



## **We Grow Guide: Starting your 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 listed your land on our online map We Grow will be advertising in your area, so that people who want to join you on your land will find you on the map and get in touch with us, and if they match your preferences we'll put them in touch with you.

As soon as they're in touch with you it's up to the two of you to arrange when suits you both for them to visit your land. When people visit your land we suggest the following:

- When you arrange by text or phone for a time to visit to your land, check whether the weekly gardening time definitely suits them, ie: Saturdays 10-12. Your weekly time will have been specified on your listing for our online map already so the person will have hopefully read it then before deciding to contact you, but it's best to double check just in case, before they visit.
- At the visit to your land ask them about what they're hoping to grow, whether they've grown before, if they have experience would they be willing to show other people in the group how to grow, and whether it's only them wanting to join or would they bringing other members of the family to join in. Chat and get to know each other for a while, so that you can get an idea of whether they would suit the group you're creating or not.

# WE GROW

- Let them know if you'll be part of the growing group or not (some landowners like to and others not), and whether you'll be asking for money towards land use or water use, or whether you'll be asking for a weekly veg box as an exchange for use of your land.
- Let them know whether the plot is already set up with fencing, gates, etc, or whether the group would need to work at setting up these things.
- We suggest that if permanent things like fencing and gates are needed, that you pay for the materials. The group then puts in money to pay for temporary growing materials like compost, seeds, tools, etc.
- Let them know that you'll be in touch within a time period (so that it's clear to them when they can expect to hear from you), with an answer as to whether you'd like them to join you on your land.
- When you get back to them if you've decided you'd like them to join you and they also want to, it's a good idea to have a written agreement for all members of the group. There's an addendum to this guide with a template agreement that you're welcome to edit for your use. Or you may find other versions online.
- For your first gardening session together it's a good idea to draw out a plan of the plot together and chat through what you'd all like to grow. There are some tips in the addendum to this guide that you're welcome to use. Or you might find other versions online.
- If the land is near your house, we suggest that unless and until you know each other well and a good deal of time has been spent together, you don't allow group members inside your home, and that you focus on just working together on the land.
- We suggest that you don't allow dogs on your land unless they're 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 long-term:

### **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 putting in an amount to start with for whatever is needed for plot materials, 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.

# WE GROW

## **Ordering person**

Orders seeds, compost and other 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 as to what they want to grow. 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.

## **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.

# WE GROW

## **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's loads 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 sometimes a group member might need 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 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.

## **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

## **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