

Kensington Gardens Square

photo by KGSOSA

GOING WITH THE FLOW OF NATURE



A bat box, left, and owl box, right, are having their hanging supports tested before being put high up in the trees. photo by KGSOSA



The garden's compost is carefully formulated and managed until it is ready to be spread on the ground.

Kensington Gardens Square, W2, is run by a garden committee determined to work with nature to keep the garden beautiful and well nourished through environmentally friendly means.

Judging from the lush and healthy appearance of the square, which was open to the public in June on Open Garden Squares Weekend, the philosophy is working extremely well. The wormery, the leaf recycling process, the mulching regime and other practices were delivering impressive results.

The garden committee's mission includes spreading the word about how the garden is being managed. An extensive and well-designed website, www.ksgarden.org.uk, maintained by Monica Zgurova and Jan Kremer, gives a good overview of what is happening in the garden, with photographic illustrations. And during Open Weekend there were eight information sheets placed around the garden explaining what was going on at various spots.

Gardening firm One Two Tree tends the square, and garden committee spokesman Jim Rea said the company is in tune with practices such as leaving fallen leaves in the flower beds. Another contractor, Tim George of Tim George Tree Services Ltd. contributes wood chippings from his tree cuttings for the flower beds. He has also devised a way to install bat and owl boxes to trees without damage to the trunks (see photo, upper left). Even the horses at a nearby stable get in on the act – their manure is used in the compost.

The garden committee members set out their story in the information sheet below which was distributed during the open day in June.

"The ecology of this garden is being restored via a management regime designed around a policy of nutrient recycling – especially that of nitrogen and carbon.

The basis of this programme is that we now keep on site and recycle all organic waste generated within the garden via a traditional 'hot composting process'.

Levels of organic matter are augmented by introducing material high in nitrogen, including horse manure from Hyde Park Stables (hot composted to kill weed seeds and break down substances such as antibiotics administered to the horses), blood and bone (sterilized via a cooking process in its manufacture) and chicken pellets in the sacks to your left, stacked up next to the garden shed.



The worms in this box are fed green kitchen waste and in return they secrete nutrients that are returned to the soil. Residents are invited to join "the worm farm community" to help maintain the box.

In addition to this, 30 cu metres of tree chippings are now being added to the garden borders each year. These come from trees shredded locally by various arboriculture firms. Piles of chippings are left to age for three to six months to break down tannins and other organic substances found naturally in leaves and bark. This is then spread to create a humic layer on top of the soil within the borders.

Delivering impressive results

This encourages a local 'food chain' within the garden, allowing plant material to break down via the action of fungi, bacteria, worms and insects. This mulch substrate provides a habitat within which this 'decomposing' flora and fauna live. This regenerates the soil with organic matter as the worms take it down into the soil in burrows, excreting it as worm



Instead of border tiles, small lengths of wood are used to create a border for the beds.

casts which contain high levels of plant-available nutrients.

The humic layer also serves as a gigantic 'sponge', allowing water retention throughout the dry months of the year, reducing plant water stress and allowing plants to continue growing through the summer when they would otherwise shut down due to lack of water.

The principle is very much to feed the soil. This in turn feeds the plants and replaces the need for fertilizer and irrigation.

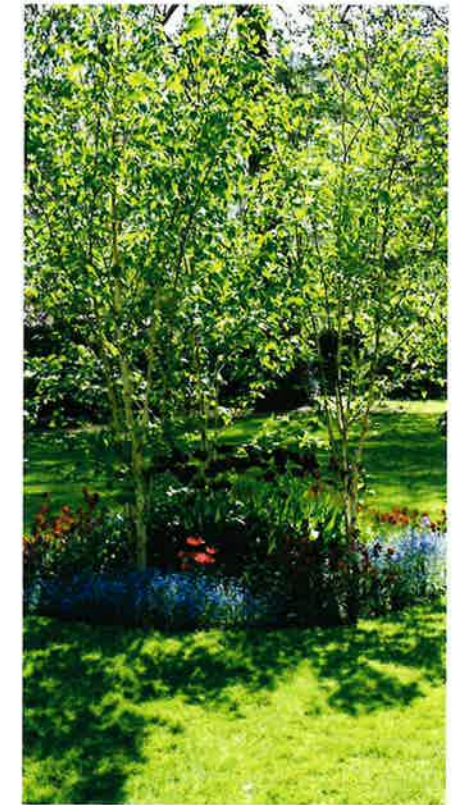
This programme reverses a 150-year policy of removing surplus 'waste' organic matter from the garden, (leaves, hedge and lawn clippings etc.) that has resulted in the garden soil being depleted of organic matter. This in turn places stress on the trees and hedging and dramatically reduces the habitat and food for animals further up the food chain.

The aim of this programme is to restore the ecology of the garden and encourage a local food chain where both living plants and dying plants coexist, building a stronger ecosystem in which insects and microorganisms (fungi and bacteria) thrive.

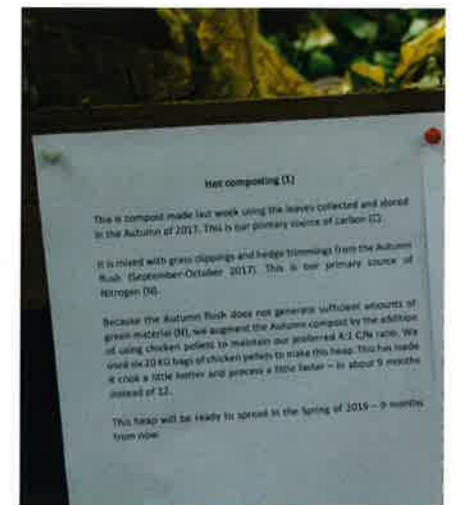
We are now starting to see the results of this approach with healthier plant life, an increase in birds and the appearance of higher mammals (a tawny owl & pipistrelle bats) that inhabit the garden.

Over time this programme will allow us to introduce more horticulturally interesting plants that are much more demanding of water and nutrients.

We will take this opportunity to select different species of plants that encourage wildlife populations but also species that are threatened or endangered in the wild."



The garden is thriving under the sustainable care it receives. photo by KGSOSA



Visitors on the open day were offered detailed instructions on how to create the best compost. This is one of three pages.