

Dulwich Vegetable Garden (DVG)

2010 - 2011 report

The 2010 growing season drew to a close with the sowing and planting of winter crops - cabbage, pak choi, leeks, onions, garlic and broad beans. In preparation for the cold weather, the banana palm was carefully wrapped in straw and fleece. The discovery one November morning that pigeons had attacked the cabbages and purple-sprouting broccoli was a setback. We resolved to build pigeon-proof cages at the earliest opportunity as the shiny tape and CDs were clearly not an effective deterrent! The perpetual spinach continued to crop over the winter. In preparation for the new season, we spread most of the beds with well-rotted horse manure.



At the start of 2011



Pigeon scarers; banana tree behind

The staging for the greenhouse arrived early in 2011 and was quickly assembled. Work started on netting cages to protect the brassicas and during the next few months four of the beds were provided with protective screening.



Building the greenhouse staging



Sprouting broccoli protected from pigeons

John Clements from the steering group visited a local potato fair to buy 'earlies' and after chitting, we planted Belle de Fontenay, Ratte, Maris Piper and Charlotte. Maris Barr were planted for the main crop. The greenhouse was put to good use to bring on pea, beetroot, carrot, lettuce, cucumber, tomato, sweetcorn and cabbage seedlings.



Volunteers bring in topsoil



The garden flourished in a warm April

The steering group continued to meet regularly, and occasionally with the park manager, Paul Highman. We learned that the two beds in front of the lodge would become available to us, but this was delayed a year to clarify the requirements and plan what to plant.

We were delighted that Cleaner, Greener, Safer funds were made available via the Dulwich Society for the renovation of the extension to Rosebery Lodge to provide us with a small kitchen and (disabled) lavatory. The steering group was invited to review the specifications and made a number of suggestions, which were accepted. Work was completed by the end of August - except the electricity supply, which was eventually connected in December. A wheelchair-accessible bed was constructed adjacent to the access ramp to the extension and this will be planted by Southwark as a sensory garden.



'Three Sisters' planting



Volunteers at work

As an experiment, part of Bed 10 was used for a 'Three Sisters' planting as practised by Native Americans - sweetcorn, beans (in our case, borlotti) and squash (courgettes). The idea is that the tall sweetcorn provides support for the nitrogen-fixing beans, while the squash provides ground cover, retains moisture and suppresses weeds. However, the beans rapidly outgrew the sweetcorn and the courgettes failed to provide much ground cover. But there was an excellent crop of beans.



Working around the lodge refurbishment



Building the cold frame

The compost heap yielded excellent compost with a high worm content. We continued to collect vegetable waste from the Pavilion Café and encouraged volunteers to bring similar material. A wormery was introduced and the worm waste collected for use as a fertiliser. The aim is to become self-sufficient in fertiliser by making nettle and comfrey 'soups' from the garden, as well as using worm waste.

Items were stolen from the greenhouse in July and security was improved as a result.

Projects included the construction of a cold frame largely from recycled material and frames for each bed made from plastic tubing and cloche film or protective netting as required.

A very successful Open Day was held on 10 September which attracted about 150 visitors, including our local MP, Tessa Jowell. There was a competition to guess the weight of a bag of potatoes, a wormery demonstration, a talk on composting, and a children's activity table provided by Whippersnappers. Visitors were able to buy salad leaves to grow on at home and to enjoy tea (thanks to the generator kindly lent by the park manager) and cakes home-made by our volunteers, for which donations were made to continue the work of the garden.



Tessa Jowell visited the cake stall



Wormery demonstration

There has been an increase in the number of casual visitors during work sessions in the garden. We have added to the educational signs around the beds, which are popular with visitors. The garden was visited by various councillors, including Stephen Govier (South Camberwell), Toby Eckersley and Michael Mitchell (Village), who were very interested in the project.

This year the garden yielded good crops of potatoes, broad beans, borlotti, dwarf and runner beans, chillies, onions, carrots, fennel, radishes, spinach, rainbow chard and salad crops. For the second summer, volunteers were able to take home fresh salad and vegetables. Peas, tomatoes (due to blight), sweetcorn, cucumber, courgettes and Brussels sprouts were less successful.



June harvest



August harvest

Winter sowing and planting was started in October – leeks, onions, garlic, Chinese broccoli, purple sprouting broccoli and next spring's broad beans. These have done well in the mild autumn weather. After discussion with volunteers, we started building a fruit cage near the lodge, and we have also planted loganberry, tayberry and thornless blackberry canes along the boundary fence with the riding school.

In November we obtained permission to extend the garden's east boundary and re-sited the fence. This gives us a larger bed on the sunny side of the plot.

Andy Bodycombe, who has been part of the steering group since its inception, decided to step down as he had become involved with another group which requires more of his time. Arnaud Baldacchino joined the group and brought many ideas on developments for the garden. David Smart, the original founder of the DVG project, is now one of the session leaders.

In preparation for the colder weather ahead, the wormery was moved into the lodge extension. A member of the public generously donated a rotary composter and this has been put to good use.

As Christmas 2011 approached we were working on reconstructing the fence, building the fruit cage, laying out paths, setting up water tanks to collect run-off from the lodge roof, designing a drip-watering system and new raised beds (subject to funding).

There are some 150+ volunteers and interested parties on the DVG email list, who receive weekly updates during the growing season and fortnightly during winter. We advertise on the park noticeboards and our activities are shown on the Dulwich Going Greener website www.dulwichgoinggreener.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

The Dulwich Vegetable Garden was established with financial assistance from *Capital Growth*, *Dulwich Community Council* and Southwark's *Cleaner, Greener Safer* fund. The garden has the support of Paul Highman, contracts & services manager, Dulwich area (park manager) and Ric Glenn, head gardener, throughout the year.

Volunteers:

Sarah Alexander, Sonya Anscombe, Rochelle Baker, Arnaud Baldacchino, Curlette Beckmann, Kirsty Berry, Karen & Josh Bewsher, Andy, Kath & Louis Bodycombe, Christine Brandon, Marita Byrne, Celeste Cardew, Damaris Charnley, Karen Chessell, Filiz Ciftci, John Clements, Andrew Cunningham, Lucia De Vila, Alfie Doyle, Gary Doyle, Bethany Elce, Brenda Ferron, Eva Filose, Maurice Hughes, Erica Goldsmith, Tim Gluckman, Sue Gosling, Kamaljit Healy, Adrian Hill, Mike Howitt, Sarah Ireland, Karen Keenan, Philip King, Desiree Kongerod & Axel, Christiane Luck, Ben Margerison, Felicity Moore, Orla McArthur, John McCarthy, Jane Mounty, Niki Parker, Helen Rattigan & Thea, Marion Reichart, Maisie Rennie-Carter, Marin Simmonds, David Smart, Jonny Stewart & Sophia, Ina Tzavaros & Jason, Lucia De Vila, Ed Walker, Ian Wallis & Caspar and Matilda, Melanie West, Pamela Woodruffe, Nita Wheeler, Sally Wright.

Steering group:

Andy Bodycombe (until November 2011), Arnaud Baldacchino, Christine Brandon, John Clements, Adrian Hill, Niki Parker

Session leaders:

Andy Bodycombe (until November 2011), Christine Brandon, John Clements, Adrian Hill, Niki Parker, David Smart (from September 2011).