

Stroud LETS Allotment

Summary

A shared triple allotment that provides vegetables for the families who work it and, during summer months, additional boxes of veg which are sold for LETS (a local exchange trading system).

History

Stroud had one of the first Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) as an alternative to cash in the UK. In 1980 a group of LETS members took on an allotment in Summer Street, Stroud. They paid themselves \$5 LETS per hour for their work on the allotment and bought vegetables from the allotment using LETS.

In 1989 the group took on a second, adjoining allotment. By 1991 there was a significant surplus of vegetables during the summer months so the group started to sell the surplus for cash or LETS at Stroud Farmers' Market. However due to an increase in the cost of a market stall, new trading standards restrictions on weighing machines and concerns from the allotment committee about selling vegetables, the group decided not to sell on the market.

As an alternative, the group set up a small box scheme. This provides 3 families with a box of vegetables every week between June and September.

Organisation

There are four regular allotment workers - all LETS members. They meet every Friday morning for 3 hours to work the 3 adjoining allotments. There are another five workers who join us occasionally.

We have an annual meeting to plan our crop list for the following year. We grow vegetables to our own taste and sell the surplus, rather than planning to grow vegetables for sale.

We do not use any pesticides or artificial fertilisers. We grow organically and use some biodynamic practices.

Those who have space at home, start seedlings. Others take the onion crop for drying or the seed potatoes for chitting.

To fit in with the allotment association system three of us have each signed individual tenancy agreements on three single adjoining allotments. There is some eyebrow raising from some of the more traditional allotment holders at our 'cooperative' practices, but one of our regulars also has a standard single allotment that he works in the 'normal' way ie one person to one allotment - he just enjoys working with us on a Friday morning!

We have lots of discussion about the best time to plant things and when to prune the plum tree, but it is all very good natured and we end up with a good combination of gardening wisdom.

Finance

Regular customers - who are all LETS members - pay for their boxes with LETS and cash. They commit to paying for a box every week between June and September. If they do not need the box, they arrange for someone else to take it. Some regular customers collect the box from the allotment on a Friday morning, some pay a small delivery charge. Boxes cost £/\$10 per week if collected from the allotment and £/\$12 per week if they are delivered.

Cash raised from sale of vegetables is kept in a joint bank account held by two of the regular workers. It is used to buy seed, manure, allotment rent (£7 per year per allotment), petrol for the strimmer, wheelbarrow repairs, etc. There is no surplus in the bank account.

A record sheet is used to monitor the number of boxes provided over a season. At the end of the season, customers sign off the sheet and pay the cash balance (usually one third of the total) into the LETS allotment bank account. The LETS balance (two thirds of the total) is recorded in the

Some customers come up to the allotment on an ad hoc basis and buy whatever surplus is available. A separate record sheet is kept for each of these customers and they settle up at the end of the season in the same way.

Activities

On a typical Friday morning we arrive about 9.30 to 10am and do a bit of work before a leisurely coffee break (around a fire to boil water for hot drinks in the winter). We have built a curved bench around a grass area in the middle of the 3 allotments where we sit and put the world to rights.

Several times a year we will meet socially. One of these meetings involves some serious crop list planning for the following year. One of us then takes on the task of planning the crop rotation.

This was our crop list for 2003:

Potatoes, Onions, Rhubarb, Black and red currants, Autumn raspberries, Lettuces - red and green, Peas, Broad beans, Runner beans, French beans, Tomatoes, Butternut squash, Pumpkin, Celeriac, Parsnip, Winter cabbage, Spring cabbage, Kale, Purple sprouting broccoli, Sunflowers, marigold, cornflowers, love-in-the-mist and wildflowers

Future

We took on the third allotment in 2003. In the first year we grew buckwheat as a green manure. In 2004 we will grow potatoes in half of it and apple trees surrounded by a wildflower meadow in the other half. In 2005 we will follow the potatoes with soft fruit.

We hope to attract new workers including people from disadvantaged groups. One of us already work with people with mental health problems on the allotment.