

The Growing Together Project at Hayling College

The Growing Together Project is an after college activity club, currently looking after chickens; a chicken run, including free range area and coops; rabbits and hutches; poly tunnel; vegetable plot; soft fruit plot; a few fruit trees; extensive hedge row; a pond. We have members from Year 7 through to Year 10. Our main working day is Thursday after lessons, but we can often be seen most afternoons working away at the back of the college. Thursday afternoon is also when members of the Hayling Island Horticultural Society come along, lend a hand, give advice and part with their many years of experience and knowledge. We also attend the local horticultural shows and exhibit our own produce!



The project shows members how and where we get our eggs, how vegetables, from the seed packet, grow in the soil, get harvested and appear on our dining tables ready to be eaten. However, it is not just about learning and hard work, but building relationships within college and the wider community. So it is not unknown for members to be seen socializing with each other, in the quad, talking, laughing, exchanging stories, drinking tea and eating biscuits, after an afternoon of healthy work!

Chickens and Rabbits

Activities involve a seven day, fifty-two week chicken and rabbit rota, manned by members, to feed, water and clean out the chicken coops, chicken run and rabbit hutches, plus collecting the hens' eggs. Chickens run free range through the day in a large fenced off natural area and currently we care for 24 hens which include Bantams, Light Sussex and rescued ex-battery Hybrids; but we are looking to increase the number and variety of hens by spring 2013 to 60! The 3 female rabbits have an extensive grassy run, and can be seen running round during break and lunch time. They tend to be the female members' favourites!



With guidance, members overcome fear of handling domesticated livestock, learn and experience responsibility and care by looking after them, their welfare and safety and feeding them a healthy, varied diet, within a unique, natural environment. Members also love to collect the eggs and with the hens' new improved free range surroundings we have increased the size and flavour of our eggs. The record was a 3 and 1/8 ounce, or 90 gram egg! The chickens lay between 14 and 23 eggs a day, which we sell to staff and members. There is always a waiting list for our hens' tasty fresh eggs!



Poly Tunnel

Members can get involved with building, maintenance and repair works. In addition to the new fencing and gates built by members during the summer for the chickens' free range area, they also erected a poly tunnel during Artcetra week 2012. They have been improving the poly tunnel soil and planted cucumbers, purple sprouting broccoli, spring cabbage, garlic and some strawberries. The cucumbers were really tasty and juicy!



Vegetable Plot

Members work very hard on the vegetable plot, which is undergoing a huge transformation, through soil improvement, edging boards, winter planting and preparation for a large fruit cage to protect the produce. Members dig over the ground, spread compost and nourishing chicken manure, whilst constantly weeding the plot. Their hard work is excitedly rewarded when planted seeds burst through the surface alive and green and eventually, harvest. Our summer onions won a 'highly commended' at the local horticultural show!

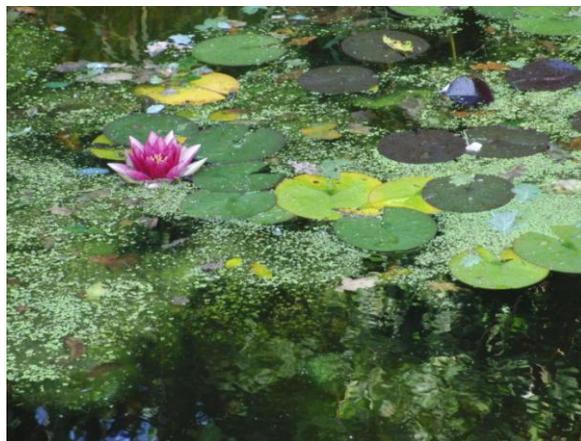


Soft Fruit, Fruit Trees and Hedgerow

We have some soft fruits; currant; gooseberry; raspberries; strawberries; and a few fruit trees, which members helped move and re-plant in late autumn. The hedge row, a recently planted variety of trees and shrubs was done with the help of the Horticultural Society, but is still in the infancy stage and a few years off from being really productive, however, we did have a couple of crab apple fruits on two trees. We are excitedly hard at work researching and planning for an orchard to be planted during autumn/spring 2013/14. In the meantime, our raspberries are still to die for!

Pond

Members get to see nature at work in and around the pond. After a summer of care, cleaning out and sorting pond plants, more cleaning and topping up water levels, removing rubbish and barrow loads of leaves, we have been rewarded with crystal clear water and an abundance of new wildlife, including three different types of dragon fly, damselflies, caddice flies, and now, we reckon, common stickleback fish!



Overall, the project is one of those rare activities, allowing pupils to experience a sense of achievement through team work and their own individual hard work and determination, pitted against the forces of nature, its weather and seasons, bringing success and achievement within the encouragement, guidance and determination of all Growing Together Project staff, supporting friends and members, which allows them to explore their own limits, realize growing achievements and set goals. The Growing Together Project breathes fresh air into all project members!