

'Celebrate your Alleygates' presents

How Green is Your Alley?



**A simple guide to greening
community spaces**



A potted history of our project:

Celebrate Your Alleygates is a Big Lottery Fund project in Whalley Range, Manchester. It was one of the winners of the Big Family Idea: a competition held by National Family Week and the Big Lottery Fund as part of the launch of National Family Week in 2009.

In 2009 Chris Ricard of the Whalley Range Forum registered with Keep Britain Tidy's 'Big Tidy Up' and got her neighbours together for a clean-up of their newly gated alley and a Celebrate our Alleygates party. They also invited people from nearby streets with gated alleys to join the party.

Having seen how the day brought people of all ages together, Chris thought this would be a great idea for National Family Week.

Chris sent 50 words describing her idea to the Big Family Idea competition and she was one of the three winners in the UK. The Big Lottery Fund awarded them £35,000 via a tendered process to take the project forward and for Celebrate Your Alleygates to work with residents of 10 gated alleys in Whalley Range.

'Winning the Big Family Idea has provided us with a fantastic opportunity for residents to work together, get to know each other better, share resources and ideas and make the neighbourhood a more friendly place for everyone.' C.R.

Chris, a community development worker has run the project with gardener Cath Wade and this booklet aims to be a basic guide to help people who want to make their own alleys and unused spaces into shared, peaceful havens.

'I had hoped this project would be a chance to find out more about plants and equipment and local suppliers but the best bit has been the real resources: all the ideas and skills, laughter and kindnesses of my neighbours.' C.W.

We tried to make the booklet as straightforward as possible but sometimes we have used technical terms and Latin plant names. Sometimes these words are the best tools for the job and they can help with finding plants and applying for grants. C.R., C.W.



GREENING YOUR ALLEYS

A SUSTAINABLE GUIDE TO IMPROVING YOUR ALLEY

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GREENING YOUR ALLEYS

How Green is Your Alley?

First Steps

Congratulations: your alley is gated and, hopefully, a safer space.

Now all you have to worry about is not losing your key.

Or perhaps there are still problems: a neighbour is using the alley as a run for their dog or as an overflow for their rubbish - or the extra effort of opening the gate is stopping some people bringing their bins back in.

Mostly what happens next though is nothing.

For some reason we don't think of the space as ours.

We may never go in it except when we drag our dustbins up and down.





Step One

Where there is a garden there is a positive person

All gardens are started by a person wanting to grow things.

A community garden is a shared garden. So even if you are only one person - if you start to grow in a shared space - you will be making a community garden.

You can make a start by yourself

If you don't feel able to speak to your neighbours yet, there is nothing to stop you doing some growing outside your back gate.

The chances are that someone will notice and either copy you or come and ask you about it.

Even if nothing happens, you will have improved your alley for everyone else and some people will be feeling the benefit.

You will also be spending more time in the alley and be getting to know the space better.

"My neighbour Sylvia says that years ago everyone used their back doors and alleys when they left their homes to shop or go to work - and she often met up with people for a chat and a catch up. The alleys are an ideal community space for people who don't have a garden to get to know each other better, to build respect between the different ages and cultures within our area, to share growing tips and to improve community safety by looking out for each other."

Step One

Take a stroll along your alley and have a really good nosey around.

Have a look at everything:

The drains and gullies - are they working well or blocked?

Any manky corners?

The walls: do they look sound?

Is anybody gardening in their yards?

Anything badly overgrown?

Anything attractively overgrown?

The ground: cobbles/concrete/tarmac?

Even/Cracked?

Evidence of dogs or cats?

Weeds?

Anything dumped?

Where is the sun?

Does the alley feel sheltered or windy?

Any dark corners?

Is anyone using the alley for plants or play?

Think about who you already know on the streets -

do you know any of the people who live behind you?

Look at the front of the houses as well and notice who looks after their garden or puts pots outside or perhaps if you are as nosey as me - who has a lot of houseplants.

You may be surprised by how long it takes you to do this.



"Before our alleys were gated we had constant problems with fly tipping, drug users, burglaries and items such as bikes stolen from back yards.

"Now the alleygates are in place, we've been working together planting flowers and herbs, providing a safe place for our children to play, keeping the area tidy and getting to know each other better."



Step two

This comes when you find someone who, like you, wants to make the alley into a shared garden.

If you met some neighbours during your walk around the alley, or if you realised there were some neighbours you knew and could work with, then you can begin to share your ideas.

Now you can take the step one walk together and begin to make plans for your alley.

Step two

Step two



Swap seeds and cuttings with your neighbours!

Grow fruit and vegetables and herbs to share

Have a street party and plant some bulbs to put in the back alley and in front of the house



Send a note:

Dear Neighbour,

Come and help clean up our alleyway and plant some bulbs on Sunday:
Everyone welcome,
tea, coffee, hot chocolate,
biscuits and cakes provided!

Thoughts to consider: One of our neighbours is planning a sensory play area.

Other ideas include: mosaics and sculptures, notice boards to share planting tips and leave messages for neighbours, solar lighting for security, shared tools, bamboo/willow screening for privacy: the possibilities are endless . . .

Step 3

What does everyone want?

Now is the time to ask the people who share the alley how they would like it to look and how they would like to use it.

You could send everyone a survey, hold a meeting, organise a clean-up of the alley, have a street party or combine all or any of these...



Step 4

How much can you do?

You can do as much as you have time, energy and ideas for.

You also need money to buy the things you want.

There are lots of organisations, charities, councils and companies who like to fund small groups of people who want to get together and make their area better. (See list later on)

Be optimistic about grants: You don't need to be an expert.

If you can explain your idea and make a shopping list for it, most grant providers will help you with making an application.

Step 4

Step 4

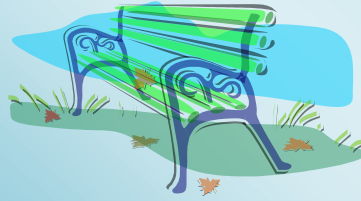




The path to your green and pleasant alley: a walk through getting the basics together

Soil, planters, seats, preservatives, plants, water, composting, tools.

Luxury living.



This takes us into the world of shopping where the choices can seem endless, so I have written some ideas to get you started on your own search. Before you buy, think about what you can reuse: plastic bottles and cartons are useful for seed sowing and watering; waste wood can be used for planters or trellis; many things which are strong enough to hold soil and can have holes to let water out can be used to grow plants.

A place for plants

Containers

Size

You need to get a balance between getting these as big as possible to maximise the range of plants you can choose and minimise the amount of watering needed (hopefully to zero), whilst making sure you still have the access you need in the alley: e.g. most alleys can take planters up to 1m wide without them getting in the way of moving bins or blocking wheelchair access. If this seems too big for your alley, try to have at least 50cm wide planters as these can still be used like beds dug in the ground.

You could chalk out their positions in the alley to make sure they will fit the way you want.

Smaller containers are useful for temporary plantings or to make more use of alley walls.

Once they are full of soil, the containers will be too heavy to move - so make sure you take the time to place them exactly where you want them to be.

You can get containers made from many things: What you choose will depend on your budget, how you want the alley to look, how eco-friendly you want to be and what is available.

Plastic containers are lightweight and come in a wide range of colours and sizes. They will eventually break down in sunlight. New plastic pots are not eco-friendly but it is possible to find good quality second hand pots.

Our best ones came from the police: they were part of equipment taken from a cannabis farm.

Metal can make striking containers which brighten your garden because they reflect light. They can also be quite expensive and may rust.

A great green option is recycled washing machine drums. These are made to survive in wet conditions and are very shiny. We found a local recycling company which was adapting the drums into containers.

Up the Walls:

You don't get sweeping lawns in an alley, but you do get a whole lot of wall. This is space to grow climbers, train fruit trees, decorate with murals, mosaics, mirrors, or to hang plant containers, bird boxes and feeders.

Containers (continued)

Wood can be used to make planters the size and shape that you want. You can also easily change the colour of the containers to suit your ideas. We all know about global warming and trees these days - and it is getting easier for us to get wood without damaging the planet. Lots of countries sell wood with a certificate to say it has been collected properly: our certificate is FSC - and hardwoods from abroad should have their own country or area certification.

It is not hard to find certified wood: B&Q have been supplying it for years.

You can also use reclaimed wood. This older seasoned timber can be more long lasting than newly produced wood. Used scaffolding planks are great for making containers.

Most wood needs to be treated to protect it from the weather. Some of the products that help preserve wood can be quite toxic but there are also plenty of water or plant-oil based ones that are gentler on people and the environment.

Terracotta

This is the traditional plant pot material but it is easy to break and, even if you are careful and buy frost proof terracotta, it may still crack in a very cold winter. Stoneware which does not absorb water should be tougher. You may also want to check where your clay is coming from as it can cause environmental damage.

Acid loving plants

One advantage of a container garden is that you can make a place for plants that need acid soil (ericaceous plants). Blueberries would be top of my list for an acid bed. Please make sure you find a **peat free** acid compost to use and only ever water these plants with rain water.

Soil

Containers need to be filled with soil, not potting compost: this will go on feeding plants for longer.

Happily this should also be cheaper.

You will need to find a good local supplier: some soil suppliers also produce turf so look up those too.

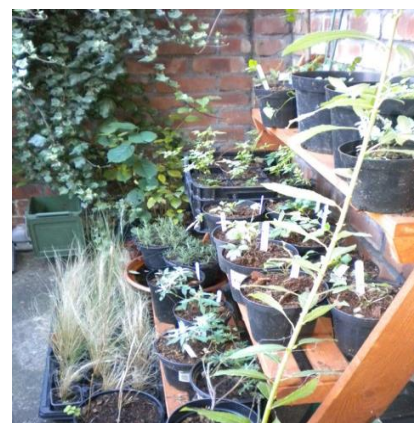
Any good soil supplier should be able to tell you all about their soil: where it comes from, what kind of mix it is and what it is suitable for.

You will need to work out the volume of your containers and the supplier should be able to work out how much you need.

Hopefully you will have some soil left after you fill your containers.

The soil in your containers will settle down over a few months and level will drop by anything up to 15cm.

You, of course, will be able to tell everyone this is to be expected and get them to use the left over soil to top up the containers.

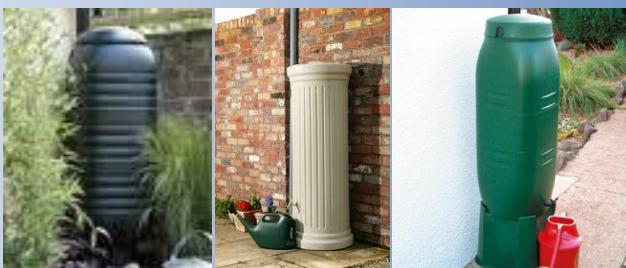




Water: get some butts -

One of the advantages of big containers is that they can be largely watered by rainfall, but new plantings, plants in areas sheltered from the rain, or a long dry spell may mean you need to water.

Alleys don't usually have access to mains water or gutters and downpipes where rain water can be collected. The best solution is for some households to have water butts. You can get slimline ones now which will fit into backyards. Watering with rainwater is much better for the plants and using a watering can instead of a hose keeps down the number of slugs and snails and reduces the chance of soil getting washed out of the containers and messing up the alley and blocking the drains.



Composting

If you have cobbles or a layer of tarmac over cobbles then you should be able to try normal compost bins as the worms and much tinier composting organisms can get up through the cracks. If the alley is surfaced with a good solid layer of concrete, you will need to do something else. You could try a tumbler composter which is closed and does not touch the ground; or composting in people's backyards; or perhaps a mixture of the two.

Lots of Councils do green waste collections now, but this doesn't cover the terraced streets with alleys. It is worth asking the Council for help with this as most of them are keen to do as much recycling as possible.

If your alley is near a green waste collection route you may be able to add your street to the round. Also green waste collections can include thorny material and weeds you might not want to compost because they grind up the waste before they compost it.



Tools

Hurrah - no digging so you won't need any spades or forks.

Wheelbarrow, sack trolley, shovels, watering cans, secateurs, folding pruning saw, loppers, handforks, trowels, hand cultivators, yardbrushes, hand brushes, labels, string, canes, gloves



Security/Storage

If your alley needed gating, you'll know lots about security issues. We found some people didn't like going in the alley after dark to bring their bins back and there are still some places where people can climb into the alleys unseen. There are lots of solar powered security lights these days which solves the problem of having to run them off a household supply.

Planting something very thorny can also block off a favourite entry point. Make sure you don't put benches or containers in places where they will be offering a step up to intruders.

You will also need somewhere to keep the tools out of sight. A long storage box which can double up as a bench is a good idea.



I'm sure you already know that wherever there is a garden there is a toilet for a cat, so make sure they are not tempted by your lovely new soft soil.

Cover bare containers or protect young plants with netting or lots of 15cm sticks.

I like to use thorny ones if I can.



Luxuries

Don't forget, somewhere to sit, a bit of art, a water feature, somewhere to cook, something for children to play with, shelter from rain or sun, a bit of privacy.

Rest on your Laurels - or perhaps your locally made sustainable bench.

The bit I always forget.

Make sure amidst all the hard work that you take the time to enjoy your flourishing garden and be proud of your efforts.

Plants: Some Ideas

To make the most of your money you will need to choose plants carefully.

Make sure you read the labels to find out how big the plant will be when it is fully grown. Look for words like miniature, dwarf, larger rockery plants, trailing, climbing, hardy, compact, repeat flowering, disease resistant

Beware of plants which are described as vigorous or fast growing climbers or groundcover. Many of these could swamp your alley in a couple of years.

Hardworking plants: evergreen, flowering, scented, winter berries, and/or herbs

Hebe, Ceanothus, Bay, dwarf Conifers, Lavender, Perowskia, Callicarpa bodinieri, Osmanthus, Jasmine, Viburnum, Cistus, Choisya, Fuchsia, Daphne, Skimmia, Convolvulus, Phlomis, Santolina, Mahonia, Helianthemum, Heathers, Veronica, Thymes, Sage, Bay, Rosemary,

Sharing Plants

Perennials are plants which grow for some months of the year and are hidden under the soil for the rest of the time (think of Spring bulbs).

You can plant things close together if they do their thing at different times of year.

Use spring bulbs next to strawberries or deciduous shrubs; grow Alliums or Corydalis, where autumn flowers will come up.



Climbers/Wall Shrubs

Clematis (comes in Spring, Summer or Autumn flowering and some are evergreen), Jasmine, Ivies, Ceanothus, Winter Jasmine, Climbing roses, Wisteria, Hydrangea petiolaris (terrible name but great for shade), honeysuckle, Passion flowers, Chaenomoles, Kiwi fruit, trained fruit trees and bushes.

Plant these in groups of 2 or 3 to get cover and flower most of the year.

While you wait for your climbers to fatten up, grow some Morning glory from seed.

These will fill your walls with flowers.

Fruit Veg and Herbs

Choose what you like to eat and what is expensive to buy. Fruit and herbs give the most value for the least work.

Salad crops grow well in containers; leeks look great in winter; and you have the walls for beans, peas and small pumpkins.

Slugs and Snails

We live in an area plagued by these so all the non-food plants mentioned can survive their attacks.

This lets you save your time for keeping them off your seedlings, salads, strawberries and basil.



January

Planning, ordering seeds and plants.

Chitting potatoes.

Looking Good: Snowdrops, Aconites, Sarcococca, Viburnums, Mahonias, Skimmias, Ericas, Winter Jasmine, early Crocus.

February

Finish bare root planting and winter pruning. Start sowing seeds indoors. Clear dead growth from perennials and start weeding to make room to admire Spring bulbs, Hellebores.

March

Split and/or move perennials, cut old growth off ornamental grasses. Seed sowing indoors and out. Keep weeding. Even more Spring bulbs, Spring Clematis, fruit blossoms, rosemary in flower.

April

Keep at the weeds. The more you do now the more your work will count. Prune Fuchsias when you see new leaves shooting.

Begin to harden off seedlings.

Wallflowers, loads of bulbs and blossoms.

(If Spring is dry bulbs may need a drink. Remove bulb leaves as they die back)

May

Plant out seedlings: wait until the end of the month for non hardy ones.

Alliums, Ceanothus, Violets, Philadelphus, Berberis, Oriental Poppies, Peonies, Azaleas and Rhododendrons.

June

Summer prune fruit bushes and trees. Thin fruits on apples and pears. If they need it trim back shrubs like Ceanothus and Philadelphus as they finish flowering. Take softwood cuttings.



July

Finish summer pruning fruit, prune wisterias; finish evergreen pruning e.g. Bay, Box, Conifers by end of month. Keep deadheading flowers and harvesting fruit and vegetables, but mostly enjoy sitting in your garden.

August

Order Spring bulbs, keep deadheading, trim lavenders once flowers die

September

Plant bulbs (not Tulips); finish planting out winter vegetables and salads. Remove leaves from tomatoes to let fruit ripen.

Apples to eat. Still lots of Summer flowers and Autumn Crocosmia, Asters, Schizostylis, Japanese Anemones, Nerines, Autumn Clematis,

October

Plant winter onions and garlic; sow broad beans; divide perennials, harvest apples and pears as they ripen; order bare root plants. Tidy up pots as plants die back; bring in or wrap up plants which can't survive in the cold.

November

Begin winter pruning and bare root planting when all leaves have dropped; take hardwood cuttings; plant tulips. Many Autumn flowers last until first hard frost and Winter Heathers and Cyclamens begin. Berries to look at and to feed the birds.

December

Inspect, clean and re-weatherproof wooden trellises, furniture etc. as plants die back.

Put out water for birds if it is frosty.

Leeks, brassicas and winter salads to harvest Callicarpa bodinieri, Viburnum, Winter Jasmine, Cyclamen Coum

Links and useful contacts...

Look up plants and products on the internet using search engines: there's a lot of information on the web.

Find specialist nurseries for detailed information on specific plants using Latin names.

Visit your local library; if you are a member or join up - as well as using the internet you can borrow books, read gardening magazines to give you ideas - or find out if there are any gardening classes in your area.

Most City Councils will be able to let you know if there are any start up grants you could apply for - and community centres will usually help you fill out a funding application or let you know who you can get in touch with to help.

Check out these useful sites:

How to make the most of growing veg in the smallest spaces, planting tips, free seeds and more from the BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/digin/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/htbg/>

Royal Horticultural Society Tel: 0845 260 5000

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/>

Enter your postcode and find plants native to your area.

From the Natural History Museum

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/>

Garden Organic, the UK's leading organic growing charity

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>

Organic gardening site based in the UK

<http://www.organicgarden.org.uk/>

Allotment Society: lots of advice and information about growing food

<http://www.allotment.org.uk/>

The BIG tidy up

Join England's biggest ever litter pick and help tidy up your corner of the community!

<http://www.thebigtidyup.org/>

Now in its third year, National Family Week is the biggest and only annual celebration of families and family life in the UK, with free resources to help you put on events in your area.

<http://www.nationalfamilyweek.co.uk/>

Some ideas for making your own plant containers from

Whalley Range Resident, Hannah Wooler

<http://whalleyrange.org/newsdocs/ContainerIdeas.pdf>

Remember to look out in the national and local press and libraries for things to Celebrate: Neighbours Day, the Big Bulb Plant, the Big Lunch – there are often small pots of funding or free resources available to put on your own street parties and planting events.

And don't forget to celebrate your own project!



Grants and Fundraising

Big Lottery Fund: Visit the website to find out about available funding for community groups and the environment

<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>

Awards for All: lottery funding for small new community-based projects in the UK.

<http://www.awardsforall.org.uk/>

Co-operative Community Fund: Community grants, between £100 and £2,000

<http://www.co-operative.coop/membership/local-communities/>

BiffAwards: Most cities provide funding to groups who live within 10 miles of a landfill site

<http://www.biffaward.org/>

Local Councils: often have funding to help groups to set up new projects to help with stationary, publicity etc.

Local Co-ops often have small pots of funding for community groups

Supermarkets: will often support local projects.

Look out for schemes like the Big Bulb Plant where you can apply for free bulbs to plant with everyone in the community!

Sign up to <http://thebigbulbplant.com/>

During March to May and Colour **your** Community!



"Take lots of photographs of your alleys before and after you start turning it into a community space. You can use the photos to show others what a difference a clean up and a few plants can make!"



Most City Councils will be able to let you know if there are any start up grants you could apply for - and community centres will usually help you to fill out a funding application or let you know who you can get in touch with to help. Visit www.direct.gov.uk and search for 'local councils' for your City Council contact details.

Try to get a stall at local events and get to know other groups so you share resources.

Use recycling websites like Freecycle to pick up free plant pots and tools:

<http://www.realcycle.co.uk/>



GREENING YOUR ALLEY IS A GREAT WAY TO:

- ❖ GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS
- ❖ SHARE IDEAS WITH OTHERS
- ❖ LEARN NEW SKILLS
- ❖ LEARN ABOUT FUNDING AND GRANTS
- ❖ SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT PLANTS
- ❖ MEET, RELAX AND PLAY
- ❖ GET PLENTY OF EXERCISE AND VITAMIN D
- ❖ STAY FIT AND ACTIVE
- ❖ IMPROVE YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD





"Join the Big Tidy Up to receive resources to get people started: badges for kids, rubbish bags and posters - or get an artistic resident to design a poster inviting people to do a big clean up together to get you started!"

<http://www.thebigtidyup.org/>



Sharing ideas and deciding together what to buy for your Alley



Working together gets the job done faster!

"Hold a cleanup with your neighbours: your local council or parks wardens can usually loan you litter picks and gloves. . ."



Many cities across Europe celebrate European Neighbours' Day at the end of May each year to encourage neighbours to meet and get to know each other better by arranging street parties, environmental projects and fun days.

Why not join in?

<http://www.european-neighbours-day.com/>



Hold a consultation event and recruit a few volunteers at your local park fun day or school open day. Find out what people want in their own alleys, swap seeds and cuttings and share tips and ideas!

Celebrate your Alleys and Green Spaces !



Photo: Sean Wilton

Why not send a photo and short article about your project to the local press?
It will make everyone feel proud of their achievements - and it could inspire other neighbours to start up their own projects!



Transform your green spaces !



Thanks to Fiona, Fran, Bill, Drew, Hannah, Shakila, Geraldine, Sèverine, Jan, Naila, Phil, Sue, Emma H, Emma W, Martin at Total ReUse
- and everyone else who is working on the project - and will be working on the project who we haven't met yet!

Contact Cath/Chris at JNR8 Youth & Community Project,
82 Cromwell Avenue, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 0BG

Tel: 0775 1666 150

E: info@whalleyrange.org

Words Cath Wade, Chris Ricard

Illustrations: Geraldine Gilmour

Photos: Chris Ricard, Chandni Kaur Kandola Wade

Now Celebrate your Alleygates !