Lower Bush Farm CIC

Pollinator garden project 2021 - 2022

Introduction

Lower Bush Farm was awarded £2000 towards the construction of a pollinator garden.

The Farm works a variety of client groups including, adults with learning disabilities, teenagers with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, and children with various special educational needs. The aim was to include groups in the design, construction and planting of the garden.

Long term groups will assist with the maintenance and after care of the plants, including, planting, pruning, weeding, pond maintenance and structure maintenance.

Aims

- Increase the number of pollinators

- Use the project as part of the students' Land and Environment course.

- Teens to recognise the importance of pollinators for larger animals and for pollinating other plants including food for humans.

- Holiday club children aged 8+ getting involved with basic planting and bug hotels.

- Increase the number of beehives at the farm due to an abundance of food.

Project management

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The initial phase was the hire of a mini digger to landscape the area including three linked ponds, paths, steps, fire pit area and south facing slope. Time was volunteered by one of our members of staff to do this.

This phase was successful and the area grassed over quickly.

One member of staff, Neil, took responsibility for the construction of the ponds as he has created several ponds at different sites in the past. The students assisted with the grading of the sides, building the waterfall and laying the pond liner.

After this point the site started to take shape, with distant areas appearing.

From September the SEMH and SEND level 1 students started work on their OCN Land and Environment courses. Units include, Habitat Management and Using Tools and Equipment for a Practical Activity.

The three areas of the wildlife garden are three distinct habitats that require different considerations:

- Ponds

- Shady woodland

- Sunny south facing grassy slope

The first part of the school year they focused on the construction elements of the site and developed the pond area.

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Pond habitat work

Students researched pond plants needed for various animals including, frogs and dragonflies. They planted marginal plants, submerged plants, oxygenating plants and flowering plants around the banks that are beneficial to pollinators.

Ponds pictures (the pump pipe work still needs digging in)

Top pond, waterfall, marginal plants, flowering pond side plants




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Construction work

Students have assisted with the design and construction of various paths, steps, archways, rustic gates and pergolas. We printed many ideas from Pinterest to inspire the students. They decided that they wanted the construction projects to look like they had grown organically from the site so we have used mostly rustic wood including branches and logs rather than square sawn timber.

Students have learnt many specific skills with tools such as drills, saws, tape measure, set squares, hammers and fencing equipment. They have also learnt transferable skills including, group work, problem solving and conflict resolution.

The woodland area has been easier to design and build in because it already had natural windy walkways between the trees we could develop.

As many of our students have short attention spans we broke the construction project into lots of smaller projects that took a few session to complete. One particularly successful mini project in the woodland area is, a small timber bridge under which they have planted a, 'river' of bluebells surrounded by a 'beach' of yellow wood anemones.

The grassy slope is taking also shape. The initial beds were established at the start of the school year and this spring it is great to watch the plants get that bit bigger and infill some of the gaps.

Some of the students, with our carpenter, have designed and constructed a small decking area in the middle of the area. It's south facing and people enjoying chatting and having lunch.

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Decking area and pergodas on the south facing slope

Hazel and willow weaving to stop people walking on the lavender and creeping thyme beds either side of the path

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Students used draw knives to peel the bark off the upright hazel poles and then collected thinner hazel to make the fence. The left hand fence is along the pond to protect the plants on the edges and stop people falling in

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Log steps from the pond area to the woodland area. Various bulbs have been planted here too as well as alpine strawberrys and creeping thyme

The log steps in the background turned out particually well. A small fairy door is against the tree at the top of the steps

Bridge with rope marking out where the bluebell, 'river' is planted. We're looking forward to seeing the flowers bloom here

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The main path through the woodland habitat towards the first set of log steps. We need more chip to be delivered

Log archway, boardwalk and log railings along one side of the woodland, this will have flowering climbers and ivy to help it blend in even more.
Pergola with climbing Jasmin and wild strawberries

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Planting

Early on I emailed www.hettysherbs.co.uk to ask for recommendations regarding native plants for the woodland area and the south facing bank. Not only did they give me lots of advice and time, they also sent us a whopping £5000 worth of native plants at the cost of only £500! This has meant that the project is bigger and better than we could have hoped. We have plants left to replace any that die and to continue expanding the wildlife garden. Projects such as the spiral bee garden, pizza wheel herb garden, hexagon bee garden and many, many planters around the farm are full of beautiful native plants beneficial to pollenating insects. We will always be eternally grateful to Hetty's Herbs for this very kind gift.

It was decided that the planting would, in some areas, be the last part of the project as we did not want people walking on new plants whilst working on the construction projects.

Students have researched pond plants, native plants for the shady woodland and plants beneficial to pollinators that prefer full sun for the south facing slope.

The woodland area has a softer, traditional focus and includes plants that flower at different times of the season. Plants including, snowdrops, bluebells, wild strawberries, wild garlic, iris and wild daffodils. We have some areas that look more designed, such as the bluebell river, but the overall look is as if the plants have been there for a long time.

Some of these plants are bulbs that were planted this year so we are all looking forward to seeing the final affect once they come up. The smell of the wild garlic is quite strong already and the wild strawberries very tasty.

Around the pond we have continued to plant plants that like damp ground and partial sun and shade. The scheme around the pond is lighter colours including blue, whites, pinks and purples. Bees particularly like blue flowers so we have a focus on lavender, hyssops and several buddleia. The pond edges have marginal plants as bees and butterflies need to be able to drink. Indeed last summer our honey bees were already buzzing around the pond and using the lilies and marginal plants for sitting on to drink.

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The south facing slope is taking shape. We have a focus on perennial plants for pollinators which will get larger each season. The annual plants will be included as part of the on going maintenance. A mixture of heights, colour and flowers have been used including a path lined with lavender and creeping thyme, Jasmin climbing up student made pergolas, cascading rosemary and feverfew. We have several evergreen bushes and other flowering bushes in large pots and that we are in the process of trying in different locations before planting them. Plants include, white, blue and pink hyssop, fennel, lots of lavender, pennyroyal, creeping rosemary and borage.

To split this sunny area up students have planted a curving path/river of bulbs including different dahlias in the middle and smaller native bulbs from various pollinator friendly multipacks.

Around the area we have also had other construction/planting projects including, a spiral bee garden, pizza wheel herb garden, hexagon (honey comb shape) bee garden and many long flower and herb beds.

This spring we are able to see the site develop as the plants unfold, start to green up and grow. The first few flowers are out and we are all looking forward to a very colourful late spring and summer.

Daffadils in the sun

River of bluebells and beach of Wood Anemone

Wild daffadil bulbs

Wild garlic

One of several willow fedges

Honey suckle and forget me nots

Pizza wheel herb garden will flower later in the summer, includuing, rosemary, creeping rosemary, thyme, chives, mint, fenal, oregano and marjoram.

Spiral bee garden with many pereninals and some annuals some are just starting to bud

Chives, lavender and alpine strawberries in the spiral bee garden

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Various hanging baskets of alpine strawberries, cascading rosemary, etc.

Many fruit bushes including honey berry

Pots of lavender and rosemary

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Mixed beds of herbs and lavender

Honey comb hexagon bee garden made by student from two special educational needs and disabilities schools

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Future of the project

- Maintaining structure

- Weeding

- Replacing dead or diseased plants

- Tying in Jasmin and other climbers

- Planting annual plants beneficial to pollinators

- Continuing the planting around the south face slope to join up with the area already planted up with various bulbs over the years

- Students and ALD service users to learn gardening and construction skills

- Everyone to gain a deeper understanding of how the natural world works in terms of plants for different growing conditions and the importance of pollinating insects