

a closed loop system, providing the materials we would need in the garden from the resources available on this patch of land. This goal is more realistic now that we are working with more than an empty field.

Inexpensive Fruit Trees

Potentially plants are the most expensive element of the garden, but they needn't be. As I wanted to keep costs as low as possible, we purchased some bare root fruit trees found at the local branch of a large chain supermarket during the late autumn and winter for just a few pounds each. In the four years since I planted them, they have provided a small crop of apples, plums and pears, while the cherry trees have given us abundant harvests since their second year in the ground. If you'd prefer to grow varieties that are native to your local area or simply a wider choice of varieties, choosing bare root trees rather than pot grown trees can be more cost effective.

Growing from seed is usually the cheapest method of raising new plants. Seeds can be purchased, but I also found them through seed swaps, being given away in local community groups and through friends who were happy to share surplus seeds or seedlings. I also exchanged seeds and seedlings for surplus that I had. Many plants can be grown from cuttings or from divisions of larger clumps and gardeners are often very willing to share their knowledge and plants in the form of cuttings or small offsets. I found many plants through a local gardening group on Facebook; I also found friends and a wealth of horticultural knowledge.

During the first couple of years of developing the garden, I thought it unlikely that we would be able to grow sufficient food to see us through the whole year if we wanted a variety of flavours and textures in our diet. I turned to foraging, collecting windfalls and swapping food with neighbours to top up our food stores. Without building relationships with neighbours and local residents we would not have been able to enjoy the huge number of windfalls and other foods that I swapped for surplus grown in the garden. I foraged the local hedgerows for blackberries and haws and in my family and friends' gardens for rosehips. A few chickens and ducks provided us with eggs, meat and a continuous supply of used bedding to make compost from. I sold surplus eggs at the farm gate to help cover



Growing from seed is the most economical method of growing your own food



People's generosity with their time has enabled me to learn the art of beekeeping

the feed costs and occasionally sold some young plants too.

I save seeds whenever it is practical. Quite apart from the monetary savings, one advantage of this is that those home saved seeds gradually become acclimatised to the microclimate and conditions of this garden, giving us stronger, more resilient plants. I save seeds in paper envelopes and also in small recycled tablet bottles for the finer seeds.

Designing in Many Functions

Stacking and layering functions as much as possible reduced costs too. For example, the vegetable garden fences were made from pallets which are then also used as compost bays, tool racks, storage spaces and vertical surfaces over which climbing plants can scramble. They keep the ducks away from the growing food and also

provide a windbreak. This one element of the garden serves six or more purposes and I look at every element with the same 'what else can I use this for' view.

I have learnt that some things were worth investing in, tools being a prime example. I have wasted so much money in the past on tools that really weren't up to the task and it becomes a false economy. The pallets used to store the garden tools are littered with lonely handles that have snapped off the spades and forks and subsequently been designated as dibbers for creating holes in the soil. We can't afford the 'professional and top of the range' tools, but we now do some research, talk to other people who have used those tools and get their feedback and then we invest as much as we can in just a few good quality, basic tools.

Building links with, and being a part of, different communities has brought