



## **We Grow Guide: Joining a Growing Group**

### **Introduction**

Welcome to the We Grow community! We hope you really enjoy connecting with whoever you find to grow food together.

Please see this guide as a set of suggestions rather than what you should or shouldn't be doing in your group. Ultimately, it's your choice how you do things and to find a way to self-organise with the people you grow with. We've written here what we've witnessed tending to work and not to work, with all of the groups that we've helped get together.

Please let us know how you get on with your growing journey. And do give us a shout if you need more advice.

Happy growing!

Andi and the We Grow team

[www.wegrow.org.uk](http://www.wegrow.org.uk)

### **Starting Up**

If you've seen a piece of land on our online map that you like the look of, you'll have asked to be put in touch with the landowner.

As soon as you're in touch with them, it's up to the two of you to arrange when is best for you to visit their land. When you visit the land we suggest the following:

- When you arrange the visit by text or phone, ask the landowner whether they already have people in the growing group and if they do, whether you can meet the other people when you visit.
- When you visit the land, ask about what they're planning to grow food wise, and if there are people already in the group whether they're experienced in growing and whether you could learn from each other. Chat and get to know each other for a while, so that you can get an idea of whether the group and the land would be suited to you or not.
- After your visit when the landowner gets back to you and if you've decided you'd like to join them and they also want you to join, they should offer you a written agreement which all group members sign, so that everyone is clear on what you're each agreeing to whenever you're on their land.
- For your first gardening session together it's a good idea to draw out a plan of the plot together. There are some tips in the addendum to this guide that you're welcome to use. Or you might find other versions online.

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- If the land is near the landowner's house, we strongly suggest that unless and until you know each other well and a good deal of time has been spent together, you don't go inside their home, and that you focus on just working together on the land.
- We suggest that you don't take dogs onto the land unless the landowner has agreed to it and the dogs are kept on a lead.

## **Recommended group structure**

We recommend that each group member (or each family) takes on a role in organising the group. This is so that everyone feels empowered in an aspect of the running of the group, which makes the dynamic of the group healthy and the group is then more likely to be sustainable:

### **Money collector**

Keeps track of money going in, once you agree on a monthly amount. Sets up a bank account for the group. We suggest starting with an amount to set up the plot and also saving £2/3 per week each member (or each family), and then reviewing after a few months. This will pay for shared items like seeds, compost, tools. Keep a tally of expenditure.

### **Ordering person**

Orders seeds, compost and growing materials. In a small growing group this can be the same person as the Money Collector. Keep receipts and ask the Money Collector to log all expenditure.

### **Plot design team (2-3 people)**

Makes a plot plan, a seeding plan and a planting plan on a timeline or calendar, after asking for input from the whole group. Best done by people who have grown before. If everyone is new to growing, take guidance from online sources (see the list of resources at the end of this guide)

### **Comms person**

Sends reminders and updates in a messaging group, like What's App or Signal. Communicates with external people like other local groups, or puts out social media posts asking for items needed from the local community ie: second hand tools, shed etc.

### **End of session chat**

Brings all group members together at the end of each session for a quick chat about what the plan is for next week, and if anyone needs to order or bring anything.

### **Rota creation**

Person who creates a watering rota for the newly planted seeds or seedlings, or crops that may need regular watering during dry weeks. Or if you're keeping animals, creating a rota for feeding.

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## **Multiple roles**

The roles listed above are ideal if you're working on a large piece of land with a lot of different members. If you're working on a small piece of land or a garden or allotment and you have only a handful of members, you're best to each take on several of these roles and treating some of them as a quick deciding chat, to avoid overwork.

## **Rotation**

Roles can change over time if needed. This helps share responsibility and keeps things from falling onto the same people. We recommend you hold a longer meeting every 3 months, to chat about roles and whether anyone wants to rotate, to try something new.

## **Growing Naturally**

We suggest you practice organic, no-dig and mulching methods. You might also decide to use permaculture or biodynamic methods. We also suggest using succession planting to keep crops coming throughout the seasons, paying attention to Spring and Autumn sowings so that you ensure crops through the year, and using storing and preserving techniques. It's a good idea to do companion planting. There is lot of information online or in books. Please see our recommendations for resources at the end of this guide.

## **Healthy group dynamics**

A weekly end of session chat and a 3 monthly meeting do wonders to naturally create a healthy group dynamic. We recommend that whoever hosts these mini meetings encourages everyone to speak up if there's been any small issues or things that need to be aired. This is a great way to be preventative around the little resentments that humans sometimes naturally hold onto, so that they don't build up.

We also recommend that everyone involved in the group realises the commitment of supporting each other and stepping up for each other, if somebody is ill or needs time out for a week or two. And although every group member will need to take the odd week off, committing to turning up most weeks will be essential, so that everyone feels that there's been relatively equal amounts of work going into your plot from each member (or each family).

## **The importance of tea and cake**

We strongly recommend your group makes a weekly habit of tea and cake together, or some food, or even just sitting by a fire at the plot after a gardening session. This time is an essential ingredient to creating a healthy group dynamic. Having a chat and a laugh together is bound to bring good things to everyone.

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## **Swap events**

If there is a We Grow trained Community Leader in your area, then you may have been invited by them to join seed and seedling swap events where local groups get together. If there isn't a Community Leader in your area and you don't see any swap events being advertised, perhaps your group would like to take the lead on starting up some swap events and encouraging other people to form groups that will join you. You can download the We Grow Guide to Creating Swap Events in your Area, from our website.

## **We Grow newsletter and forums**

You will have automatically been added to our email newsletter list (unless you don't want to, in which case please let us know). You have access to companies who kindly offer We Grow groups a discount on growing related items that they sell. You can also log in to the membership area of our website where there's a noticeboard for groups to share tips and let each other know about swap events in different areas or gardening items they might be giving away or selling, or just general support between groups.

## **Resources**

### **Books**

The Earth Care Manual - Patrick Whitefield

Gaia's Garden - Toby Hemenway

Barefoot Biodynamics - Jeff Poppen

The No Dig Organic Home & Garden - Charles Dowding & Stephanie Hafferty

Carrots Love Tomatoes - Louise Riotte

The Organic Vegetable Gardener - Yvonne Cuthbertson

### **Websites**

[www.thealootmentgarden.co.uk](http://www.thealootmentgarden.co.uk)

[www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk)

[www.permaculture.org.uk](http://www.permaculture.org.uk)

### **Short how-to-grow videos**

#### **You Tube:**

Grow Veg

Nettles and Petals

Cloud Gardener UK