everything is mowed twice a year. Mowing is not done before mid-June and preferably only in November for the second time.

Beekeepers

There are three beekeepers on the bee garden and a biological beekeeper with two beehives on the edge of the garden park.

Organisation, Communication and Education

Organisation

The Natural Gardening committee is closely involved in the weekly general maintenance of the garden park, to ensure that all borders are properly cared for. The members of the Commission manage two teams themselves and organise extra monthly gardening sessions for volunteers. The club encourages the involvement of all members. It is estimated that there are about twenty members who are committed to natural gardening at the garden park.

Information and communication

The Natural Gardening committee holds a meeting every year for all team leaders who manage the weekly Park maintenance. At these meetings people are informed about the natural gardening and the benefits of this for nature. Workshops are organised for the members, for example about keeping bees and improving the soil according to permaculture.

Communication about natural gardening takes place via the website, the club magazine, the digital newsletter and via the Facebook group. Explanations are given on the General meeting.

Specials

On the garden park there are ten pile walls in various shapes and materials. There is a bird hut on the forest path and various wickerwork of willow branches. Bee hotels have been added, including one, which is equipped with glass tubes for education. Birdhouses have been placed, as well as a sparrow hotel and bat boxes.

Education

A project has been started with a primary school for various workshops with the youth about nature. Activities include for example:

- Making bee hotels from tree trunks and reeds.
- How is vegetable grown?
- Recognise and spot birds and amphibians on nature trails.
- Creating view boxes and making Christmas pieces with materials from the gardens.
- Various puzzle tours (meant for recognising plants).
- Making grape juice in a natural way.
- Making apple sauce from self-picked apples on the garden.

There are also school gardens where weekly children from an after-school come gardening.

The allotment association “Nut en Genoegen” from Amsterdam (NL) received the diploma for ecological gardening



Children in the garden



Joint use of the lawn



One of the many excursions

The switch to natural gardening

Garden Park “Nut en Genoegen” started with natural gardening at the end of 2015 with an analysis of the existing soil and water qualities, existing vegetation and possibilities. They then made plans, together with the members, appropriate to each location and with an eye for an attractive image. These plans have been elaborated by one of the board members, who is a landscape architect. The result is a series of different natural areas: Marsh and Bird Groves, Heritage Vegetation Gardens (stinzen gardens), Pond gardens, a Lupine bank, the Entrance Area and a Butterfly garden.

Subsequently, trees, shrubs and plants with an ecological added value have been planted. Other examples of nat-

ural management: The construction of baskets with branches for compost and leaves baskets, pile walls, nettle nooks, puddle zones and floating islands, which enhance soil quality and biodiversity. The percentage of paved ground is also greatly reduced with this redesign.

In addition, the following teams are active: Nature & Education, The Shop, “Green Pleasure” Nursery Garden, Compostello, Water Quality and Birds Nesting. The latter focuses on construction and maintenance of hiding and nesting areas, such as the kingfisher wall, sparrow flat nest boxes, hedgehog houses and insect hotels. The beekeeper provides four beehives. The Shop has been repainted with organic paint. It now has a sus-

tainable range of garden articles and a garden and nature library. Fertilised soil in plastic bags has been replaced by loose, un-fertilised garden soil.

The Nursery Garden grows biological nectar sources and host plants for the garden park and sells them to the gardeners and to visitors. The Water Quality working group focuses on better water quality. Dredging now is immediately after the leaf fall, low banks are laid in the common green areas and intensive information is provided to stimulate natural banks and healthy water life. Compostello takes care of the composting and recycling of garden waste at a central location. “Nut en Genoegen” encourages its members with workshops and information to composting their green waste. Pa-



Team wise Willow Pollarding and a workshop Wicker Braiding.



Workshop Pile Walls at the Entrance Area



Flower meadow and Stinzensgarden

per, glass, batteries, metal and residual waste are collected separately.

“Nut en Genoegen” investigates what else is possible; from cleaning products to generating energy. A first part of the path lighting has been replaced by new solar lighting fixtures with an

animal-friendly light colour and light beam.

Organisation – shared knowledge and responsibility

Natural Gardening consists of a core group with a board member, a head coordinator and one or two coordinators per sub-area / team, who think along, organise and guide the members during construction and management. A group of about seventy gardeners work in regular groups on average once a month. This way they see how ‘their’ area develops and they learn to put natural gardening into practice. This structure strengthens community life, connects the gardeners with the garden park and ensures the dissemination of knowledge and support for natural gardening. As a result, a growing group of gardeners is responsible for the maintenance and management of all projects. At the end of 2017 99% of the members voted during the General Assembly to follow the course set.

Internal communication has been taking place since 2016 via the private communication platform Tuin & Wijk (Garden & District). It contains all relevant information for gardeners, all teams can be found and messages can be sent. The developments of Natural Gardening and articles for knowledge deepening are permanent components of the Club Magazine. Work plans Natural Gardening are located in the Shop, at the site managers and can be found at Tuin & Wijk. In 2019, natural gardening shall be laid down in the new Rules of Procedure.

Green network – welcome to the gardens of Westerpark

“Nut en Genoegen” involves interested parties “from the outside” in two ways: Firstly via social media and the renewed website www.nutengeoegen.amsterdam with information about the garden park. Secondly via “De Tuinen van Westerpark” with website, e-mailings, flyers and social media. “De Tuinen van Westerpark” is

a partnership with neighbouring garden park Sloterdijkermeer in which they organise activities for (prospective) members, neighbourhood residents and other city dwellers. They let everyone know that they are welcome to come for a walk, enjoy the peace and quiet and participate in the Natural Garden activities, such as themed walks, nature and gardening workshops, winter workdays, excursions, vegetarian meals, etc. Every year there



Beekeeping



The Open Air Allotment Hotel



Nut en Genoegen welcomes local politicians



Information and education sessions



Award of the National Quality mark Natural gardening

are Open Garden Days where the gardeners open up their little paradises. Also there are extra activities, such as the Open Air Allotment Hotel.

The garden park is part of the Amsterdam ecological network. Thanks to the crowd fund campaign 'A blossoming Westerpark for Bees' thousands of spring flowering bulbs have been planted with donors and about 20 bee friendly trees will soon be planted. A nearby law firm helped with the construction of borders. Since 2018 one has started with vegetable gardens for aspiring members. Because of great interest, they are going to expand this.

At the entrances there are maps and walking routes and there are information boards on the park about, facilities, plants and animals. There are benches on nice places and there are natural play areas for children. Together with the municipality, the neighbours and the local Association of Allotments (Bond van Volkstuinders), they are working on a pilot project called "Accessible Garden Parks"; with a number of new entrances, connections and small-scale facilities. This way they improve accessibility so that more visitors can enjoy the beautiful garden park, activities, gardening and nature.

The allotment association “De Pioniers” from Utrecht (NL) received the diploma for ecological gardening



Visitors from the nearby nursing home



The Experiment garden

In 1935, the allotment association De Pioniers (The Pioneers) was established to grow potatoes, vegetables and fruit; a welcome addition for the poorer families. The garden park in Utrecht now has a social, recreational and ecological function. Among “De Pioniers” you will find pensioners who grow their own vegetables, young families who create a play corner for the children, nature lovers who see



Converting the Grass snake heap

their garden as a biotope and artists who can put creative ideas on their piece of land.

Careful with nature

“De Pioniers” has developed into a valuable place in the city of Utrecht. Because of the large variety of vegetation, water and the way of gardening, nature is strikingly diverse. The park is part of the ecological network of Utrecht. Nature observations have been kept since 1997. There have been 14 butterfly species and 60 bird species counted in the park in recent years.

“De Pioniers” is careful with nature. By managing as naturally as possible, more plants and animals get a chance and there is more to experience. Wildlife gardens “The Point” and “The Com-

ma”, the wood walls and the banks are managed ecologically as much as possible. All in all, there’s about one hectare of (semi) public green space. Plants and animals find a refuge here in the compact city of Utrecht. This way the association contributes to more nature in the city.

There is also the Experience Garden, a garden open to everyone. Here, examples and explanations are given about natural gardening. Information boards are under a green roof with heritage vegetation (stinzenplanten). The walls of willows are covered with clay. In addition, they also arranged a vertical garden, specifically for people who have problems bending over.

Due to the expansion of the city of Utrecht, the area around the Garden



The meadow after mowing with the scythe



Willow pollarding in February



Natural banks and ditches



Information boards

Park now is completely built and inhabited. This offers opportunities to involve the neighbours in the garden park and in the activities of “De Pioniers”.

National Quality Mark Natural Gardening

In 2015, the garden park was awarded the National Quality Mark for Natural Gardening. The ladybug (symbol of natural gardening) on the Quality Mark Shield received 3 dots. In 2018 a reassessment took place and 4 dots were awarded. This is the highest possible.

Good judgments included the natural values of the wood walls, the nature garden De Punt, the Experience Garden and the bee- and butterfly friendly borders, the management plan, the water vegetation, measures for the benefit of insects, garden guidance, the good information provided by the association, the use of environmentally friendly pesticides and fertilisation, the energy measures taken for the club building and social involvement.

By offering lectures and workshops by all kinds of nature and environmental organisations, more and more gardeners are switching to natural gardening. At this moment, about 70 % of the members practice natural gardening. Among the members are many people with diverse talents, which also can be used for the benefit of the association. This has led to nice results like exhibitions in the club building and to guided walks with residents of the nearby nursing home for dementia. Naturally, the residents and their families or caretakers are always welcome at other times to visit the garden park.

Information and participation

“De Pioniers” realises that they have a role as partners in the society, so

they make their club building available to neighbourhood activities. The open arts studio is a good example of this. The association has an annual program with various activities; some of them are inspired by national campaigns in the field of nature conservation by volunteers. For example further planting of the back entrance and converting the Grass Snake heap, or activities to bring the value of a green environment under the attention of residents living in the neighbourhood of the garden park. Furthermore lots of workshops in collaboration with nature organisations are offered, like bird excursions, counting moths and ditch life research. All these activities are meant for members of “De Pioniers” and for interested parties from the neighbourhood.

All this results in a peaceful place in the neighbourhood that can no longer be ignored. A garden park with added value and that is loved by the members and by the people living around it.

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