

Green-fingered way to grow as communities

It's possible to enjoy the gardening experience, even in your own back court

There's lots of bad news stories about Shettleston, but 41 volunteers worked for eight days in March to build a path in a community garden for wheelchair users. Is that not brilliant?

With the help of a grant of £116,000 from the Scottish Government's People and Communities Fund, Shettleston Growing Project has developed a green volunteer scheme.

The idea is to give more local people the chance to get involved in healthy outdoor activities, to learn new skills and to help transform other derelict areas into productive and attractive spaces.

I've never owned a garden, but recently I went out to the back court to the bin area, dug up the stoney earth, which folk used to tip the rubbish on, and bought some compost and plants. I then got some guys to build me a fence and started to plant all manner of stuff. I now regularly catch myself gazing proudly out of the window at my lovely little allotment.

The best gardeners I know call themselves artists. I've heard so many of them talk about how cultivating something and watching it grow is the same process as creating anything.

How unique every garden is and how strong the primal pull to plant and grow. And you don't need a lot to work your plot. Any old shovel will do.

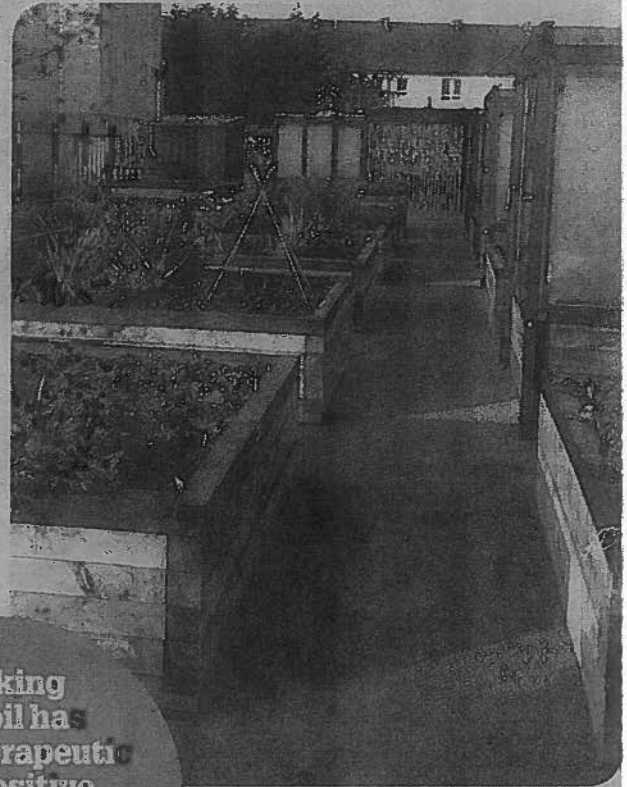
It's also been known for years that offering folk the chance to work the soil has huge therapeutic and positive effects on people's lives. Allotments and gardens are often attached to facilities dedicated to healing mind, body and spirit.

There's also the potential to produce healthy food, provide exercise, contribute to lifelong learning, social inclusion and even sustainability.

This last one appeals to me enormously in our age of mass food production and materialism. If kids grew kale they'd eat kale.

In Glasgow, only 27 per cent of the population has access to a garden. In some areas there is a nine-year waiting list for an allotment – the situation is similar in Edinburgh.

So let's not wait to get our hands dirty. Check out these guerilla gardeners who are instigating growing and planting initiatives on any bit of neglected land all over cities where that sense of connection has already



Working the soil has huge therapeutic and positive effects on people's lives – healing mind, body and spirit

CREAM OF CROP... Shettleston Community Growing Project

been lost. The daddy of guerilla gardeners, Richard Reynolds, said: "There are small patches of unloved land across Scotland, and especially in our inner cities, just waiting for people to care for them."

Back in sunny Shettleston, the SCGP is looking for more volunteers.

Anyone living in the area can contact the project at www.shettlestongrowing.org.uk

● If you'd like to email: libbymcarthur@dailyrecord.co.uk

I've definitely got this one licked

I spent the other day tasting ice-cream as a judge for the Golden Cone Awards. It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it.

I learned so much about the ice-cream trade. When it comes to ice-cream cafés, the skills are traditionally passed down through the generations. In the same way you couldn't go to job centre and apply for a job as a farmer, as it really is a family affair.

I now know that the quality of ice-cream is actually based on its weight, as well as its flavour. I remember as a kid in Castlemilk when the Mr Whippy van turned up – I knew he was a light-weight.

Rum and raisin was as exotic as I'd gone until, as a judge, I got to taste salted caramel with almonds, dark chocolate espresso, mango and passion fruit. Every flavour under the sun. Well under the grey skies of Scotland's cafés.

Animal attraction not always good for love

In the steam room we were discussing the subject of pets in the bedroom. One woman reported: "We've not had sex since the dog arrived."

They'd made the mistake of letting him sleep in the bed when he was wee. She added: "It just doesn't feel right to have sex in front of him."

Another, as a student, thought her young lover was crying out with ecstasy when actually the cat, on his way from the top of the wardrobe to the floor, had just used his bare back as a stepping stone.

One woman told us that when she was young her first boyfriend and his mynah bird moved into her bed sit. Her father then visited to check out the suitability of the new suitor. Over Jammie Dodgers and a cup of tea, the bird started to do a very good impersonation of Meg Ryan in *When Harry Met Sally* – and it wasn't from watching the film.

