

Capital Growth Annual members survey

2024-2025



Introduction

London is home to a wealth of growing spaces that provide refuge for both people and urban wildlife. Across Capital Growth's network of more than 2,000 sites, these spaces appear in unexpected places: floating gardens on canal barges, permaculture forest gardens on disused car parks, and dudhi bottle gourds trailing above commuters on TfL platforms. Our annual members' survey offers a glimpse behind the garden walls, helping us better understand the value these spaces bring and the challenges they face.

Capital Growth is London's largest food growing network, which exists to serve urban growers, with over 4400 involved since its inception in 2008. These are predominantly community gardens but also include school plots, allotments, flourishing peri-urban and city farms, as well as home gardens and balconies.

The network offers in-kind support to people who grow food in London, including discounted training and equipment, networking events, growing advice, and a suite of online tools and guides to support members to create nature-friendly gardens that are more resilient, welcoming and inclusive.

This survey of our network members was undertaken during July 2025 and completed by 121 people representing food growing projects. The questions cover details on the members' garden, their challenges, Capital Growth's support, and their views on what our future focus could be.



Summary

Training and education

- Across responding sites, **a total of 24,897 people engaged in growing activities** in 2025.
- Community food growing spaces continue to be major sites of learning, **with 13,258 school pupils** forming the largest group of participants.
- This is followed by **5,998 corporate volunteers, 4,236 regular volunteers, and 1,242 new volunteers**, showing the breadth of engagement across the network.

Funding and building capacity

- Gardens continue to report ongoing challenges around **funding for core costs, staffing, and access to materials, with financial insecurity remaining the most significant barrier to long-term resilience**.
- Insecure **land tenure and short-term leases continue** to limit long-term planning and investment in sites.
- **Capacity pressures are increasing**, with 41% reporting difficulties attracting and retaining volunteers, contributing to burnout and limiting outreach capacity.

Accessibility and inclusion

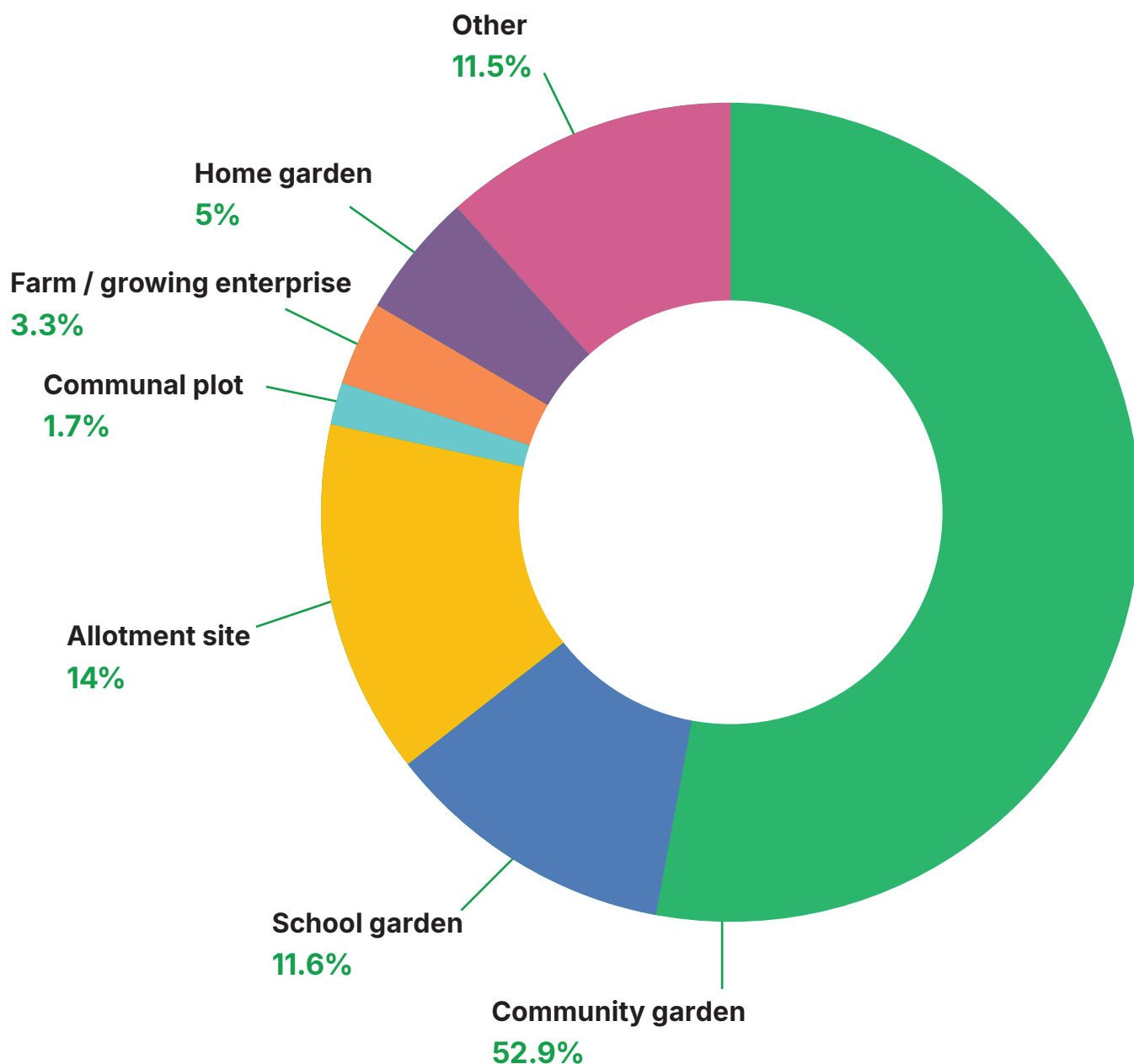
- Gardens report strong performance in social outcomes, including **85% supporting community cohesion and 85% improving access to local food**.
- Despite funding constraints, gardens continue to deliver strong social and environmental value, **with 94% reporting improved health and wellbeing outcomes and 91% providing access to green space and nature**.

Capital Growth making a difference

- Capital Growth continues to be seen as a **friendly, supportive and useful network**, valued for its resources, training and **sense of connection** across London.
- The network's greatest impact remains in **building skills and knowledge in climate- and nature-friendly growing practices, alongside improving confidence in food growing**.
- Members particularly value training, online resources, and direct advice from staff, alongside networking and peer learning opportunities.

Survey respondents

We had responses from 121 growing sites in our network this year, with the majority from community gardens (53%), with the next highest percentages allotments (14%) and school gardens (12%).



Cultivating the capital: who shapes our cities' growing spaces

From the 121 gardens that responded to the survey, **a total of 24,897 individuals engaged with growing sites across our network**, demonstrating the positive impact these gardens are having across London.

Who engaged with network growing sites in 2025

- The largest group were school pupils, with 13,258 students
- 5,998 participants took part as corporate volunteers
- 4,236 people were regular volunteers, including 1,242 new volunteers
- 229 paid members of staff, including growers, engagement officers, and administrative support roles.

Using the data we can estimate that community gardens engage an average of 35 volunteers and school gardens an average of 109 school pupils.

Extrapolating the numbers across the 600 active gardens, our findings suggest that the Capital Growth network reach includes:

- 21,000 volunteers (14,842 existing volunteers and 6158 new volunteers)
- 29,742 additional corporate volunteers
- 1,135 paid workers employed across the network, which shows the potential for job creation within the sector.

Building inclusive spaces

Survey responses demonstrate that a multitude of different people benefited from their presence in the community.

Of the gardens that responded to our survey:

- 41% have more than 10 people from White backgrounds involved in their project,
- 28% have more than 10 people of mixed heritage involved,
- 22% of gardens have more than 10 people from Black or Black British backgrounds involved,
- 23% have more than 10 Asian or Asian British people involved,
- 30% reported having more than 10 people of other ethnic groups involved in their project.

Our survey found that members support a wide range of people with specific interests or needs via social prescribing initiatives, through a web of local connections and formal and informal networks. They support refugee groups, carers, mental health groups, and survivors of domestic abuse, as well as providing space for culturally specific groups such as Abya Yala, Eastern European and British Bangladeshi communities.

- 49% involve people who are refugees or asylum seekers, with 5% of gardens involving more than 10
- 93% of gardens involve people who have a disability or health issue, with 26% of gardens involving more than 10
- 88% of gardens involve LGBTQIA+ folks, with 11% of gardens involving more than 10
- 38% of garden involve more than 10 under 16's
- 30% of gardens involve more than 10 over 60's

In addition to structured programmes, gardens provide more informal support by engaging isolated individuals and creating opportunities for local young people to get involved. 78% of gardens involve people not in employment, education or training, with 21% involving more than 10 on a regular basis. This highlights the enormous contribution the network makes to education and training in green skills for young people and adults.

Many growing groups also collaborate with established charities and organisations, including Community Autistic Support, Pride & Advocacy, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and collectives such as the South London Mushroom Club. Respondents frequently highlighted partnerships with schools, including targeted sessions for SEND students and groups.

How are food growing sites contributing to their communities?

It is well known that food growing sites aren't just there to grow plants but also provide a space to bring communities together, supporting mental and physical wellbeing as well as encouraging growing skills. At a time where 88% of 18-24 year olds are lonely and half of the population feels disconnected from society, community growing provides an important space for healing and connection to both people and nature, plus a wide range of benefits for local communities. Our members further proved

the overwhelmingly positive impacts they provide to garden users and visiting locals who are benefitting from:

- **opportunities to improve health and wellbeing (94%)**
- **access to green spaces and nature (91%)**
- **access to local food (85%)**
- **community cohesion (85%)**



Pam Shor Mushroom growing workshop at Wolves Lane Centre. Credit: Rachel Dring

The Bandstand Beds Association

Bandstand Beds Association (BBA) was established in 2013 by a passionate group of local gardeners keen to create opportunities for people to get outdoors, grow their own food, connect with nature, and build community. Fast forward to 2025 and the garden is a fully developed and flourishing community space. In addition to their work at Clapham Common, the group still maintains the fruit beds near the bandstand and hosts activities with schools and local charities, such as: Froglife's Wild Times (supporting carers and individuals with dementia); Ace of Clubs (Clapham's homeless charity) and nature bereavement sessions with Royal Trinity Hospice.

David Dandrigde, Chair of Bandstand Beds told us, *"The community garden has hugely benefited the people of Clapham, especially those who feel lonely or isolated – and with no outdoor growing space of their own. Bandstand Beds has also had substantial impact on the ecology of Clapham Common, creating habitat for wildlife and food for pollinators, as well as people."*

At the end of 2025, working in partnership with Lambeth Council and The Orchard Project, BBA created a small orchard with eleven apple, one damson and two walnut trees beside their community garden on the Common.



Bandstand Beds Garden. Credit: David Dandrigde

A flourishing network: Stories of succes

We asked our members how well they felt they were doing against what we see as the five pillars of a successful community food growing space;

What we found is that Capital Growth members are environmental champions, running food growing sites that are using organic methods and making positive impacts on biodiversity.

- 1 Running a resilient and well protected garden** – systems in place, sources of income, good relationships with local council/landowner, protections on your land or local awareness and support for your work
- 2 Supporting biodiversity** – providing a variety of habitats and forage for wildlife
- 3 Following organic gardening principles** – avoiding artificial pesticides and fertilizers
- 4 Representing your local community or target group** – involving a wide range of people in activities and decision-making
- 5 Improving the health and wellbeing of your volunteers and visitors** – providing accessible spaces, leading therapeutic activities, supporting volunteers with additional needs

95% of gardens report they are doing very well and making progress in **gardening to organic principles**, which is improving soil quality, reducing chemical use and protecting local wildlife and people.

Supporting biodiversity is also huge strength, with nearly **9 in 10 gardens (87%)** reporting positive performance providing a variety of habitats for wildlife.

Health and wellbeing impacts are significant, with around **72%** of gardens saying they are doing well at supporting volunteers and visitors.

Garden resilience is improving, with **70%** of respondents reporting positive progress in creating resilient and well-protected sites.

Approximately two-thirds of gardens actively engage local communities and target groups, making **community representation a priority**.

Always striving to do more

There is always so much more that community food growers would like to do if only they had the time and resources.

Areas where members feel they would like to be doing more is in creating resilient and secure sites, with 19% saying that they felt there was more that they could do in this area. This highlights the precarious nature of land for food growing in London, with many food growing projects based on “meanwhile” spaces with short-term leases or without any formal agreement in place, and competition for space at an all-time high.

As one respondent explained: *“One of our biggest challenges is working in a public park not in our own community garden”,* and another cites needing *“support from local authority to establish the garden formally”* as their key challenge.

The area where most members felt there was room for improvement was in representing the local community, with 21% saying there was “more we could do”. Encouragingly, 42% say they are making progress in this area. As one respondent explained:

“**Our biggest challenge is simply getting more local people involved. We need to do a better job of getting our name out there in the area, so we are clearly recognised as a community food growing space and not just known for other activities.**”



Newham plots. Credit: Patrick Vickers

"A more adaptable, self-sufficient, skilled, healthy and united borough". The GROW Lewisham Network

GROW Lewisham is a community-led network working across several sites in the borough, with its central garden, The Plot, based in Downham. The network exists to help local people access land, resources and skills to grow food, and has become a strong example of how community growing can support both people and place.

Regular volunteering sessions bring together a diverse mix of residents, including families, young people and people without access to their own garden space. Alongside these sessions, GROW Lewisham grows and donates produce, provides community meals, and runs a wide range of activities that strengthen local connections. Current projects include the development of a community orchard, forest school activities, creative programmes and collaborations with local partners such as James Kids Home. The network also works with social prescribers and a Community Payback scheme, extending its reach to people who may benefit most from connection to nature and community.



GROW Lewisham. Credit: Rosemin Najmudin

Reflections from growers on the Capital Growth network

The network respondents benefited from a wide range of activities and support from Capital Growth over the year, from online resources to garden listings, networking events, and our training program.

“ **Capital Growth kindly supported us in hosting and promoting a workshop on ‘Growing South Asian Vegetables in the UK’.** *This was a new idea for a workshop to support growing a more diverse range of food organically and locally, to inspire everyone and also to attract under-represented audiences to gardening/growing.* ”

In addition, gardens were asked to reflect on our services over the past year. Responses showed an even spread in perceived helpfulness across our London-wide festivals, toolkits, directory listings, training programmes, network events, as well as advice from the team and our newsletter. This highlights that Capital Growth's broad offer is both widely valued and actively used.



Grow Joyce and Shell. Credit: Rachel Dring

How Capital Growth has helped food growing projects



"Having a place on the map is great and we can see how close other growers are to be able to network. The harvestometer is great to record how much we have gathered. More than I realised."

"To be honest it's just lovely to know you're there for us all - it helps us feel connect to other groups who are helping to make a better more sustainable future"

"It was nice to get the sign and tell all our visitors (around 30) about the fact that the little garden is part of a big network."

"Mainly the information and updates in the very informative newsletters."

"The Harvestometer is a fabulous tool. Before it, I was recording my harvests on Excel, but the way the tool calculates how many meals and the how much carbon saved really inspires me to do more useful things to help save the planet! Love it!"

Sutton Farm, the veg box embracing seasonality

Sutton Community Farm, South London's organic, community-owned fruit and veg farm provides volunteering opportunities as well as a veg box scheme delivering across South London.

This peri-urban farm plays a crucial role in building local climate resilience, providing skills and training for future farmers, and strengthening the urban food supply chain. Sutton Community Farm delivers impressive social and environmental benefits with over 250 volunteers relying on their programmes for social connection, physical activity, and mental wellbeing. More than 400 households receive fresh, organic produce weekly, and over 6,000 kg of organic food is donated annually to local food charities. They grow 16 tonnes of organic fruit and vegetables each year, all the while supporting soil health, biodiversity and increasingly ecosystem reliance. Despite all this incredible work, Sutton Community Farm is struggling to survive, with increasing competition from supermarkets on the one side and a diminishing funding landscape on the other. Whilst urban fringe farms like these have a critical role in our current and future food security, the future for this farm hangs in the balance.

Find out more about Sutton Farm and their volunteering opportunities.



Sutton Community Farm crew. Credit: Sutton Community Farm

Looking forward: challenges and priorities

Aside from slugs, the survey highlighted several challenges facing London's gardens, with the most significant being the need to raise funds to keep growing spaces open and operational (53%). This was a greater issue than last year, reflecting ongoing difficulties with funders less inclined to support the core costs of established gardens, including staff salaries. As a result, many gardens struggle to have long term security, leading to staff shortages, barriers to inclusion and volunteer burnout. Without proper resourcing and support, these sites will suffer at a time when we need them the most as hubs of connection, resilience and nourishment.

“ Securing the necessary investment and resources to continue developing and delivering. As a well-established project with a successful track record, we are excluded from funding all about 'new ideas' rather than sustaining what already works well.

This lack of financial stability also exacerbates other key challenges, making it harder to attract and retain volunteers (41%) with limited capacity and funding to roll out community engagement to engage diverse communities and create more inclusive spaces (30%).

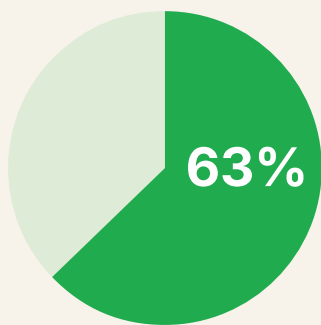
“ We would love to offer horticulture traineeships but lack the funds.

“ No systems in place for community/self-care for volunteers (80% of people).

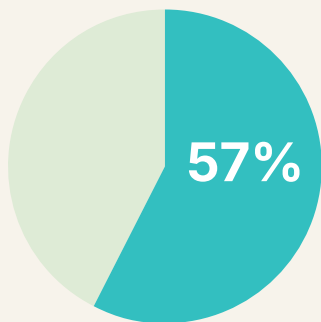
Challenges including adapting to climate change, securing growing sites and demonstrating impact also remain prevalent amongst growers.

What should Capital Growth prioritise going forward

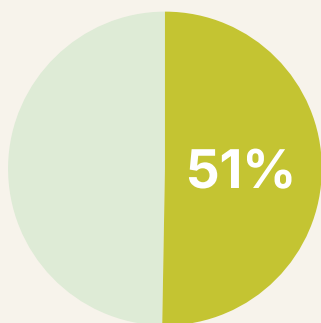
The top areas growers think we should prioritise include:



Creating resources for gardens to create climate resilience/nature friendly spaces



Supporting the Right to Grow campaign



Inputting the London Plan and other key mayoral strategies

These findings present a great mandate from the network to rollout our Growing for Nature project in 2026 providing engagement and educational resources for gardens to monitor and improve biodiversity in their growing sites.

Furthermore, this clarifies Capital Growth's role in campaigning for the Right to Grow, to help build on the work already being done by grassroots campaigners demanding more public land for food growing and greening. The Capital Growth team has already started to support councils to integrate Right to Grow into relevant strategies, encouraging cross-departmental co-operation, and collaboration with borough grassroots campaigns.

Tower Hamlets' Right to Grow, a hand outstretched

The Tower Hamlets Right to Grow campaign is one of several grassroots movements across London driving change in urban food growing. Launched in June 2025, it quickly mobilised residents and organisations, building a network of over 20 community gardens and producing A Growing Guide to Community Food Gardens alongside "Roots and Routes", a map celebrating resident-led green spaces, local harvests and the diverse cultural traditions connected to food. Campaigners Carmen Ho and Rachel Hippolyte successfully brought their case to councillors at Whitechapel Town Hall, securing support for a Right to Grow policy that will improve access to unused public land through transparent mapping and simpler leasing processes. Rooted in the East End's history of community growing, the campaign highlights how urban agriculture can strengthen social cohesion, support climate resilience and improve wellbeing, while creating opportunities for skills-building, biodiversity and greater access to fresh food.

Find updates of the campaign on their Instagram @righttogrow_th.



How will these findings be used?

Capital Growth uses various survey data, information and feedback alongside engagement in our work, to showcase the impact that food growing is having in London and beyond, as well as helping us identify areas of focus and ways to improve.

In particular, the data collected in this survey will help inform our feedback to the GLA, calls for environmental data, as well as our campaigns, activities and events. They will also help to develop new fundable project ideas for 2026 and beyond.

Findings will be shared with our network members and friends of Capital Growth, London councils, local researchers and our network partners to help create a better system-wide picture of the current state of growing in across the capital.

If you have any queries, comments or suggestions relating to this report, please send them to

capitalgrowth@sustainweb.org.

Acknowledgements

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Front cover: Kilburn to Kensal Fruit Pickers. Credit: Michael Stuart

Capital Growth

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About Sustain

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote equity. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level.

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

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