

GROW TOGETHER

A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY GROWING WITH LEAF



Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS



**Libraries
Ireland**
Makes Every Library
Your Local Library

INTRODUCTION TO LEAF AND GIY

WHAT IS THE LEAF PROGRAMME?

The Literacy & Food Education (LEAF) programme supports community groups in starting or expanding food-growing initiatives in shared spaces such as housing estates, GAA clubs, and Men's Sheds. The programme establishes 25 libraries across the Southeast as food growing learning hubs providing resources, guidance, and support to empower individuals and communities to grow food as a form of climate action. LEAF aligns with national efforts to build food resilience and encourage biodiversity-friendly food growing under the Community Climate Action Plan.

ABOUT GIY

GIY is a proud non-profit, social enterprise founded in Waterford, Ireland. We are on a mission to inspire a movement of people to grow food for a healthy and sustainable future. Since our founding in 2008, GIY has reached over 6 million people - inspiring, engaging and supporting them on their food-growing journey. Through initiatives like LEAF, GIY helps individuals and groups create sustainable food-growing projects that improve food security and enhance local green spaces.

WHY COMMUNITY GROWING MATTERS

Growing food as a community provides numerous benefits:

- **Strengthening Social Bonds:** Bringing people together to share skills, experiences, and responsibilities.
- **Improving Health and Well-being:** Access to fresh, local food and the therapeutic benefits of gardening.
- **Environmental Impact:** Reducing food miles, increasing biodiversity, and creating pollinator-friendly habitats.
- **Empowerment and Education:** Providing skills in food production, environmental sustainability, and climate action
- **The Community Climate Action Programme:** Climate Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing (Strand 2) is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Environment Climate and Communications



WHY COMMUNITY GROWING?

Did you know that for the first time in human history, the level of diet-related disease has surpassed that of infectious disease?¹ There is an urgent need for mankind to meaningfully reconnect with life-giving, nutritious food that has been grown with care in the living soil. We at GIY know that when people grow food, it leads to long-term dietary changes, a deeper understanding of nutrition and improved mental and physical wellbeing. Here in GIY, we call this “food empathy” – it is a deeper understanding and respect for food that arises when we grow some of it ourselves. Food growing experiences (even modest ones), act as a lever to a healthier, happier and more sustainable life. Change begins with the individual’s decision to sow a seed. If we can get enough people to grow some of their own food, the GIY movement can become a disruptive, positive force for change in the food chain and for human wellbeing.

Community growing can be a powerful tool for social and environmental change with key benefits such as²:

- Providing fresh, locally grown food to participants.
- Enhancing social inclusion by bringing diverse community members together.
- Promoting environmental stewardship through organic and sustainable practices.
- Offering educational opportunities in food literacy and gardening skills.

LEAF supports community groups in starting or expanding food-growing initiatives in shared spaces such as housing estates, GAA clubs, and Men’s Sheds. Delivered in collaboration with public libraries across Ireland, LEAF leverages libraries as hubs for learning, providing access to resources, workshops, and expert mentorship to empower individuals and communities to grow food as a form of climate action.



¹The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that in 2019, seven of the top ten causes of death were non-communicable diseases, including ischemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diabetes.

²Carlow County Council, 2022. A Guide for Design & Implementation of Community Gardens & Allotments for County Carlow. Cathal O’Meara Landscape Architects, URBACT, European Union.



SETTING UP A COMMUNITY GROWING GROUP



START SMALL BUT GET GROWING!

While you might have big ideas for starting a new community garden, it takes time and effort. Don't be put off—you can begin growing as a community in simple and accessible ways.

MEITHEALS

Meitheals are an old Irish tradition where people in rural communities gather on a neighbour's farm to help save the hay or crops. **GIY Meitheals** follow the same spirit, bringing people together in GIYers' gardens or community gardens to complete a GIY-related task. These gatherings foster camaraderie and friendship—they're hard work but great fun!

SEED GROWING MEITHEALS

A **Seed Growing Meitheal** is a great way to kick off the new growing season.

- Organise members into groups of five.
- Each person grows seeds in seed trays to share with the other members of their group.
- Each member only needs to care for one type of seed but will receive five different types of seedlings in return.
 - **Example:** One member sows 25 tomato plants, gives away 20 to the Meitheal, and in return receives five each of courgettes, peas, broad beans, and squashes.

SETTING UP A NEW COMMUNITY GARDEN

Establishing a successful community garden requires planning, collaboration, and a clear vision.

- 1 **Find Your Team:** Identify interested individuals within your community, such as local residents, sports clubs, Men's Sheds, or school groups. **Community Gardens Ireland (CGI)** can support you by connecting you with experienced growers and mentors.
- 2 **Choose a Location:** Seek available land in housing estates, GAA clubs, community centres, or unused public spaces. Check land ownership and secure permissions early in the process.

- 3 **Plan Your Garden:** Define your group's goals. Are you growing food, creating a pollinator-friendly space, or providing an educational resource?

DESIGNING A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY GARDEN

A well-planned community garden includes:

- **Defined Roles & Governance:** Establish a steering group to oversee the project and set responsibilities.
- **Access to Water & Composting:** Ensure sustainability by incorporating rainwater harvesting and composting systems.
- **Biodiversity Planning:** Design areas to attract pollinators by incorporating hedgerows, wildflower patches, and habitat structures. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan provides extensive resources and guides on planting and planning for pollinators.³

By starting small and growing together, your community can create a thriving, sustainable garden that fosters learning, biodiversity, and connection

³Carlow County Council, 2022. A Guide for Design & Implementation of Community Gardens & Allotments for County Carlow. Cathal O'Meara Landscape Architects, URBACT, European Union



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

LEAF AT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

You can find videos, growing guides, expert advice, seeds, and links to local growing experts at your local library.

GIY

The GIY website has everything you need to know about growing. We provide growing guides for hundreds of vegetables, recipes for everything from beetroot brownies to carrot top pesto, two TV shows, a podcast, and—while we can't promise a partridge in a pear tree—you never know what you might find on giy.ie.

COMMUNITY GARDENS IRELAND AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

Community Gardens Ireland (CGI) is a nationwide network supporting community gardens and allotments. It provides resources, guidance, and connections to help new groups establish and sustain community growing initiatives. CGI encourages knowledge-sharing, collaboration on best practices, and advocacy for policies that support community gardens.

How Community Gardens Ireland Can Help:

- Connecting your group with experienced community gardeners for mentorship.
- Providing templates for garden constitutions and governance structures.
- Offering advocacy support for community garden recognition and funding.
- Organising national meetups and knowledge-sharing events.

Find out more: <https://cgireland.org/>



ALL-IRELAND POLLINATOR PLAN (AIPP)

The AIPP provides guidance on creating pollinator-friendly habitats in community gardens. Pollinators like bees and butterflies are essential for food production, and simple gardening choices can help protect them. Visit pollinators.ie for expert advice on supporting pollinators, including:

- Planting pollinator-friendly flowers, herbs, and shrubs.
- Reducing mowing frequency to allow wildflowers to bloom.
- Avoiding pesticides and herbicides that harm bees and other pollinators.

By starting small and growing together, your community can create a thriving, sustainable garden that fosters learning, biodiversity, and connection!

Find out more: <http://pollinators.ie/>



FEATURED COMMUNITY GARDENS

Starting a food-growing initiative can feel like a big step, but with LEAF, no one grows alone! Five established community gardens—one in each LEAF county (Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny, Carlow, and Tipperary)—are featured as inspiring examples of community food growing. These gardens showcase practical approaches, share valuable insights, and provide inspiration to help participants get started, maintain crops, and organise growing spaces, building their confidence and skills.

TIPPERARY: CARRICK-ON-SUIR LIBRARY COMMUNITY FOOD GARDEN

A collaboration between Carrick-on-Suir Library, local volunteers, and GIY, this garden fosters intergenerational connections, involving children, adults, and seniors in gardening activities. It integrates pollinator-friendly planting, composting, and sustainable growing techniques, creating a welcoming space for the whole community.

KILKENNY: UPPER PADDOCK BIODIVERSITY GARDEN

The Upper Paddock Biodiversity Garden in Thomastown is a pollinator-friendly, pesticide-free space run by the '2 Hour Gang' volunteers. It features wildflowers, fruit trees, and herbs, hosts workshops and cultural events, and recently introduced vegetable growing. The group meets Saturdays, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm, welcoming new participants.

WATERFORD: WYSE GREEN GROWERS

Based at Wyse Park in Waterford City, members pay a small fee for garden beds to grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Weekly meetups offer a space to grow, learn, and collaborate on projects, promoting community cohesion, wellbeing, and engagement while reducing isolation.

WEXFORD: YOLA COMMUNITY GARDEN

Nestled within Yola Farmstead in Tagoat, Co. Wexford, Yola Community Garden is a thriving space for growing food, learning, and community-building. Established in 2023, the garden expands on an existing vegetable garden created by local teachers and now includes flowers, vegetables, and beehives.

CARLOW: BAGENALSTOWN COMMUNITY GARDEN

This community-driven garden welcomes people of all ages and abilities to grow flowers, herbs, fruits, and vegetables. Regular meetups take place every Saturday from 1 pm to 3 pm (or 4 pm), offering locals a chance to connect, learn, and contribute to the garden's growth.



DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT - TAKE OUR GIYER'S WORD FOR IT!



"Growing can be a very solitary activity. But GIY helped us to build a community of growers who share seeds, plants, advice, and produce. I have met people in my community with a shared interest whom I never knew before.

I've always worked hard to reduce our food waste at home, but now I'm trying to reduce plant waste. If I germinate more seedlings than I have room for in my veg patch, I use our GIY seed and plant share to pass them on to other local growers who can give them a good home.

Since starting to grow my own food, I've become conscious of the true cost of food in terms of effort and environmental impact. Once you've grown your own veg, you realise that supermarket prices don't always reflect the work involved in food production. You also realise that all that effort is wasted if any of that food ends up in the bin. These revelations didn't come from intense study or investigation – they came from the simple act of planting a seed, nurturing it, and eating what I had grown."

– Gareth Kelly, Inniskeen, Co. Monaghan

"I was motivated to join GIY Tramore because of my love of growing. I am very passionate about food and where it comes from – I love growing it and eating it fresh. I worry about the quality of some of our food, and I am a big believer in sourcing locally wherever possible. Growing food and gaining knowledge from other members, along with the varied topics we covered throughout the year, has been incredibly valuable. We have a small GIY bed in Tramore that we maintain – it's in good condition and looks well in its location. We also have a small bed at the Coastguard building that will need some attention when everything reopens [after lockdown]. We're also looking forward to hosting interesting speakers at our meetings in the future to share their expertise on growing and other related topics."

– Shirley Moore, Tramore, Co. Waterford





TOGETHER WE GROW

“Growing food is about more than just fresh produce; it’s about building community, fostering resilience, and supporting biodiversity.”

CALL TO ACTION

Join the growing movement today! Visit your local library or contact GIY to start your community growing journey.

Contact Information:

- 📍 www.giy.ie
- ✉ info@giy.ie
- ☎ 051 584422



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