

An organic, recycled allotment garden.

(Shropshire Organic Gardeners with Shropshire Master Composters)

The garden is designed to be viewed and accessed from all sides. The main aim is to demonstrate organic principles and how they can be applied to a low cost, attractive and productive garden in a fascinating partnership with nature.

This is an organic garden, so is working with nature by attracting beneficial insects and feeding the soil not the plants. These principles are the mainstay of organic growing – and they can be used in any size of garden, which will eventually achieve a balance. An organic garden does not produce blemish free fruit and vegetables – we expect to have holes in leaves, and to lose a percentage of produce to slugs – but the birds attracted to the plot will deal with those, parasitic wasps kill caterpillars, and ladybirds eat mountains of aphids. Gardeners also help by physically deterring pests with nets and fleece, and by judicious squashing!

Allotmenters are generally careful with money, and are therefore great recyclers. The shed was made from a larger, decrepit one, and the greenhouse and cold frame consist mainly of windows from a neighbour. All the paving and bricks are either recycled from member's gardens, or retrieved from skips. The raised beds are packing cases used in the Potteries, and the containers consist of old pots and 'found' objects.

The pond is designed to attract birds, insects and frogs. It is surrounded by herbs, which are visited by a wealth of wildlife, including bees which are essential for good pollination. They also smell good when brushed against or when using the seating area.

On show are various methods of deterring slugs – the bane of the gardener's life. Copper wire round the seed bed gives them a mild electric shock; eggshells, wool pellets and coffee grounds around plants make uncomfortable barriers; beer traps attract – and drown – them. Beds are interplanted with bright flowers to attract insects, carrots are grown next to onions to help deter carrot fly by masking the scent of the roots. Bright yellow tagetes are used extensively, since they deter aphids.

The composting area turns all garden waste into a valuable addition to the fertility of the garden – the ultimate recycling. Here are various types of compost bins, both purchased (made from recycled plastic) and home made. A wire container holds leaves turning them into incomparable soil conditioner, leaf mould. Worms are prodigious recyclers, producing worm casts which add nutrients and improve the structure and water holding capacity of the soil. And of course they produce 'worm juice' which is a good liquid feed.

Comfrey and nettles are being grown to improve the mineral content of the compost, by bringing up minerals which have been washed down into the soil – comfrey can have roots 4meters long! Both comfrey and nettles can be used to make liquid feed, either by steeping in water, or by using a 'comfrey tube', seen here attached to the pallet compost bin. Comfrey leaves are stuffed in the tube, and a bottle of water used to weight them down. The liquid which runs out must be diluted before use.

Water is being collected from the roofs of the shed and greenhouse, although run off is slowed on the shed by the sedum 'green' roof. This also acts as insulation for the shed, and adds more insect attractants. The greenhouse contains aubergines, peppers and tomatoes, after being used as a place to germinate seeds in the spring. The shed is being used mainly as a drying area, with herbs hung from the roof, and onions laid out to dry. It also acts as a store for tools and boots. The seats in the sitting area are made from coppiced hazel, and the bird bath is a reworked log. There is a hazel among the fruit bushes, although it will be some years before it produces bean supports!