



Climate change and the gardening community

Introduction:

The predicted effects of climate change are well known. In plans for amelioration of its impact, most emphasis has been placed on renewable energy and attempts to reduce the carbon footprint. What has hardly been recognized is that responsible gardening is one of the biggest contributions ordinary people can make to adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Gardens have a crucial role to play both in reducing the effects of climate change and in helping us to understand the changes that are already taking place. Producing their own food enables people to reduce their carbon footprint as well providing local community networks and a leisure activity for all the family. Gardens provide important corridors/refuges for species of wild life and plants at risk from climate change. Gardening involving caring for and covering the soil, can help to reduce the problems of flooding and pollution and thereby reduce the cause, as well as the impact, of climate change.

Climate change, food production and allotments:

The city of Toronto has looked at the carbon and environmental impact of food and food systems and finds that 30-40% of its carbon footprint comes in one way or another from food related activities: transportation, energy growing, retailing. Growing 10% of the vegetables in the city would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 37.9 kilotonnes a year, help meet Toronto's commitments to reduce global warming, and avoid more than \$5 million in environmental costs.ⁱ Growing your own food involves caring for the soil, composting, and growing plants from seeds, it reduces transportation, packaging and waste, the energy input is mainly from the sun and from the gardener's physical labour. In addition allotments provide a space where the local community can share knowledge as well as plants and produce.

Climate change, biodiversity and gardens

Climate change leads to loss of biodiversity, which is the natural framework underpinning social and economic sustainability and so impacts on social and economic well-being.

The report on 'Gardening in the Global Greenhouse: The Impacts of Climate Change on Gardens in the UK'ⁱⁱ suggests that 'By regarding the garden as a microcosm of the wider environment and using it to develop and demonstrate practices which will alleviate and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, the gardening community has the potential to set an example of good practice which will further increase public appreciation of and support for gardens and which could ultimately alter the course of climate change....Gardens and parks are invaluable components in a green web. They support and at times replace the fragile network of natural ecosystems and will have a vital role to play in extending a system of ecological corridors through which wildlife can migrate in response to climate change. Good soil management and maintenance of a healthy plant cover in gardens provide a model which, if reproduced on a national and international scale, will do much to slow the pace of climate change and to reduce its impact.'

Climate change, changing attitudes and gardens:

Michael Pollanⁱⁱⁱ (Guardian June 2008) says. '[by gardening]..At least in this one corner of your yard and life, you will have begun to heal the split between what you think and what you do, to commingle your identities as consumer and producer and citizen.' Andrew Thin, Chairman SNH says 'Having an allotment or a garden is good for you. Not just because it keeps you fit and (potentially) supplies you with high quality food. But because the nature that we find there is part of the context that helps to determine our wellbeing and state of mind.'^{iv}

It is accepted that in adapting to climate change we need to change our attitudes and values. Gardening helps to do just that.

Possible Actions:

Policy makers should

- promote responsible gardening as one of the biggest contributions ordinary people can make to adaptation and mitigation of climate change
- ensure that national and local strategic frameworks - such as Open Space Strategies, Sustainable Community Strategies and local plans – include access to land for gardening and environmental activities.

Local authorities and allotment organizations should

- work together to ensure that suitable land is made available for gardening communities.
- recognise the collective impact of gardening in spreading community and environmental action

Long term Aims:

The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society would like

1. a representative body to produce a strategy and action plan for a nationwide commitment to gardening agenda.
2. government agencies involved with employment and economic opportunities to assess the contribution the gardening sector could make to Scotland by improving the local environment, creating new business and making a real, practical difference to the urban and rural land-scape.
3. the health service to recognize and promote the contribution gardening makes to health and well being.
4. local authorities to make long term strategic provision for accessible gardening for local communities thus providing the means to implement the requirements of the planning regulations.
5. councils, public agencies, professional bodies, education establishments, gardening societies to develop, in partnership, a range of policies which include the design and implementation of national and regional programmes of management, gardening skills and environmental research.

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society

www.sags.org.uk

ⁱ http://www.toronto.ca/food_hunger/pdf/food_charter.pdf

ⁱⁱ Bisgrove, R. and Hadley, P. (2002) *Gardening in the Global Greenhouse: The Impacts of Climate Change on Gardens in the UK*. Technical Report. UKCIP, Oxford.
www.rhs.org.uk/research/climate_change/documents/climate_technical.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jun/06/ethicalliving.food>

^{iv} keynote speech joint conference ‘Cultivating Sustainable Scottish Cities and Towns in the 21st Century’ June 2008 Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society and Centre for the Built Environment