

# Giving discarded materials an inspiring second life.



At Communigrow, we care about land and nature conservation, as well as wellbeing and we are proudly reusing and recycling where we can. Recently we have realised just how many projects around the field were possible thanks to reused materials! We think this could be an interesting addition to our newsletters, and to kick things off we wanted to share our favourite projects with you this month. Our projects are mostly made using wood, either from pallets, or boards which were donated to us by various businesses and individuals.

During recent months, thanks to NIAB EMR's donation of pallets, apple boxes and other useful items, we have some new raised beds to grow vegetables. Warren Pestell of Malling Gardens & Trees, and Day Tree Fellers also donated bark and wood chippings which were used to make beautiful paths - an organic way to keep weeds under control and prevent the ground from becoming too muddy when it rains.



David's approach is refreshingly inclusive, aiming to involve volunteers in every aspect of the field, which has increased the range of opportunities for volunteers to contribute, learn and use some of the machinery available at the field. Reusing material provides an excellent, environmentally friendly alternative to other waste management methods such as landfill or incineration, because it reduces air, water and land pollution, and limits the need for new natural resources, such as timber, petroleum, fibres and other materials. In addition, it gives a new lease of life to old products and sometimes in our case, it can provide a home for local wildlife.

## ***Furniture and raised beds:***

In 2019 some of you had the chance to see how groups and volunteers took pieces of old, discarded and donated wood and transformed them into unique benches, tables, chairs and stands for displaying produce. It was a great exercise for those involved and it will last us for years of tea and lunch breaks, Open Days, Food Festivals, home schooling sessions and more.



Also in 2019, in order to make the field accessible to new groups, including young people and people with mobility needs, we started to introduce raised beds. These are also a great way of improving growing conditions immediately, as you can add any growing medium you like. It is easier to control growing conditions and nutrients. So, for example, if you have plants like blueberries, growing those in a raised bed with ericaceous (acidic) compost will provide them with all the nutrients they need, while mixing in some sand in the bed will help your carrots to thrive. The downside of that solution is that sometimes slugs like to hide near the moist wood and the water evaporates faster from a bed which is higher above the soil and more exposed to the elements like wind or sunshine. Luckily, we have a team of dedicated staff and volunteers keeping an eye on both pests, and hydration levels in our raised beds.

We mustn't forget about the compost bins either, a very important part of the field and a space where weeds, grass cuttings and old cardboard turn over time into rich compost used to feed the soil, helping retain moisture and helping our crops to grow.



### **Wildlife:**

Over the last few months we have noticed increasing bird activity at Communigrow's field. David, our Horticultural Leader reckons it must be due to the research centre in the vicinity and the fact their trees are protected with mesh for most of the season, so naturally birds are looking nearby for shelter and food.

Birds are particularly important for organic approaches to vegetable growing, since they are natural predators, giving us a helping hand in keeping the numbers of caterpillars, slugs and other insects under control. Birds can also help with pollination of the plants, by transferring the pollen from one flower to another. This mainly occurs in tropical regions, however, the humble wildflowers are often pollinated this way. According to Britannica "birds are at least as important as pollinators as insects are, perhaps more so. About a third of the 300 families of flowering plants have at least some members with ornithophilous ("bird-loving") flowers- i.e., flowers attractive to birds. Conversely, about 2,000 species of birds, belonging to 50 or more families, visit flowers more or less regularly to feed on nectar, pollen, and flower-inhabiting insects or spiders."



[View more pictures of our birdboxes here](#)

Bearing that in mind, we have recently built several bird boxes, bird hide and even a hedgehog house.



### **Miscellaneous:**

We have also worked on a few other projects which are equally exciting. For example, we have transformed an old cable drum into a table which will soon become a base to our own, handmade weathervane (an instrument used for showing the direction of the wind), with parts made from an old tin shed. In addition, little things we use in our daily work like plant labels, signage posts and even some shelves are all made with reused materials!

