



COMMUNITY GARDEN NEWSLETTER

Strengthening communities and improving the local environment

OUR COMMUNITY GARDEN NETWORK

By Natasha Eve



We wanted to wish everyone in the **ecoACTIVE Community Garden Network** a very Happy New Year! We're really looking forward to an exciting 2024!

Our community garden network seeks to help community gardens and community gardeners to get together and share ideas and experiences, as well as skills, training and funding possibilities. Through these activities our small and increasingly resilient network of gardens and gardeners in Hackney is growing. We work with and signpost to other organisations to help provide access to support, advice and opportunities to get together with people living locally who have similar interests. More than 15 community green spaces have benefited from being part of the network so far.



UPCOTT COMMUNITY GARDEN'S SUMMER FAMILY FUN DAY

The sun came out for Upcott Community Garden's Summer Family Fun Day in September. Neighbours brought food and drink to share and there was a chance to learn about and try herbal teas at Jyotea's wonderful stall. As well as some amazing face painting from Alison, children enjoyed planting herbs and other pollinator friendly plants in pots and beds and made some eye-catching new signs for the site. Everyone had a great day, supported by Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association, OurSpace Award and some pretty fabulous sunshine!



Being part of our community garden project allows residents to work together to benefit everyone as well as spreading their influence throughout the wider neighbourhood and the local environment.

WESTMEAD GARDEN SHED RISES FROM THE ASHES

Westmead Community Garden is a beautiful green oasis which holds a special place in the hearts of local residents. For more than ten years, dedicated volunteers have put in lots of time and effort to the space. The group regularly organise family events and gardening sessions which bring neighbours together, fostering an invaluable sense of community. People in the area also benefit from the locally grown and deliciously fresh produce grown in the garden. Tragedy struck last year when the garden's shed burnt to the ground in an early morning arson attack. The group had worked hard to build the shed and to gradually acquire all their tools and equipment, which were also sadly lost, and they were devastated.



But, not to be defeated, they set up a crowdfunder and, together with a generous donation from Bupa Foundation and help from the local community, they will be installing a super-resilient shipping container shed on the site and replacing much of what they have lost. Sessions run at Westmead Garden on Saturday mornings and on Wednesday afternoons at nearby Eastmead Gardens. They are always looking for new volunteers and Demetrious and Sarah are happy for anyone to pop along, give them a little help and receive a share of whatever produce is available.

Hours for Westmead are 12.00 to 2.00 pm on Saturdays.
Hours for Eastmead are 1.00 to 3.00 pm on Wednesdays.



GLAMOROUS GAZEBO AT SHOREDITCH COURT



The Garden Group at Shoreditch Court have added some glamour to their gazebo with this fabulous chandelier (pictured: Joy and Michael from the Garden Group)

SEASONAL

Have you added any imaginative and interesting features to your community garden? Let us know more! If you have any events coming up or photos or news you would like to share then we would love to hear from you!

What's been happening in your space? Do you have some top tips or recipes to share? Please get in touch with natasha@ecoactive.org.uk

February is a good month to plan for the growing season. You can also prepare growing beds, plant bare root fruit bushes and get pruning. There are lots of great winter growing suggestions in Garden Organic's tips for each month

www.gardenorganic.org.uk

There are also some wonderful ideas in Thrive's Winter Wellbeing Calendar

<https://www.thrive.org.uk/get-gardening/winter-wellbeing-calendar>

SPINACH SOUP

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery sticks, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 cup dried red lentils, rinsed and drained
- 1 can (400g) chopped tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish)
- Crusty bread (optional, for serving)



TOP TIP

Start thinking about growing potatoes! 'Chitting' or sprouting seed potatoes can give them a good head start for mid March when they can be planted in the warmer soil. Try chitting some of your seed potatoes from late January. Plant with unchitted potatoes to compare and decide what to do next year.



Now is the time to harvest over wintering greens, such as spinach and kale. This warming and filling spinach soup is perfect for this frostier time of year

1. Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add chopped onions and sauté until translucent.
2. Add minced garlic to the onions and sauté for an additional 1-2 minutes until fragrant.
3. Toss in the diced potato and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Pour in the vegetable broth and bring the mixture to a simmer. Allow the potatoes to cook until tender.
5. Add the chopped spinach to the pot. Stir well and let it wilt into the soup.
6. Season with salt, pepper, and ground nutmeg. Adjust the seasoning to taste.
7. If you prefer a creamier soup, pour in the milk or non-dairy alternative. Stir to combine.
8. Simmer the soup for an additional 5-7 minutes, allowing the flavours to meld.
9. Use an immersion blender to puree the soup until smooth. If you don't have an immersion blender, carefully transfer the soup to a blender in batches and blend until smooth.
10. Taste the soup and adjust the seasoning if necessary.
11. Serve hot, garnished with croutons or grated Parmesan if desired.

TRAINING AND EVENTS

FIRST AID



First aid training: ecoActive can cover the costs for a limited number of Community Garden Network volunteers to join a first aid course at the Leaside Trust in Clapton.

Please contact natasha@ecoactive.org.uk if a member of your group would be interested.

USEFUL NETWORKS

[Hackney Union of Gardens via Good to Grow](#)

[Capital Growth](#)

[Social Farms and Gardens](#)

[TCV Community Network](#)



Contact natasha@ecoactive.org.uk for information on how to join the WhatsApp group

LATEST EVENTS

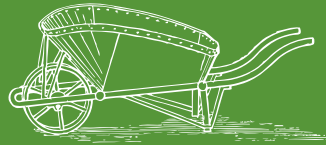
Keep up to date with our latest event, news and training opportunities via our blog



Our Funders this year are the Niniveh Charitable Trust, City Bridge Foundation, OurSpace Award, Bupa Foundation, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association and the Clarion Futures Charitable Foundation.

COMMUNITY GARDENING QUESTIONNAIRE

2024



If you've been involved with one of the gardens in our network we'd love to hear from you and would be really grateful if you could fill in this short questionnaire (and please do send this on to anyone else in your garden group)



Habitat creation at ecoACTIVE's new home at Leaside

YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY GARDEN

We want this to be your newsletter. This is the first edition. We hope to have a newsletter for each season. We would really welcome your stories, photos, tips, recipes, advice and anything else you would like to share