

Kensington Olympia Kitchen Garden

By
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I moved to London from Ireland in late 2013. I grew up on a small rural farm in the Irish midlands, where I was fortunate to have so much space available to develop my love of growing vegetables for both the kitchen and show. London was a big change and finding accommodation that included a garden was a luxury I could not afford. Once settled, I was desperate to find some space somewhere within the city to continue my hobby. It was then I was introduced to the Royal Borough Environment Project (RBEP).

The RBEP aims to work in partnership with the local community and the public, private and voluntary sectors, to improve and clean up neglected sites in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The project aims to work with a range of partners and local people to:

- Increase local residents' involvement and pride in their local environment
- Support a diverse range of innovative and appropriate environmental initiatives
- Improving the appearance and use of grotty spots and the local area



The initiative started in 2009/10 with the development of 10 Community Kitchen Gardens. The Kitchen gardens transform under-used, neglected or disused areas of land into kitchen gardens



where local residents can grow their own fruit and vegetables. This project has been expanded and has proved extremely popular with local residents. To date there are over 50 community kitchen gardens across the Borough.

The 50 garden sites offer over 500 raised plots and are being used by over 1000 local residents and community groups. Each plot is approximately 3m², which provides a small but manageable size plot.

An essential part of the kitchen garden project is providing free gardening support, advice and training to plot holders and interested residents. Two part time community gardeners deliver a programme of garden workshops and events throughout the year, including fortnightly garden training workshops for each kitchen garden. This essential support allows plot holders to plan what

they wanted to grow, receive free expert advice and practical gardening tips and ensures the project is more sustainable.

Last summer the largest garden was opened at a disused platform at Kensington Olympia Station. The space has been transformed into a buzzing, colourful and productive community kitchen garden, where local residents can grow their own fresh fruit and vegetables. 89 raised vegetable plots have been installed on the platform and allocated to local residents to grow their own. The garden includes a community orchard, with over 30 fruit trees, including a variety of apple, pear, cherry and plum trees.



I was fortunate to be given one of the plots as I live within its catchment. The plot is free of charge and you sign a lease on a 1 year renewal term. The community kitchen garden scheme has proved to be a big success. I have made new friends and the kitchen gardens have become a local community hub, allowing neighbours to meet and to get to know each other.

Below are some quotes from plot holders.

“Community Kitchen Garden is in my view the very best thing RBKC has ever done in my 15 years of living in the Borough. I have not had to buy salad, spinach, peas, or beans all summer!”

“This project has totally changed my life. I am amazed every time I visit our plot at how wonderful it is to grow produce I can eat, and all the wonderful people who are doing the same thing as me and enjoying it just as much! The people who set up this project and got us all together are exceptional - they listened, encouraged us, had patience, gave us expert advice and celebrated our successes! I take my hat off to them all - absolutely brilliant!”



“It's been a great way of meeting people, as well as giving me the opportunity to eat more healthily. I feel thrilled and inspired. For the first time, it's made me feel like I truly belong to my community and I now feel lucky and proud to be a resident of RBKC. Well done RBKC for a worthwhile and useful initiative!!!! Thank you.”

Olympia is the largest kitchen garden in the borough, with 89 plots. The garden was completed in



early summer 2014 and the first growing session was a great success, as the old disused platform has great aspect and offers perfect growing conditions. The project has been delivered in partnership with Network Rail who own the platform and kindly granted the council a lease on the site.

A garden club for the site has been set up and we are all very excited for the new growing season, planning what vegetables to grow.

For more information about the project email: Terry.oliver@rbkc.gov.uk or call 020 7341 5684