

Aston University Food Growing Project

Summary

Staff and students at Aston University are being given the opportunity to grow their own food thanks to a new initiative from the Environment Team. The team had stalls last year to give out pots, compost and seeds along with advice and information. These stalls were to promote interest in the new growing area in Lakeside Residence, set up in 2014. The area has four raised beds and last year volunteers successfully grew herbs, salad leaves and vegetables that they could pick as they wanted.

In the 2015 growing season, the team will give out more plants to promote interest in the project and encourage more volunteers to get involved. There shall also be collaboration with the Aston University Campus Wildlife Group to carry out activities such as wildflower planting and building insect hotels.

The Environment Team has plans for a new growing area, which will incorporate features of the Biodiversity Action Plan into this: a bee hive, wildflower area and composting bays.

The problem

Aston University is known for being a city centre campus with limited green open space. Recent demolitions and landscaping have improved the area by the Chancellor's Lake so to improve the campus even more, staff and students have been given ownership of spaces where they can grow their own produce.

The approach

- Promote interest by setting up 'growing stalls' with free seeds.
- Encourage staff and students to send in photos of their plants to social media sites.
- Hold regular lunchtime sessions with staff and students to maintain the raised beds.
- Where possible, give produce to Catering - we provided herbs to use in a vegetable soup, which was given out as a freebie in Freshers' Week.

Our goals

- Increase the number of staff and student volunteers.
- Develop a new growing area with features such as a bee hive, wildflower area, compost bays and an earth oven. This site is sunnier, so will get more success rate with growing, and shall be promoted as a social space and events area for staff and students.
- Increase rates of involvement on social media and include 'growing competitions'.



LiFE Framework:
Biodiversity



Aston University
Birmingham



FREE Grow Aston Event

- Help out at the Lakeside allotments.
- Take away pots and seeds to grow your own!

Wed 5th Nov, meet 1.15pm in MB Reception



Obstacles and solutions

Obstacles	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The growing season does not coincide with the student academic calendar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try and engage students as early on as possible and look at things that can be grown inside earlier in the year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A shaded growing area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select salads, herbs and vegetables that are suitable for this area and look at plans for a new area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited space for growing area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at existing borders that could be converted into herb and salad boxes, particularly next to student residences.

Performance and results

Numerous staff and students have grown everything from sunflowers, tomatoes to salad leaves on their windowsills. Participants were encouraged to send in photos of their progress to Green Aston Uni's Facebook and Twitter page to promote the project and to promote food growing more widely.

Over 100 staff and students collected their chilli plants in April 2015 and the Environment Team hope this has promoted a lot more interest and shall increase rates of participation.

The current growing area is quite shaded but volunteers were still able to grow a variety of herbs and salad leaves successfully and we aim to do this again this year, with the aim of the new growing space to be established by next year.

Further information

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Environment and Sustainability site:
<http://www.aston.ac.uk/about/environment/>



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