

Communities in Action



CASE STUDY:

BH15 Grow Together, Poole, Roadside Verge Garden

Tell us a bit about your group

The BH15 Grow Together Garden was started during the Covid-19 pandemic, to bring the community together during this socially isolating time. People were keen to get involved. We approached Poole Housing Partnership, as it was at the time, to gain permission to create the garden on a roadside verge next to the community. Since the Councils unified to create Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole Council, it's now known as BCP Homes.

What actions did you or your group want to take and why?

We got together and decided we're going to do a veg thing! It's been lovely how people got involved. And now the garden has really expanded, from one or two planters to the five we have now alongside the wildflower patch.

What sorts of things have you done for nature so far?

We thought it would be a really lovely thing to grow some wildflowers so people could come and enjoy the space and sit on the bench which we recycled from



Community Gardeners have a watering rota during the summer.
© Anona Dawson

someone's garden and then painted. Passersby often come and sit here, amongst these beautiful flowers.

We've taken an interest in companion planting to encourage pollinators. We're really interested in growing plants that are native to Britain. We're trying to encourage insects that help pollinate the food we are growing. Insects also eat the aphids that eat our food, so we all benefit which is important. We're not experts on this or anything, but we definitely see more natural life as a result of just growing stuff.

We've also made a compost heap using old pallets that were donated to us. We put loads of stuff in it, like peelings, coffee grounds, tea leaves, dead cuttings, and flowers, but not fish, meat or cooked food. We don't want to encourage rats.

What resources or support have you used?

One thing we did get was scaffolding for the raised beds, donated by the company doing all the work on the neighbouring social housing tower blocks. This was a significant donation from a company working in the local area. But apart from that everything's been done out of our own generosity. We've never fundraised



Recycled plastic bottles help stop slugs feasting on our beans and the garden remains chemical free! © Anona Dawson

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“ The garden has brought us together and we enjoy each other’s company sharing a common interest. ”

and just worked on the principle that people will give their own time and resources. Growing vegetables is a resource-light thing to do. Seeds are cheap and people often get too many seedlings, so they just give us their excess and we grow them in the garden. For example, mustard seeds were bought from a nearby shop for a pound a packet. It doesn’t cost a lot of money to do what we’ve done.

We’ve built up our growing soil gradually. We started with the original roadside verge soil and just enriched it year on year. We collected barrows of seaweed from the beach a few minutes’ walk from here, rinsed the salt off, piled it on top of the soil and just let it rot down over the winter. If you add organic material and let it rot down, the soil will improve for growing food.

Did you involve others?

We didn’t particularly want to set up a formal group or charity, which can be quite cumbersome for a small project. So, we just thought, “Well, let’s just keep going on people’s generosity in terms of time and resources and see how far that takes us”. That’s kind of what we’re still doing.

What changes have there been as a result of your actions?

We’re starting to see a lot more butterflies and bees and bits and pieces. There were none here before. We’ve got foxes and hedgehogs and the garden provides a patch for them to be away from traffic, and more worms for the hedgehogs! It’s a little bit of country in the town. There’s a real community spirit here because of this garden. More people join in, some take a break, but they always come back. We’ve had social gatherings in the garden over the summer. A bit like street garden parties!

HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

It’s lovely that we can share the produce, like strawberries, blackberries, tomatoes, courgettes, beans... you name it! People can just come and take what they want.

They pass by the garden and help themselves to the fruit and veg, often as they’re walking their children home from the school up the road. Which is nice. We come out in the morning and if we want a few runner beans, we help ourselves to them. It’s great to have them fresh. This is not an exclusive thing, it’s a verge side garden and open to everyone.

Local people love to see this garden in an urban area which has some unsocial behaviour, but we get very little vandalism here. Our original memorial bench was vandalised, which was sad, but then we just put a new one in the garden and repaired the original one, which is now safe in the relative’s garden. The new one is great, we painted it and also nailed it down.

What do you plan to do next?

We’re hoping to continue managing the garden we have. There is some interest in taking over the small verge space nextdoor. We’ve already planted a tree in this space as a memorial to someone in the neighbourhood and have some ideas such as planting bulbs and increasing wildflowers there. But we’re mindful that this will take extra time, and we don’t want to neglect the garden we’ve already planted. But who knows, we’re welcoming new people from the community all the time!

To find out more:

<https://www.facebook.com/bh15growtogether>

View our film here:

[Nextdoor Nature: BH15 Grow Together \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



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