

growing CULTURE



Growing Culture



Every London Borough was once surrounded by vegetable gardens to feed the urban population. In WWII, 'Dig for Victory' urged people to grow food for the war effort, with open spaces reclaimed as allotments, from domestic gardens to public parks – even the Tower of London lawn. In modern times, we have our own victories to win, on obesity, climate change, mental health and social cohesion – for which community food growing offers many delicious and sociable solutions.

Growing Culture is focusing on London's food growing heritage and how this has contributed to the culture of families, communities and our city. Sharing and celebrating this history and identity will help to reinforce the importance of the amazing work the city's food growers do every day to make our city greener and healthier, often in the most deprived areas.

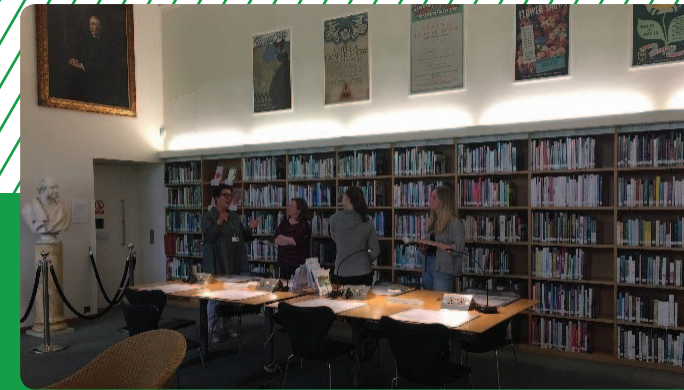


Interesting places and gardens to visit to discover more about London's food growing culture and heritage



Valence House in Barking and Dagenham

A great place to find out more info about the heritage and history of Barking and Dagenham, as well as Essex and London. The local studies collection is made up of printed books, periodicals, newspapers and maps primarily concerning the history of this area and beyond. A particular highlight is one of the original Culpeper's Complete Herbal Book. Valence House also has a very impressive WW1 'Dig for Victory' garden onsite and lots of information about allotments and market gardens in the area. Check out the local studies and archives centre in your borough!



RHS Lindley Library

A great place to research unique collections of early printed books to modern titles on botanical art, the history of horticulture and practical gardening. The library has every book you might ever need about gardening and food growing. Well worth a visit!

It also holds the Botanical Art collection of the RHS, the archives of the RHS and the personal archives of notable gardeners and garden designers. A beautiful first edition of the Album Benary (1876) can be found here. The Album contains 28 colour plates in total of vegetable varieties by Ernst Benary which are named in the accompanying page in German, English, French and Russian.

Interesting places and gardens to visit to discover more about London's food growing culture and heritage



Spitalfields City Farm Tower Hamlets

The city farm that is nearest to the city's square mile and sited on a former railway goods depot just behind Brick Lane. The farm was started in 1978 in response to local people's demand for allotments, having lost theirs to developers. With a long east end tradition of backyard farming, it wasn't long before chickens, rabbits and geese appeared on the scene.

Now also home to a lot of Bengali vegetables such as kodu or bottle gourd and many chilli pepper plants this city farm is buzzing with the history and heritage from growers who have lived overseas and started to grow food here in London. There are many city farms in London, here are a few to whet your appetite:

- Mudchute Park and Farm
- Hackney City Farm
- Kentish Town Farm
- Vauxhall City Farm
- Surrey Docks Farm
- Hounslow Urban Farm
- Stepney City Farm
- Deen City Farm



Gardening and WW1 at The Regent's Park Allotment Garden, Westminster/Camden



Food supply was a major concern in World War I. Gentle reminders not to waste food evolved into compulsory rationing by late 1917. To fill the gap and give people enough energy for essential war work, the government advised them to grow their own food. The Regent's Park helped in this effort by creating a model allotment garden in the park.

Every Londoner was encouraged to grow food. Manuals like War-Time Gardening declared: *"The most urgent need at the present time for all who are not in the fighting line and who have land is to make the utmost use of it. ... you will be surprised at the large amount of food you can grow even in a little back plot. ... You are playing your part in this great war."* Similarly, the Win the War Cookery Book, issued by the Ministry of Food in 1917, proclaimed: *"Victory in the food-fight will turn the scale."*

Reflecting the need for maximum calories from minimum space, both War-Time Gardening and The Regent's Park garden emphasized heavy crops like potatoes, root vegetables and cabbage. King George and Queen Mary not only grew vegetables at Buckingham Palace, but visited allotment gardens to admire the cabbage. Flavour and variety definitely weren't priorities. Sample recipes in the Win the War Cookery Book combined large quantities of boiled vegetables with minimal amounts of butter and - if you were lucky - some salt and pepper. War-Time Gardening didn't even bother to include recipes!

Gardening in 2018

100 years later, the restored model allotment garden in The Regent's Park serves a different purpose. Rationing is long gone, and fewer Londoners face outright food

shortages. Many people now focus on limiting their calorie intake rather than trying to increase it. Still, fresh-grown herbs and vegetables offer flavour and variety that can't be found in processed foods and encourage sustainable consumption of local and seasonal foods. The Regent's Park garden also models eco-friendly practices for home gardeners and schoolchildren. And supporting the London Plan, it provides opportunity for exercise and socializing, helping to build community in a London population that is much larger and more diverse than it was in 1918.

Commemorating the end of World War I, The Regent's Park allotment garden is currently growing wartime heritage crops, including Jerusalem artichokes, peas, parsnips, leeks and potatoes.

Gardens with fascinating history and cultural heritage to visit



Whetstone Stray, Barnet

Whetstone Stray is an allotment site in Barnet, sitting on a slope going down to the Dollis Valley Brook and Green Walk. The site had been grazing ground for the thousand or so horses used in the carrying business Pickfords, then run by transport

entrepreneur Joseph Baxendale. When he died in 1872, there were problems over the division of land. In 1907-08 the Government passed legislation that local councils must provide land on which the poor could grow their own vegetables and fruit, and the Council borrowed money to buy the land for allotment use.



From a record book dated February 1926, there is mention of a visit from a chemical fertiliser company which successfully sold the idea that with the reduction in horses since the arrival of the motorcar, chemicals were necessary. Today, the allotment Committee is nudging the site towards being more ecologically aware, for example by hedgerow planting projects and discontinuing peat based compost, glyphosate and insecticides in the allotment shop.

Gardens with fascinating history and cultural heritage to visit

St. Mary's Secret Garden, Hackney

St. Mary's Secret Garden is a beautiful and accessible community garden with a difference in Hackney, London. For over 25 years it has offered a safe space where people with support needs and the local community can get hands-on experience of gardening, gain a sense of inclusion and receive the benefits of horticulture and other eco-therapy activities. This helps those in need combat isolation, develop valuable employment skills,



gain qualifications and contribute to a greener, healthier, happier community.

St Mary's Secret Garden hosted a heritage event for Growing Culture where Paula, their manager, told the story of the garden from its early days - 25/30 years ago, and the growing history of the local area as market gardens for the City. Then Gerry, one of the volunteers talked about Thomas Fairchild, a nurseryman who lived and worked in Hoxton and the first person to produce an artificial hybrid. They had lots of old photo albums for people to look through and inspire ideas. They then had a shared meal - people brought a lovely variety of foods which complemented our stuffed courgettes and salad from the garden.

Gardens with fascinating history and cultural heritage to visit

Josiah Braithwaite Community Garden, Hammersmith and Fulham

Nubian Life is a vibrant and successful charity operating as a community resource centre in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. It was established in 1995 in direct response to a recognised gap in the service provision within the borough for its aging African Caribbean population. At Josiah Braithwaite Community Garden at the centre, people can expect to learn about how to grow and maintain a permaculture, wildlife-friendly, ecological and edible garden.

The garden hosted a heritage event for Growing Culture and had visitors hailing from England, Poland, Eritrea, India, St Kitts (Caribbean), Sudan, Palestine. They shared

stories, food and techniques: making herb teas, combining spices to make dahl, preparing wool to dye by making skeins, mordanting the wool and preparing the dye pots, and making samosas.

Visitors shared a huge feast with Indian and Caribbean food: jerk chicken, callaloo, rice and peas, samosas, dahl, pakoras, rice using vegetables picked from the garden including tomatoes, cucumbers and calaloo.



Gardens with fascinating history and cultural heritage to visit

Skip Garden, Kings Cross

A green oasis in the middle of the King's Cross development. This sustainable urban garden really is a charming oasis with wild flowers, vegetables and herbs, beehives and chicken coops. What started as a moveable vegetable garden built in skips, has grown into a community project that provides all kinds of opportunities for local young people.

The Skip Garden hosted a heritage event for Growing Culture to celebrate the work of the Seed Sisters and the Seeds for a Better World. The project aimed to connect and replenish our diverse natural heritage, through gardening workshops to train, educate, and inspire children, young people, local residents, and teachers on the natural cycle of growing and seed saving.

Through the collection of stories of food growers and seed savers in London, the creation of a mobile interactive seed bank taking heritage seeds and the stories of their growers to new audiences, this project brought together diverse groups of people, to swap seeds, learn from each other.



As part of the Growing Culture project, our volunteers recorded interviews with many people from many backgrounds and food growing cultures. Here is a small example of some of those fascinating people. You can find the full interviews on our website.

To find out more, or to get involved:
Visit www.capitalgrowth.org/growing_culture
Email janelle@sustainweb.org



Maria Gamberini was born in 1941 on a farm in Parma, Italy. She moved to the UK with her husband Gian-Carlo, and took on an allotment plot in Whetstone Stray in 1978. She grows a spectacular array of fruit, vegetables and leaves: cavolo nero, radicchio, tomatoes, beans, bitter greens... There is a hazelnut tree on the neighbouring plot which came with her from Italy forty years ago, and Italian squash varieties zucchini romanesco, zucca di Albenga and zucca di Chioggia are thriving - almost ready to be cooked and stuffed into ravioli.



Judy Twilley first came to Whetstone Stray allotments as a young girl, fetching water from the brook for her grandfather on his plot. She remembers the move from traditional British growing, a time when the allotments were all-male, and while she no longer has a plot on the site herself, she is still involved - this year as the almighty cake judge on the allotment's Annual Show.



Grey Court Community Allotment is managed by Ham United Group, bringing volunteers to work on the allotment as well as running a lunchtime gardening club for students with special educational needs attending Grey Court and Strathmore School. **Mary Pitteway** is a fantastic teacher and has told us her story.

Oral Histories

A little cross section of some of our other interviewees – to listen to their stories please head to our website:

www.capitalgrowth.org/growing_culture

