



Women's  
Environmental  
Network

# briefing

## Food growing for groups

There are many advantages of growing food in groups. For women, particularly, it offers an opportunity to get together and get involved in the community. Members of WEN's Taste of a Better Future Network say that as well as tasty, freshly grown food, they also gain confidence, appreciate the environment more, make friends and feel healthier. Growing in groups is good for sharing ideas, plants, tools and encouraging each other. Groups can garden in all sorts of different ways. A group of people could develop a large site together or members of a community centre could start a small herb garden or set up some containers in a small yard. People in the same street may decide to meet regularly to share ideas and seeds.



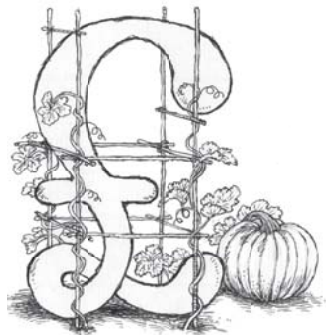
WEN/CAROLINE FERNANDEZ

Mums' gardening group, Bigland Green School, E London.



### Finding funding

Setting up a project can cost money. You may need resources such as tools and sheds, or to pay for training for members or site rent. You may be able to get sponsorship or hold fundraising events.



- Your local council or volunteer centre may have community development workers who may know about funding available for groups.
- Local businesses may sponsor you 'in kind' - by giving free legal advice, tools or seeds, goods that can be raffled or use of their meeting rooms; or in cash, but don't expect much!
- The Internet has information about local and national charitable trusts which is growing and changing quickly.
- You can hold fundraising events or sell produce.

### Getting started

Check out our briefing *Grow your own organic food* for ideas about where to grow and what to do. You can find it on our website. You will need some space, people and something in writing saying what you are and what you do i.e. a constitution. Local volunteer centres will have draft constitutions you could use (see NACVS in useful contacts, p4). It is worth getting in touch with your local council for contacts and support. Look in the phone book or ring the council and ask for the 'allotments officer' or the 'community development officer'. BTCV offer their members group public liability insurance and tool insurance (see contacts). Regular sessions, eg every Saturday morning, are good for keeping members involved while open days and events are good for reaching new people. Remember to take before and after photos of your plot.

### Support WEN can offer

WEN's local food project offers training and support to groups of women wishing to develop their food growing skills. We co-ordinate a network of over 50 growing groups across the country which you can join by contacting WEN. Members can access:

- training
- support with organisation of events
- exchange visits
- publicity
- news about other groups
- information about resources.

WEN local food project offers support and training to groups of women growing food in urban areas.

WEN  
PO Box 30626  
London  
E1 1TZ

T 020 7481 9004  
F 020 7481 9144  
food@wen.org.uk  
www.wen.org.uk

## Planning ahead

Thinking about the year ahead and working out what to plant when, is important. For help with this see WEN's briefing *Grow your own organic food* which you can find on the WEN website and *The Cook's Garden Planner* available from *Garden Organic* (see contacts).

Growing together also gives opportunities to plan activities throughout the year that will inspire your project members and attract new enthusiasts. This calendar offers ideas for on-site events, group activities and project publicity opportunities.

## Potato day: smashing!

GARDEN ORGANIC



Rosemary Creeser, Secretary of Emlyn Leisure Gardens Association in West London says a visit to Garden Organic's annual Potato Day at Ryton in Warwickshire is "a great way of getting together with fellow gardeners on a cold winter's day at the same time as starting to plan for the season ahead." Potato Day started in 1994 to give gardeners access to a much wider selection of seed potatoes than available before. In 2006 tubers from 100 varieties spanning more than 150 years of potato growing were on offer, plus talks and a potato-themed lunch.

Rosemary says, "One of the joys is that the potatoes are sold by the tuber (rather than in 2-3 kg bags) - which is perfect if you only have a small plot or want to experiment with growing a range of different varieties."

2 Food growing for groups, WEN, March 2006



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# The garden



## April

This is a hectic growing time - plan to be on site! **Champion compost:** the last week in April is *International Compost Awareness Week*. Share your composting secrets with an event on site and attract the local press to your compost bins. Compost is the essential core of a healthy organic gardening system and a sustainable and straightforward method to reduce waste.



## January

**Raising potato awareness.** Join a local 'potato day' activity or visit a national event; Sample dozens of potato varieties and set yourself a growing challenge for the coming year.

## February

Bring the group together and plan for what you would all like to eat next year - **place your seed order.** For some suppliers see the WEN website.

Are there summer local events that you'd like to have a stall at? Book your stall. Think about herbs/plants/flowers you could sell at these events to make the stall attractive, encourage local growing and make a bit of money. Start potting herbs on now.



## May, June, July

These are the summer months to be on site and a time when new people will be attracted to the project. Plan times when you'll work on plots together.

**Summer stalls at local events:** Get out and about with a stall promoting your project at a local park fun day, community green fayre or street festival.

**Visit another growing project:** These are practical and inspiring ways of us all learning from each other. Contact WEN for help with this.



## March

**Seed exchanges:** A lot of local organic gardeners save their own seeds from year to year and then exchange them with other growers. Find out if there is a seed exchange taking place close to you. If not, then why not see if your group can get together with other local growers and organise a seed exchange evening?

Contact WEN for more info about local activities. See [www.primalseeds.org](http://www.primalseeds.org) for more information about why growers set up seed exchanges.



# group year



WEN/CAROLINE FERNANDEZ

Bigland Green School mums' gardening group visit Spitalfields City Farm.

## August

**Exhibit your harvest on site:** Harvest time is a great time to get new people involved - rope them in to help you harvest your crops.

## October

**21 October is Apple Day.** Hundreds of varieties of apples can be tasted at events around the country. See [www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk)

## November

The end of November is **National Tree Week:** This is the Tree Council's festival to mark the start of the tree planting season, and a nationwide celebration of trees and woods. Across the country there will be opportunities to plant trees, or to take part in events, walks, talks, songs, storytelling and tree dressing. See [www.treecouncil.org.uk](http://www.treecouncil.org.uk)

Organise a fruit tree planting event on your site anytime from now to the end of February. The local press will be interested.

## December

**Site planning:** Get together somewhere warm and work out new structures needed for the next growing season; a new pond? More raised beds? A new compost bin? **Building a new compost bin** is a great winter way of bringing a group together. Plan a group viewing of *WEN's Guide to Building a Community Compost Bin* (see resources) (12 minute video/CD Rom - English/Bengali, available from WEN.)

Plan ahead the winter days on site with these activities, so that the group knows what to expect during these cold months and you might encourage all the more members!

## September

**Harvest celebrations:** Celebrate your harvest and local food growing.

Organise a local food celebration. Look out for WEN's forthcoming briefing on how to organise your own. Attend WEN's annual *Culture Kitchen* event: an event for all with a passion for food - the growing, cooking, eating and celebrating.

September is **seeds to savour month:** Learn how to save your own seed. Organise a workshop on your site or a local event with other growers.

Dyfi Valley seed savers organise an annual event in Machynlleth. One participant said, "I've been doing this on my own for a long time, I didn't know there were people out there for me to connect with."

## Sparkhill Birmingham

Several groups are involved in Forman's Road Allotment for Women Gardeners in Sparkhill Birmingham. CSV Environment co-ordinate the project, supported by the city council. CSV worked with volunteers to clear the land and build the raised beds. Pakistani women from Sparkhill training centre are encouraged to attend the plot at their English classes; Concrete to Coriander, a Bangladeshi women's group from Small Heath, visit now and then to find out what is going on and to share their expertise; and Mohila Shomiti Women's Forum prepared lunch for the first open day using their home grown vegetables. Irena Iwegbu, the project's organiser, encouraged new faces to take on small patches of the allotment plot during the open day.



Stalls at events encourage new members.



Putting the finishing touches to a new compost bin.

WEN/SHIRLEY ABRANCHES

WEN/CAROLINE FERNANDEZ

## Dealing with the media

- Events, openings and launches are great excuses for getting media coverage. Local papers are often keen to find local stories. Plan ahead and tell them in plenty of time.
- Get to know a local reporter and keep them informed about what you are up to.
- Take your own photos and offer them to your local paper after the event with a press release; focus on one or two people in action rather than large posed groups for a better chance of getting covered.

WEN/SOPHIE TOMLINSON



Events often provide great photo opportunities e.g. Rangoli artwork at WEN's Culture Kitchen event in 2005.

## Resources

*Grow your own organic food* - four page briefing, available free from [www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk) or send £1 for a hard copy.

*WEN's Guide to Building a Community Compost Bin* - (12 min video/CD Rom - English/Bengali) £7.

*Composting for all*, 32 page booklet by Nicky Scott, £2.25p

*Taste of a Better Future participatory evaluation* - report on WEN's work with women's growing groups. Download free or £1.30p for a hard copy

*Green Fingerted Monsters* - report on composting and waste prevention project in schools in Tower Hamlets. Download free or £1.60 for a hard copy.

*The Organic Gardening Catalogue* and *Cook's Garden Planner*, both from Garden Organic (see right).

## Useful contacts

### Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI)

Produces good fact sheets and supports good practice in allotment regeneration.

T 0117 9631551 [www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari)

### BTCV

The UK's leading practical conservation charity. Can offer members public liability insurance.

T 01302 572244 [www.btcv.org](http://www.btcv.org)

### Common Ground

Links art and the environment; nature with culture. Promotes Apple Day. T 01747 850820

[www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk)

### Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Supports promotes and represents city farms and community gardens. Particularly useful for funding information. T 0117 923 1800

[www.farmgarden.org.uk](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk)

### Garden Organic (formerly HDRA)

Organic membership organisation providing information, advice, consultancy and have local gardening groups. T 02476 303517

[www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk)

### Permaculture Association

National organisation with local groups working on sustainable solutions. T 0845 4581805 (local rate) [www.permaculture.org.uk](http://www.permaculture.org.uk)

### Primal Seeds

A network engaged in protecting biodiversity and creating local food security. Information on why growers set up seed exchanges.

[www.primalseeds.org](http://www.primalseeds.org)

### National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS)

Contact them to find out your nearest local CVS office. T 0114 2786636 [www.nacvs.org.uk](http://www.nacvs.org.uk)

### Tree Council

Promotes the planting and conservation of trees.

Organises National Tree Week.

T 020 7407 9992 [www.treecouncil.org.uk](http://www.treecouncil.org.uk)

### Wholesome Food Association

A network of growers, processors, suppliers and distributors of authentic locally grown wholesome food.

T 01237 441118 [www.wholesomefood.org.uk](http://www.wholesomefood.org.uk)

For more contacts see our website: [www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk)

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WEN  
PO Box 30626  
London  
E1 1TZ

T 020 7481 9004  
F 020 7481 9144  
[food@wen.org.uk](mailto:food@wen.org.uk)  
[www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk)

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### About WEN

Women's Environmental Network is a registered charity educating, informing and empowering women and men who care about the environment. It researches and campaigns on environmental and health issues from a female perspective.

### Individual membership (women & men)

£20 ordinary

£12 unwaged

£40 supporting

Affiliate membership (organisations)

£35-150 depending on size.

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