

Queen's University Belfast Green Fund Project; Report July 2025

Urban gardening, psychology, and the climate/biodiversity crisis



Many thanks to the Green Fund for supporting our project.

We are also appreciative of the wonderful support from Rachel Vaughan, Paul Wallace, Nicole Hempen, Melissa Grant and David McGarry.

Sections
1. Personnel, background, actions, outcomes and learning
2. Photo documentation

Section 1	Personnel, background, actions, outcomes and learning
Title of project	Urban gardening, psychology, and the climate/biodiversity crisis
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Proposal	<p>We would like to establish a vegetable garden within the David Keir Building quad, using existent large planters. The feasibility of using these planters has been discussed with Mr Paul Wallace, QUB Head Gardener.</p> <p>Demonstration events will be held, which will introduce staff and students to basic gardening techniques. These will be followed by harvesting events; supporting participants to taste fresh, local produce.</p> <p>This project will allow students and staff to become 'hands on' in terms of climate action - allowing them to participate in tangible positive action.</p> <p>The demonstrations and harvesting events will allow staff and students to develop skills in sustainable practices, allowing them to grow vegetables in their own homes and share their learnings with family and friends.</p> <p>Citizen behaviour is key; research has found that food waste is at its lowest when people grow their own food - this includes those who grow their food in urban gardens.</p> <p>Many students in our school have voiced concerns around the climate change and biodiversity crises. Targeted collaborative action, such as this, helps to counter climate change distress/anxiety. Evidence also specifically links gardening with emotional resilience in times of uncertainty.</p>

Practical actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a SharePoint site to facilitate communication and document sharing within the group. • Viewing of the Queens Elms and PEC Allotment Sites, supported by Paul Wallace and Rachel Vaughan. • Online meetings to plan ahead for gardening purchases and activities. • Purchases of seeds and gardening equipment, supported by David McGarry, Psychology Office Manager and Education Support Lead. • Integration of pre-existing gardening equipment in David Keir building with new purchases and donated items. • Completion of risk assessments for gardening activities. • Weeding, planting seeds and maintenance of plants; harvesting of vegetables.
Collaborative activities/events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of boxes around the David Keir Building to encourage staff and students to donate plant pots/food containers that could be upcycled as plant pots; emails were sent out to students and staff to inform them about the project. • Student/staff planting sessions. • Planting and garden maintenance activities, involving staff from the DECAP, DCLin and PhD sections. • Whole course DECAP planting event, in which students were supported to develop basic planting skills; this event was supported by Nicole Hempkin, lead on the Queens Elms Allotment. Students were provided with written advice on sowing seeds and caring for their plants. This was offered in the context of a day focused on sustainability actions, including a presentation on the psychology of nature connection and a vegetarian lunch on reusable plates. • Planting sessions which were joined by staff members from other schools, based in the David Keir Building. • Sharing of harvested produce with staff and students. • Photos and updates on activities were shared on DECAP/School of Psychology social media. • Audio recording was undertaken with students in preparation to develop a podcast to showcase the project.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and students readily responded to calls to donate plant pots and food containers which could be upcycled as plant pots. This action-oriented approach to raising sustainability awareness was considered helpful, based around Bem's Self-Perception Theory which suggests that people can at times infer their attitude states on the basis of their own observed actions. • Students who took part in collaborative planting events indicated that they enjoyed the activities, both the contact with nature and opportunities to interact with peers and staff outside in an informal context. Extensive evidence highlights the physical and psychological benefits of nature based activities for young people. • As a demographic young adults are infrequently involved in gardening activities. For many students who took part in planting activities, this represented the first occasion they had tried gardening. Many provided the feedback that they enjoyed it and

	<p>found it easier than expected; they said they planned to continue growing vegetables at home. One student indicated she planned to do this with her children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative planting and garden-tending activities provided an opportunity for social connection which was removed from consumption; in contrast, many social connection events centre on the consumption of high calorie processed foods. • Vegetables such as spinach, chard, mange-tout peas, broad beans, radishes, courgettes and potatoes grew well in the DKB quad site. This offered a visual and tangible reminder of sustainability practices, which occasionally provided a talking point amongst those using the DKB quad. DKB users were freely invited to use the local, organic vegetables available in the garden. • The urban garden project contributed to an enhanced normalisation of the discussion of sustainability practices within the School of Psychology. It is understood that green policies around transport and food consumption will shortly be implemented within the School; it is hoped that this project may have helped to develop a receptive context for the implementation of these progressive policies.
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given the beginner status of many people in relation to vegetable growing, gardening taster events should assume no prior knowledge and provide a high level of structure and direction. • Many people are unable to recognise ripe vegetables in a garden; a high level of signage is required, with guidance on how and when to harvest and how to use vegetables in cookery. • Offer gardening events that result in visible and immediate outcomes, as far as possible.

Section 2; Photo documentation









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project.

Please help yourself
to Swiss chard &
spinach.

Soon available:
Courgettes, brussels sprouts