



Growing for Nature Biodiversity survey for community food growing spaces

Summary

Our survey found that food growing sites in London are almost 100% organic and are providing significant habitat for nature, excelling in pollinator-friendly planting, fruit trees and compost heaps. Built interventions such as insect hotels, bird boxes and ponds were slightly less prevalent with 50 to 70% of sites having these features.

Whilst we found that recording wildlife on food growing sites wasn't that widespread, with only 18% of respondents regularly monitoring nature on their sites, there is a huge appetite to do more with almost all respondents stating that they are already recording nature to some degree or would like to start. Birds, pollinators and plant species were the most commonly monitored categories. The most popular recording initiatives were the RSPB Big Bird Watch and the Big Butterfly Count.

Nearly a quarter of respondents were already involved with their local biodiversity/ecology officers, had been using their local council's Biodiversity Action Plan/Nature Recovery Action plan or GiGL. Verbatim feedback at the end of the survey suggests that growers would benefit from expert advice and support to monitor wildlife and create more habitat.

It's important to be aware of potential bias in these results. The self-selecting nature of the survey means that those growers who are already very involved and enthusiastic about biodiversity initiatives were likely overrepresented among participants in this survey. As a result, the results may not be fully representative of the views and practices across the entire population of food growers on this topic. While valuable insights were obtained, interpreting and generalizing from the data requires caution given this limitation. To avoid this bias, future survey questions on biodiversity could be incorporated into Capital Growth membership application form as part of the joining process.

Background: In March 2024 Capital Growth surveyed food growing groups in London to gain a clearer understanding of what impact community-scale food growing has on nature. The survey was hosted on Survey Monkey to establish the location and size of the growing space plus the habitats provided for nature and how engaged the growers were in monitoring and supporting biodiversity on their site. The survey was promoted via the Capital Growth newsletters, social media channels and through partners communications. We offered a £400 and £200 prize in vouchers to encourage wide participation.

Respondents

The survey had a total of 142 respondents, between 7 March and 7 May. The completion rate was 100%. 61% of respondents were Capital Growth members.

With over 3500 food growing sites in our network, this sample size represents approximately 4% of food gardens in London.

About the food growing spaces in London

The majority of the participating gardens were small community gardens, home veg patches or allotment plots.

Type of food growing space

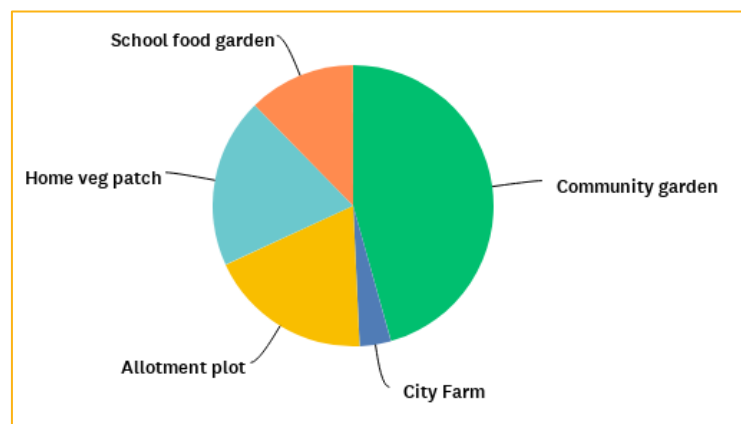
48% community gardens

20% home patch

19% allotments

12% school garden

4% City Farm



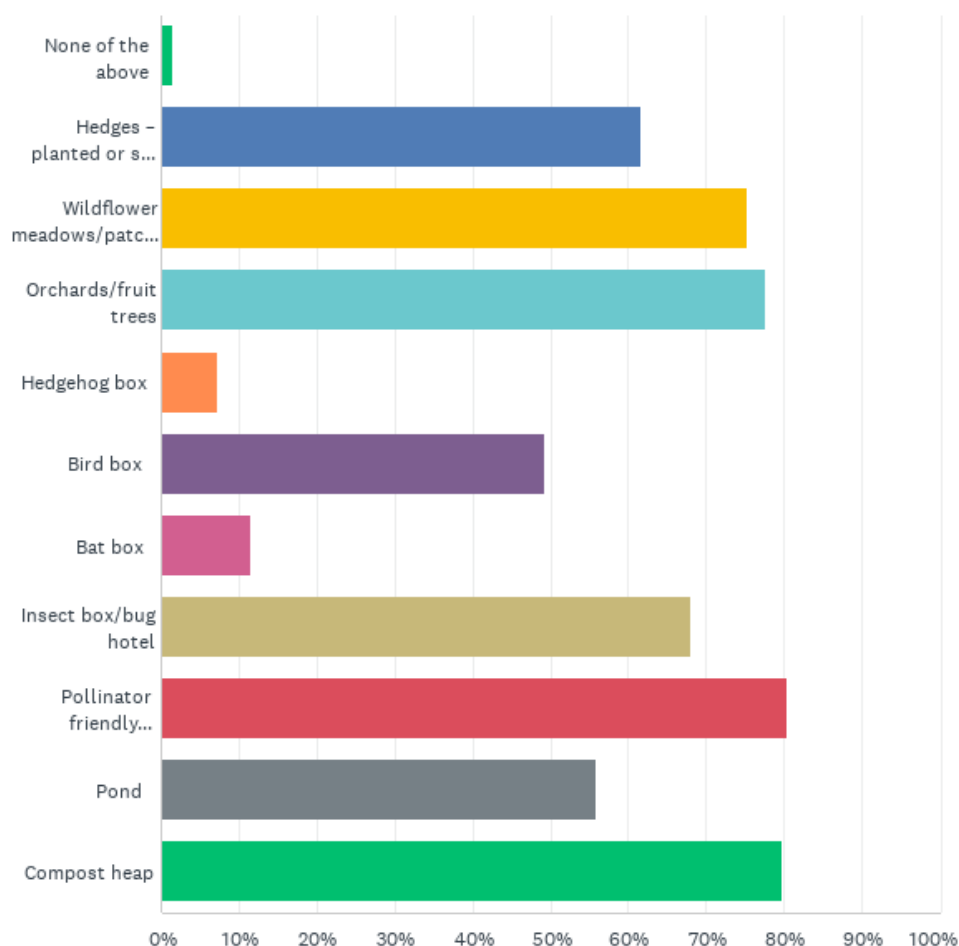
Size of food growing spaces

The average size of gardens in the survey were 885 square meters.

Size of garden (square M)	Number of gardens	% of gardens
1 to 100	54 gardens	42%
100 to 570	21 gardens	16%
750 - 8000	15 gardens	12%
16,200	1 garden	0.5%

What habitats do food growing spaces already provide?

The community growing spaces that we surveyed had a large array of habitat for wildlife and almost all had provided at least some habitat. Most common habitats included compost heaps, pollinator-friendly plants orchards or fruit trees and wildflowers. Hedgehog and bat boxes were the least common.



Are they growing organically?

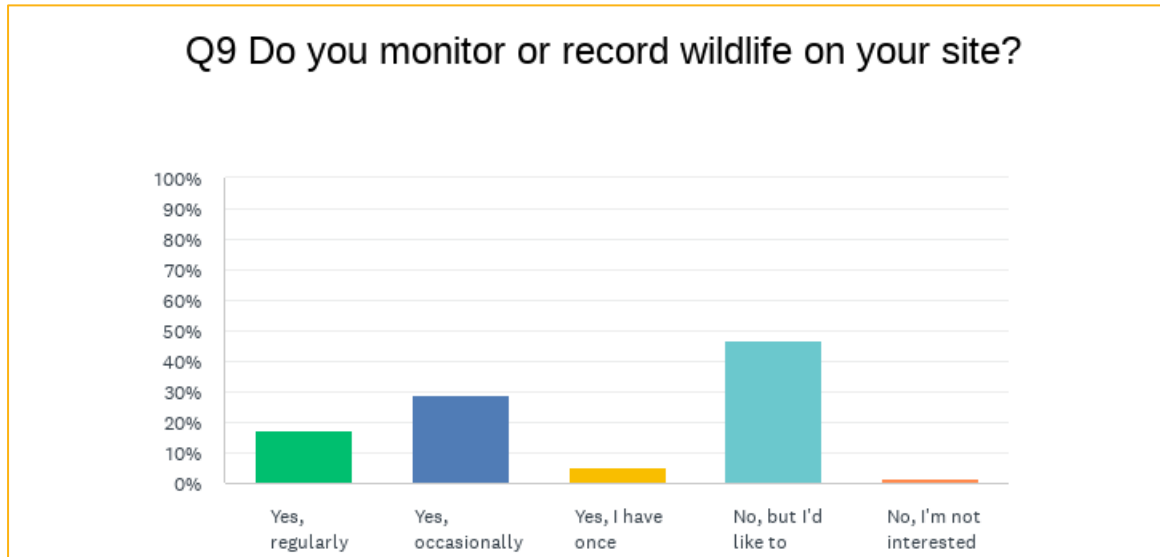
79% are growing to organic principles

20% are aspiring to and working towards

Only 1% of respondents were using pesticides or herbicides (only 1 respondent was using pesticides on a small home garden plot and 1 using herbicides on an allotment plot)

Monitoring wildlife

There is a strong interest in monitoring nature among respondents with 98% of respondents saying they have or would like to monitor wildlife on their sites.



18% regularly monitor nature on their sites

29% occasionally do

5% have once

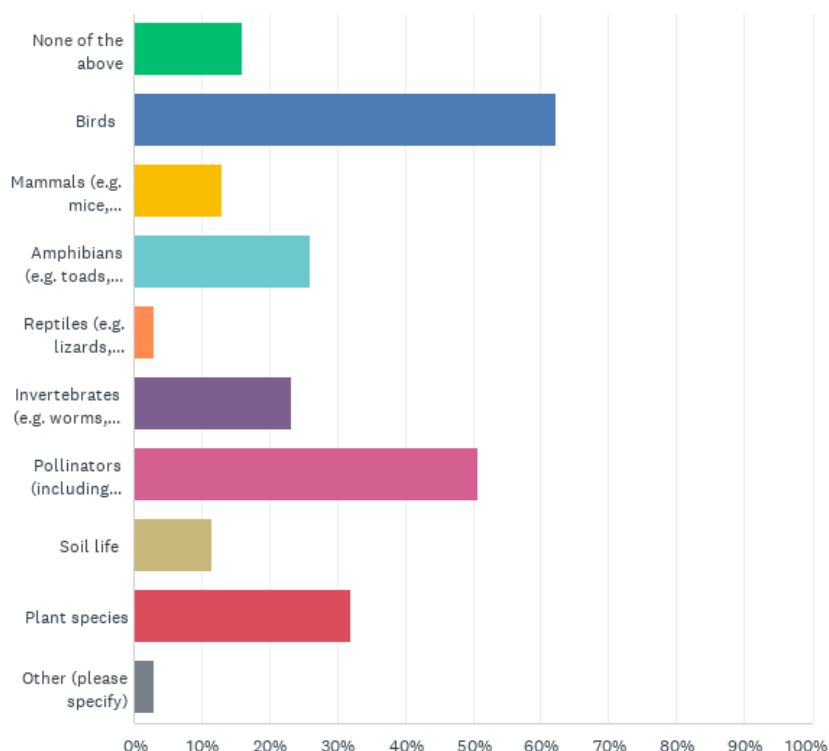
47% haven't yet but would like to

What wildlife are they currently monitoring?

The top 4 categories being monitored were:

- 1) Birds at 62%
- 2) Pollinators at 50%
- 3) Plant species at 32%
- 4) Amphibians 26%

Q10 Have you ever done any of these surveys on your site?



What Nature initiatives are they already involved in?

There was quite a low engagement in nature recording initiatives among survey respondents.

The top 3 were:

- 1) RSPB Bird Watch has the most participation at 58% (40 ppl)
- 2) Big City Butterfly Count / iRecord / Butterfly conservation - 17%
- 3) iNaturalist / City Nature Challenge – 10%

Involvement with other biodiversity initiatives

- 21% (30 groups) are involved with or have contact with their local council's biodiversity/ecology officer(s)
- 13% (19 groups) use their local council's Biodiversity Action Plan/Nature Recovery Action plan to guide their work
- 4% (6 groups) are using GiGL

Further comments from respondents

Would be great to know of local specialist knowledge to support our biodiversity moving forward

It's still early days and I only just received this questionnaire so we are looking for advice on how to improve our plot

We are currently working with Organiclea as part of the Food Growers Network on the Waltham Wild project which will mean doing more surveying and creation of a biodiversity action plan of some sort.

We would like to do more and be part of a network of schools supporting biodiversity. We would like opportunities to discuss our growing spaces with other pupils and to work together.

We're eager to carry out surveys, but don't have funding for this and/or time to put aside to find people who can help for free!

I am the secretary for our allotment site and would love to do some nature recording on site

Hi, we want to start properly recording the site biodiversity this summer and I have been looking for help and resources on how to go about this. If you can put us in touch with anyone able to help, that would be great. Particularly we have knowledge gaps in invertebrate, pond and soil life surveying. Thank you! Vicki – Paradise Cooperative

We're about to have training this year with Froglife to monitor frogs and toads and are undertaking a wildlife project with Lambeth – Helen Lees, Archbishop's Park Community Trust (formally Friends of Archbishop's Park)

We have 200 plots at our allotment site and we encourage members to create wildlife places and biodiversity – Sandra, Southlands Road Allotments

Rachel Dring, Capital Growth Coordinator, Sustain. rachel.dring@sustainweb.org

Capital Growth is London's leading network for food growers, supporting urban food gardens to create community, climate and nature resilience. The Growing for Nature project has been developed in partnership with the GLA's Nature Recovery Team to better understand and enhance biodiversity in London www.capitalgrowth.org