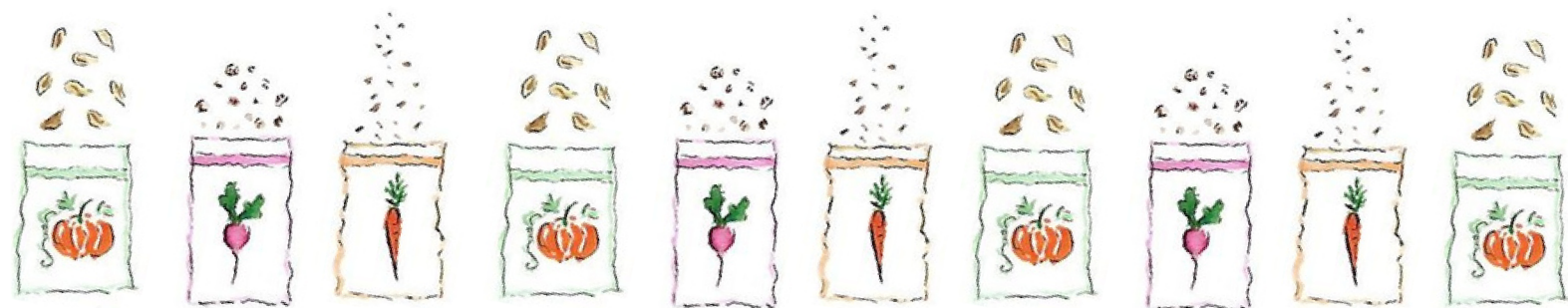


LOW MAINTENANCE SPACES



A GUIDE TO HELP MAKE
MAINTAINING SCHOOL
ALLOTMENTS EASIER AND
MORE SUSTAINABLE

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Maintaining a school allotment throughout the year can be incredibly challenging, as they need pretty consistent and regular maintenance during the year and especially over the growing season; we recommend to schools this runs from February half term to the October half term, when the allotments are then put to bed - preparing your growing space for the winter or dormant season by topping soil with mulch. Allotments generally require the most attention over late spring and summer when plants require more consistent watering, and more weeding, and this is often interrupted by the changing of the school year. In most schools we help to engage the community and source local volunteers to help with the regular maintenance and watering at school projects, in sessions run by the school, and also over the summer holidays.

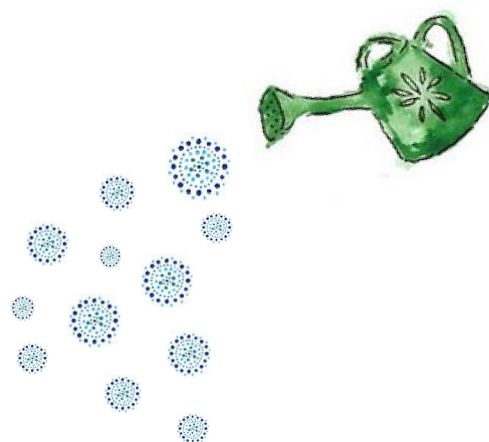


At The Papillon Project we are really passionate about helping young people and inspiring them to get outside and grow their own food. Not only because this is very sustainable and good for the environment, but also because being outside can be great for people's mental health and wellbeing. In schools we understand that it can be a struggle to maintain an allotment consistently, find and communicate with local volunteers, and hold a regular weekly allotment club due to time constraints in an already busy atmosphere. However without regular sessions it can become increasingly difficult to maintain a growing area, let alone plant, grow and harvest crops, and it can be disheartening to students when plants wilt, if they are not getting enough water, or their allotment doesn't create that much produce, and the plants remain very small.





We understand that an allotment in schools is an addition in an already very busy schedule. Creating growing spaces and areas of bare earth can increase the growth of weeds, growing fruiting plants requires pruning, healthy plants need lots of water and crop plants will always need maintaining to produce a high yield. However we still believe spending time outside in these spaces is really beneficial, and increasingly important in an ever growing world. Although maintaining an easily accessible growing area with these constraints is very difficult, there are adjustments we can make in order for this to be a little easier. Whether this is planting more perennials and shrubs, or growing veg more suited to drier conditions, or even highlighting the importance of heavy mulching. In the case of watering, by choosing drought tolerant plants carefully and designing spaces which will collect water we can reduce the stress on the plants and maximise the crop yield, whilst also keeping the allotment looking bright and colourful. Planting outside at ground level can help stop raised beds from drying out, however in polytunnels by making taller raised beds we can put more water into the soil and keep it from drying out quite as fast.



Introducing different smaller projects at different times throughout the year can help to widen the variety of jobs in the future, add more characteristic to the project and also help to inspire more engagement by students. These could be done as a group or if you had particularly engaged students could be led or carried out by a trusted student with help from a member of staff. Projects like planting beds, hedgerows and willow shelters require quite a bit of set up and also somewhat regular maintenance initially afterwards, but can be very useful for planting and screening later. Projects like building furniture, making trellis, painting and planting bulbs however need much less continued maintenance in the future, though a lot of upfront work. Bulbs, perennials and wildlife areas will provide interest and colour throughout different seasons. Building sculptures or structures can provide shelter from certain weather if there is a lot of space in an area. These projects are small additions, but can be an exciting change for interested students and also provide a good opportunity to teach new skills.





SUGGESTED SMALLER PROJECTS



- **Creating a woven willow dome, fence, tunnel, partition, sculpture**
 - Willow whips can be planted in the wetter part of the year and left to grow before being woven into fences and other structures.
 - Willow requires somewhat regular maintenance to keep weaving in the shoots to maintain the desired shape so a common task to do.
 - Domes and fences provide a nice boundary or shelter that isn't too heavy duty or costly, and windows can easily be added if needed or desired.
- **Expanding tree guilds**
 - Digging out large organic shaped tree guilds is quite a large job but doesn't need to be repeated regularly and can be edged in many different ways.
 - Tree guilds can be planted to provide more planting space for somewhat larger plants so less regular weeding is required as most established perennials don't need as much protection.
 - The turf removed can be used in another project, turned over, composted, or used to create natural low boundaries.
 - By splitting the floor up into more planting beds it minimises the amount of grass and creates more paths in the garden; this can be helpful to slow movement in an area, however may make grass somewhat trickier to maintain.
- **Building raised beds or furniture or wildlife homes and feeders**
 - Building and making upcycled furniture requires planning and creativity and can be a very fun and engaging task for students, especially if they can take the lead and have their own project.
 - Skills learned in carpentry can also be very useful throughout life.
 - Building a compost bay is an excellent idea as it is helpful to store waste and make more compost for later use. Having a 3 or 4 bay is ideal if the space is available.
- **Making a designated fruit bed**
 - Building raised beds or edging ground level beds is not only useful but could also be a prolonged activity which can be visited at anytime.
 - The better a bed is edged the less grass and other plants will grow in, and if the fruit is all together it makes it much easier to protect and harvest.



- **Planting a small hedgerow**

- Hedgerows can be used to make a small natural border or wall, they take time to grow and require maintenance, particularly if kept small, but are not costly.
- Depending on the shrubs chosen it may provide autumn colour or flower.
- Hedgerows can attract more wildlife, depending on which shrubs are planted.



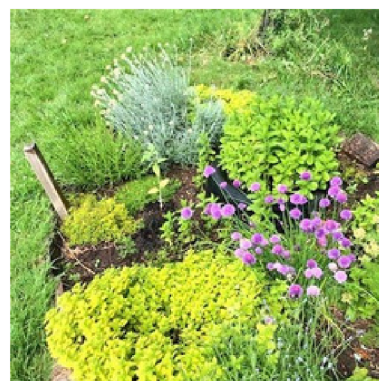
- **Planting fruit trees and growing an espaliered tree**

- A more interesting and unique way to grow a fruit tree. It promotes more fruit growth which is easier to pick, and could be used as a fence.
- It takes time and careful maintenance to create but do-able.
- It works very well against walls or where space is limited.



- **Creating a perennial herb and flower garden**

- More flowering plants can provide more colour so creating a more vibrant space.
- Larger established plants which are hardy like lavender, rosemary and daisies.



- **Painting fences and murals**

- Painting fences and furniture can be a fun task in the summer when the weather is warm and dry, and not only makes the allotment colourful but also can protect the wood or other materials from the weather.
- Time consuming job initially but lasts a long time.



- **Building a trellis structure**

- Time consuming project which can use up some small or thin pieces of wood which might not be useful in other projects.
- A useful structure in different times of the year in the vegetable, fruit or flower beds.





- **Planting bulbs to line borders**

- Bulbs require planting initially but most are relatively self sufficient throughout the year, and if planted properly will flower year after year.
- Different bulbs flower at different times in the year so planting a variety on the edges of paths can provide year round colour and also a thin dividing border.



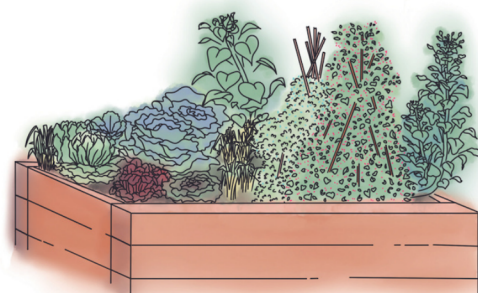
- **Making a wildlife or re-wilding zone**

- Sectioning off an area, whether temporarily or permanently, can use more space and split up an otherwise large empty space if needed.
- Involves sowing few or no seed and simply not cutting grass so is relatively easy to create and maintain, if done correctly the number of flowers and variety will increase.
- If more wildlife and pollinators is desired or would be interesting it can help to attract these, and could even be used to house a bug hotel or wildlife feeders if these are wanted but need protecting.



- **Making labels**

- Labels can be fun to make and a good project for bad and cold weather.
- Colourful labels can be engaging but also useful, as they point out edible plants, their specific names and helps to distinguish weeds and potentially harmful plants.



MULCHING

Mulch has quite a few purposes, and different kinds of mulch can be useful in different scenarios, but what is mulch? Mulches are loose coverings or sheets of material placed on the surface of the soil. Mulching usually adds a thin layer of material to the surface of the soil, and can be used to suppress weeds, lock in moisture, and act as a physical barrier to environmental conditions, like direct sun or strong wind. Generally mulches are either inorganic; consisting of synthetic material, landscape fabric (geotextiles), stones and rocks, or organic; originating from living materials like grass, leaves, bark, pine needles or compost.

Inorganic mulches like gravel, rubber chips or plastic membrane can be very strong barriers, are relatively long lasting, and are also very good for suppressing weeds. Shingle and pea gravel are also good for increasing drainage in the soil and can help reduce flooding on pathways and because inorganic mulches don't decompose they do not need replacing as regularly. However organic mulches on the other hand, often contain lots of nutrients which act as slow-release plant food, thereby improving the soil fertility. As the mulch breaks down it improves the soil structure, making it more moisture retentive and also free-draining. Organic mulches also attract worms as well as beetle and other soil invertebrates which break the organic material, which also provides food for bird life.

A FEW TYPES OF MULCH

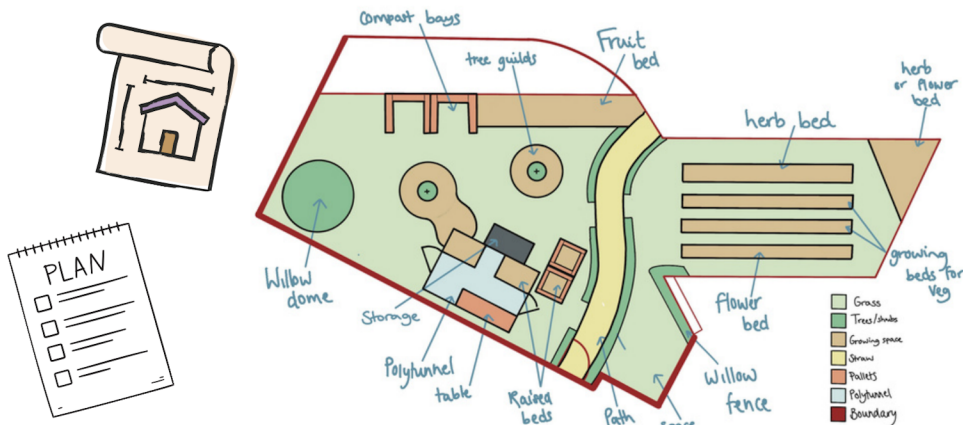
- **Straw**
 - Good For mulching over pathways or around the base of plants as locks in a lot of moisture and also stays very damp. Is also relatively inexpensive in comparison, though needs replacing at least once or twice a year. Suppresses smaller weeds well though can contain grass seed and form a mat if left unweeded for too long.
- **Leaves**
 - Leaf mulch can be collected on site in the autumn for free, depending on the trees, and contains some nutrients which break down into the soil. Locks in lots of moisture, though can mould and rot if layer is too thick. Grass clippings in the summer can also be used sometimes, though can get too wet and rot, forming a sludge if layer is too thick.
- **Manure**
 - Could be bought from, or donated by a farmer. Very high in nutrients and locks in moisture. Can be too rich for smaller plants and grass so burning the leaves and roots. Should be left to break down over winter or mixed into compost. Good for hungry plants like rhubarb and squash.
- **Compost**
 - Can be bought or made on site, though will take quite long to break down. Full of lots of nutrients and will improve soil structure and fertility. The quality will be affected by the materials used if made on site. It could contain nettle or couch grass roots if not made carefully, which could grow later.
- **Cardboard**
 - Can be collected on site as there are often lots of deliveries to schools, and available in large sheets. Good for mulching over grass when making lazy beds, or laying over the surface of growing beds and weighed down with pallets, bricks or other pieces of wood over the winter.
- **Bark or wood chips**
 - Bark chips last longer than straw and as they break down will improve the soil quality and structure as well as its ability to retain water. It can be acidic depending on the type so may not be as good for mulching certain veg, but it can be good for pathways.
- **Mushroom compost**
 - Spent mushroom compost can be brought in large quantities and will rot down, improving the soil's fertility and structure. It is high in nutrients and will lock moisture into the soil. It also attracts lots of invertebrates and worms which are good for the soil, due to the dark and moist conditions created.
- **Gravel**
 - Far more costly though doesn't need replacing as regularly, very good as a weed suppressant on pathways. It can improve drainage.
- **Plastic sheets/membrane**
 - Relatively strong material which can cover large areas at once, and a very good weed suppressant. Can be used on pathways in addition to organic mulches on top to make them last longer, or used in beds with holes cut out for planting, for larger plants like brassicas.



PLANNING

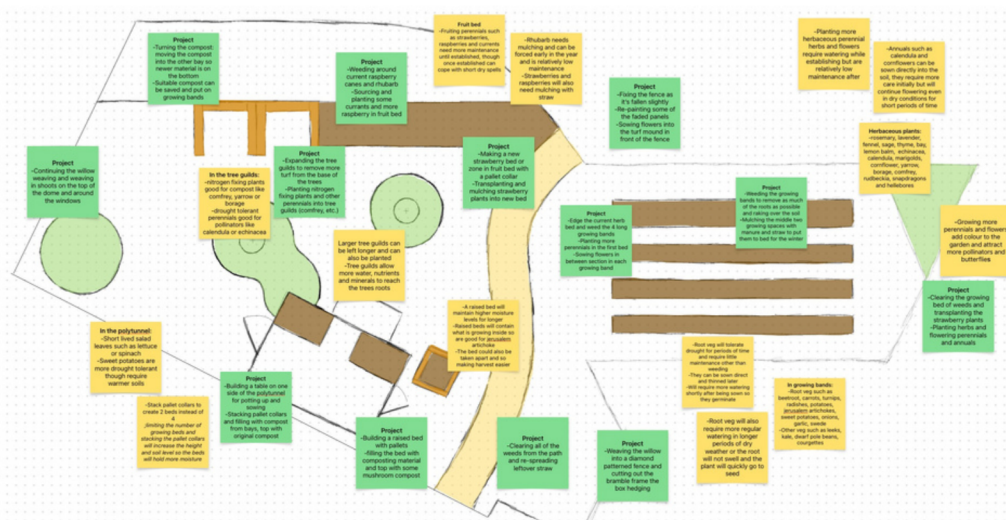


Creating and keeping to a simple garden plan or map can be very useful if the space is used by different members of staff and different students, as it will show what areas or plants in the garden are. Plans could be as simple or as detailed as you would like, from a simple boundary or rough map or even list, to a more detailed or coloured Birds Eye view plan which could even be to scale using accurate measurements. Plans could come with a related list of jobs which could be done depending on the month, or even be complete with annotations or specific tasks and projects which need completing.



Creating a plan initially can be quite time consuming, and requires a little research and planning, and it can be a little tricky to plant and understand at first, but it is worth it. The clarity brought to a space by having a clear plan speeds up the process of gardening each day so there is less planning required before working with students, and lessens the daunting task of deciding what jobs actually can be done outside.

Keeping a rough log book or checklist of what has been done each month is also useful, especially when multiple people and groups are visiting the allotment.





SUGGESTED PLANTS



- Easy to sow annuals with a high germination rate

- Rubeckia, Snapdragon, Cornflowers, Cosmos, Marigold, Poppy, Nasturtium, Sunflower, Californian poppy, Zinnia, Calendula, Borage, general wildflower or pollinator mixes



- Hardy perennials

- Coreopsis, Yarrow, Geranium, Rosemary, Sage, Mint, Comfrey, Daisy, Helebore, Chrysanthemum, Sage, Lemon verbena, Lavender, Lupin, Allium, Daffodil, Tulip, Anemone, Astilbe, Echinacea, Stonecrop, Hosta, Crocus



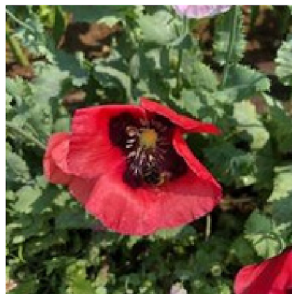
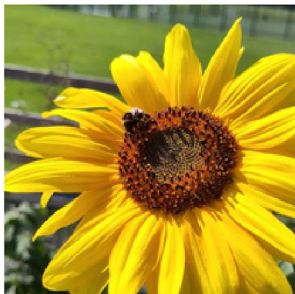
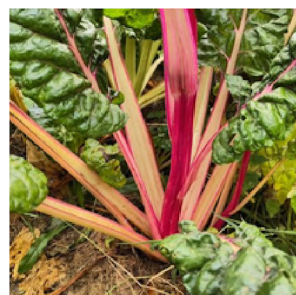
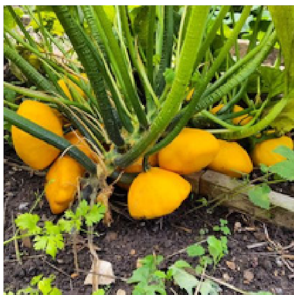
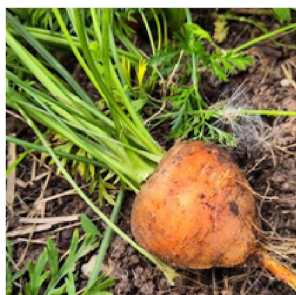
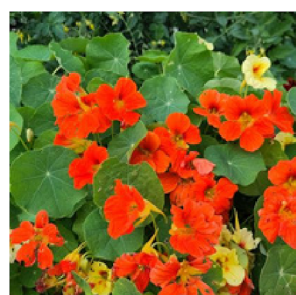
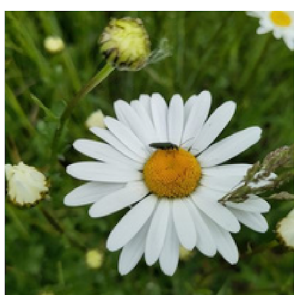
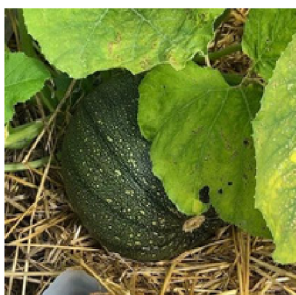
- Vegetable plants

- Potato, Jerusalem artichoke, Turnip, Carrot, Beetroot, Radish, Kale, Garlic, Chard, Parsnips, Onions, Sweet potato (in the polytunnel), Courgette, Dwarf french bean



- Fruit plants

- Currants, Raspberries, Rhubarb, Gooseberries, Strawberries, Blueberries, Trees and Shrubs like cherries, plums and apricot and natives such as plums or apples





It is always best to consult someone more knowledgeable or carry out a small amount of research into the pros and cons of most plants before purchasing them if you are unsure. This is because many easy to grow annuals and perennials are very well adapted and will spread, grow runners and self seed. Plants such as mint, lemon verbena and geraniums are notorious spreaders and will produce lots of runners, and plants such as borage and poppies can self seed to quite an extent in ideal conditions. Although it can be nice to have many plants grow so quickly they can take over areas very quickly if left, and are often somewhat difficult to remove later.



It's also important to label plants in the allotment, especially edible plants, so it is more accessible to more people and easier to weed. There are plant identification apps available on mobile devices, these are not always completely accurate but can help to initially start to identify a plant or its genus. Be careful when sowing flower seed mixes by fruit, veg and herb plots as some annuals and biennials often in pollinator mixes can be quite poisonous, like foxgloves for instance, if ingested.



Adjusting the planting and maintaining more of a constant plan, can also provide slightly more variety to the jobs for students in the allotment. Keeping to a well thought out plan can in some cases also mean the weeds grow a little sparser as there is more competition and less available space for them to grow. The larger variety in jobs can provide more interest to the allotment and so help to encourage more students to start gardening and “give it a grow”. Growing more evergreens and perennials can also extend the flowering season a bit and give the allotment more colour and interest, so creating a nice space outside throughout the year. This may encourage more students to get outside and enjoy being in a calm space even if they are not gardening, especially if the weather is pleasant. Perennial plants are much less likely to need replacing than annuals, and annual vegetable plant seed will likely need replacing each or every other year, as the success rate for the collected seed will decrease each year, and the seed is often not particularly easy to store. Lots of annual flowering plants however often have quite a high success rate for self collected seed, and most will produce a lot of seed which is relatively easy to store and sow the next year.



Though allotments can be challenging to maintain we passionately believe that a school allotment should be a “permanent place of inspirational learning”.

Allotments provide the most incredible opportunities for crucial and highly valuable skills to be taught and imparted on young people. By planning more you can make your allotment work for you, and reduce the maintenance to a manageable amount, so that it doesn't become overwhelming.



“It has captured the hearts and minds of our students and staff and opens up an new way of working within the school, enhancing the wellbeing of our students and staff and unlocking the opportunity for young people to learn and discover outdoors in new ways.”



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