

## Allotment Site Open Day for the National Gardens Scheme(charity)

At the 166 plots on Ashbourne Road and District Allotments (ARDA) in Derby city centre, beautifully painted sheds stand proud dominating the plots like beach huts at the seaside. Close by (and dotted about) are grand poly tunnels crammed with plants and seedlings 6 weeks ahead of their namesakes outside in the raised beds. Fruit trees in full blossom dominate the skyline under- planted with remnants of spring flowers which can be seen along the well mown paths in each direction of the site. New growth is about to burst through the finely- tithed soil on plots which themselves have been chopped in size to make way for the creation of the more modern, manageable, enjoyable family plot.

This is a picture the majority of our plot holders have been able to relish every day through lockdowns in the last 12 months and how grateful have they been? Very! So how do they show their gratitude to others? By agreeing to open the allotment gates and works with The National Garden Scheme (NGS) allowing visitors into the 9acre oasis and sharing gardening secrets of success with anyone who can stand and listen long enough!



The National Garden Scheme (NGS) raising money for nursing and health charities for over 90 years through its opening of private gardens to the public on specific days of the year. The gardens range from large country house estates to small town gardens. What is less well known is that the Scheme includes 39 allotment groups among its hundreds of gardens opening across the country.

On the day of the event at Ashbourne Rd, visitors moved towards the entrance gate, they were handed an NGS booklet together with a map and dossier of the allotments. As they veered through the entrance, visitors were confronted with the 'The Cart Meal'. A white wooden cart laden with freshly picked rhubarb that was repeatedly replenished throughout the day. Jars of home-made jellies and jams and bundles of lavender picked from the plots in 2020 were also donated and again, all free of charge, though another donation bucket was placed nearby.



Plants (grown from seeds) were of a perfect size making them very popular for the visitors. The Growing Academy poly tunnel was filled with tomato, cucumber and the usual fruit and vegetable plants, together with perennial flowers, herbs and old tools donated by friends of the site and plot holders. Numbers were 'managed' through

the doors and folk were politely ushered from one end of the tunnel to the other (in a very orderly manner) but enabled people to peruse and choose on route in comfort and tranquillity.

In addition, many plot holders opened gates to their plots and admiring visitors were able to ramble round each, asking questions whilst observing COVID guidance.

Families with children ventured onto the 'Centenary Plot' created 4 years previously where they could have the 'proper' allotment experience. By digging for gold with trowels and riddling the soil for nuggets (sprayed stones) and pennies as unusually, the site was a place with nothing for children to buy, but instead, a place to absorb the real experience of allotmenting.

And of the benefits? More people in the community had a day out on the site that they may never otherwise have had the pleasure of doing. The donation buckets are still being sorted and contents counted and an overwhelming feeling of happiness from truly working in partnership with an organisation that supports so many other charities which have not been able to function and in some cases, support families in the community in this last 12 months.



I suppose one thing I have forgotten to mention is that our first day did coincide with 'World Naked Gardening Day'! Enough said!

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