

Nightingale News

For the Friends of Nightingale Garden

November 2022

Gardening in 2022+

This is a new-look newsletter for us. It is produced in Word, which we hope will encourage more people to contribute to it and also be much more efficient for its editor to produce. The file sizes are smaller too.

In early October 2022, Julian and Rebecca gave notice to the City Council that they will be stepping down from their unpaid garden co-ordinator roles, by October 2023, but preferably sooner. They have been involved with this project since the garden started in 2014. They are also Treasurer and Secretary of the constituted group that runs the garden with the City Council.

In the new year, the constituted garden group will continue planning for managing this transition. It is also a good time to think about the future vision for the garden and ways to manage it that are sustainable in at least the short-term.

We will keep the Friends updated and also ask for their help.

From February

2023, we aim to recruit some more gardening volunteers, especially as Julian and Rebecca will be doing progressively less, and eventually no, practical work in the garden.

For this issue, we will focus on projects we have completely recently and update you on some in progress. Do let us know what you think.



In the garden: the garden bounces back after the Summer drought



We have been surprised (and hugely relieved) by how quickly the garden plants – especially the grass – have recovered after the extreme heat and drought of Summer 2022.

Some annual plants such as tobacco (see photo above) that refused to grow, despite watering, are now flowering months later than expected,

although often they are much shorter in height than usual.

The dahlias are now really good (see photo to right) and, hopefully, we shall have flowers from them until the first frosts hit the garden, which is usually in the first week of November.



Meadows of all kinds at Nightingale

Some will remember that the community garden started in 2015 with sown meadows in the bowling green area. They were an experiment for the City Council.

Bare earth was seeded with four annual meadow mixes: a cornfield (British) wildflower mix from Emorsgate and three mixes from Pictorial Meadows, which are well-designed mixes of 'garden' and 'native' varieties to give a very long season of interest.

The resulting meadows astonished people with their beauty and attracted a lot of insect life. The success of this experiment led to all the areas across the City that are now meadow beds of various kinds.

The Nightingale meadow areas have changed a lot since then. Until about 2017, some were re-sown with different annual Pictorial Meadows mixes, increasingly not relying on glyphosate treatment. These were then converted to three kinds of sown perennial Pictorial Meadows beds. These are all cut with a scythe late in the season and some are cut by hand in mid-Summer too to encourage a second flush of flowers from some plants.



In addition to these sown meadow areas, some areas of grass at Nightingale have not been sown or cultivated since 2015. Of these, some have been left to become tussocky grass, which is great for insects especially crickets and is also popular with mouse-hunting cats (see photo below left). They don't have many wildflowers in them.

Some areas of grass have been deliberately cut short with our mower. Although long grass is fashionable at the moment, we also like to support the pollinators who prefer short grass or bare earth and also green woodpeckers who look for ants in very short grass.

The consequence of all of this is that the garden now has extensive and very diverse grassy areas and also a good stock of wildflowers amongst all the garden varieties. Some of the wildflowers will be from our purchased seed or have come in with imported top soil and some, like lady's bedstraw, have probably been there since before we started gardening. The seeds from all these plants survive our cold composting very well.

In September 2022, one of our volunteers Anne had a great idea to trial two new mini hay meadows in an area that hasn't been cultivated before by us (see next article). They are along the East side of the garden, between the path and the hedge.



Scheme for two new hay meadows

Sowing seed into bare ground is only one way of making a wildflower meadow. An alternative method, which I feel more comfortable with, is to take an existing grassy area and manage it as a hay meadow



with one or two well-timed cuts each year. The mowings are taken away after each cut, gradually reducing the fertility of the soil. The grass becomes less lush, giving wildflowers the conditions they need to flourish.

The area that we've chosen for this new project at Nightingale includes some ornamental borders, but enough grass remains to make a worthwhile trial area. We've divided it into two parts:

- A Spring meadow between the Minibeast Mansion and the water tower.
- A Summer meadow between the water tower and the entrance gate.

The Spring meadow already has snowdrops and cowslips in the cordon apple bed along the path. We hope they will seed into the grass and we can add plugs of small plants too.

In October, we planted some purchased Spring bulbs in the grass (daffodils and snakeshead fritillaries – see photo above) and can add more 'in the green' next Spring. Lady's smock, self-heal and bugle are among the wildflowers that might appear in our Spring meadow.

The Summer meadow area already has lady's bedstraw and ribwort plantain growing in the grass. In October, we sowed it with donated yellow rattle seeds (see photo to right), collected by volunteers Gill and Justin. This is an attractive annual parasite of grass, which we hope will weaken the grass and help wildflowers to flourish. Suitable plants for a Summer meadow include knapweed and devil's bit scabious.

We bought a pack of camassia bulbs and harvested bulbs of allium 'Purple Sensation' from

beds in the garden. The camassia and this allium both flower in May and June and it isn't clear whether they'll do best in the Spring or Summer meadow. So we've planted them in both areas and will wait to see what happens.

These two meadows will need mowing twice a year. The first cut will be at different times:

- For the Summer meadow: early in the season, perhaps in March but certainly by the end of April.
- For the Spring meadow: around the end of June.

In both cases, the second cut needs to be in the Autumn.

When the grass is cut from hay meadows, it's usually a good idea to leave the mowings on the ground for a few days to allow seed to drop. After that, the mowings must be collected up, otherwise they will increase soil fertility as they decay. If the soil becomes too fertile, grasses will out-compete the flowering plants that we want to encourage.

It's said that the signal for the second (Autumn) cut is the rattling from the seedheads of yellow rattle.



Our new hay meadows don't have any yellow rattle growing in them yet so this year we just cut them when it was convenient and didn't need to wait for seeds to fall.

Making a hay meadow is a gradual process and instant results are not to be expected. In a few years' time, we hope to have a diversity of meadow flowers along this Eastern edge of the garden. Lessons learnt can be applied elsewhere in the garden too and maybe all our meadow areas will inspire mini-meadows in gardens in other parts of the City. **Anne Davenport, volunteer gardener**

In the garden: our first grapes and pears

In September 2022, we were delighted to find two tiny bunches of grapes on our vine (see photo). We also noticed we had two pears growing to ripeness (see photo), above the



reach of fingers, which is our first potential orchard crop from the garden. Both pears fell and one was rescued and eaten and one just fed garden wildlife.

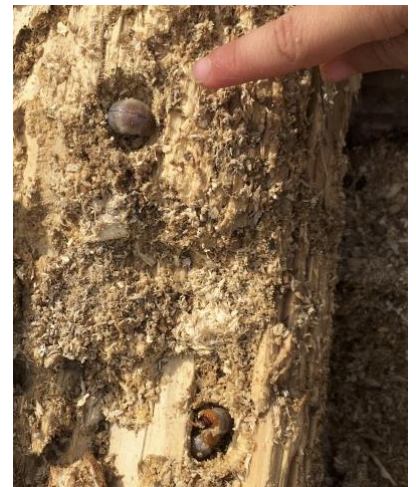


Supporting biodiversity: grubs galore!

For some years, we have had some logs half-buried in a circle, originally for children to sit on – or hop from. Since then, they have been slowly rotting down. This Summer, Justin (a past volunteer) spotted that one lying on its side was also being eaten from within by some very hungry fat grubs (see photo) - to the delight of his young son Felix, but also the adult volunteers in the garden at the time. It is always good to be surprised by nature in the garden.

We covered the grubs over to stop them being very quickly munched by birds. If we can get

some more large logs (not from conifers), we think we will make part of the original log circle into a turf-buried log mound. To see if we can feed even more beetles.



Recent get togethers: Moon festival shadow theatre



At the beginning of September, we celebrated Chinese Moon Festival by telling the story of Lin Yi's Lantern in our shadow theatre. The shadow



theatre itself has developed quite a lot since we first put some pieces of

wood and a bit of fabric together around this time last year. It even had some very last-minute curtains added. As with previous stories that we have told in the shadow theatre, it was a true community effort! Thank you so much to everyone who stepped up and spent an evening making shadow puppets, working out the logistics, volunteered to read the story, played the puppets, took photos and for all the hands-on help with set-up and clear-up. We are planning more shadow theatres for later this year and Spring time. Get in touch if you would like to get involved or have any ideas!



Get-togethers coming up

We hope to do something for St Martin's Day in the late afternoon of Saturday 19 November (4–6pm). Julia and Eli are organising this.

They might also do something for families on Tree Dressing Day on Sunday 4 December or on 6 December.

Thanks and request for gardening assistance

As always, thanks to the Friends for supporting the garden and all the volunteers for creating it and keeping it going in many ways. Also to Julia and Bronwen for updating the garden poem at regular intervals (see photo).

We could do with some more practical gardening help during November and then we take a break from regular gardening sessions until mid-February.

About the Friends

This newsletter is produced by Nightingale Gardeners a constituted group run by volunteers for the Friends of Nightingale Garden. Join for £10, or as much as you can afford, annually (see the website for details). This helps support the garden for expenses like insurance, tools and plants.

One-off donations are also very gratefully received to: Nightingale Gardeners, Lloyds Bank; Sort code: 30 65 65 Account number: 631 76568.

Weather allowing, we'd like to have a get together on New Year's Day afternoon – this has been a very happy time in past years. We can update you on these in the next December newsletter – and see the website too, which has been recently slimmed down to make it easier to find information.

Our regular sessions are on Monday afternoons and Wednesday mornings, with a few extra Sunday afternoon ones. See the gardening page of the website for dates. Sessions are not 'drop-in', so please let us know on the garden e-mail (see below) if you would like to join in.



You can donate via the garden website: nightingalegarden.org.uk (or use the QR code to the right).

Also online on Facebook:
NightingaleGardenCambridgeUK

E-mail: info@nightingalegarden.org.uk.

Visit us: Nightingale
Community Garden,
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