

A taste of the future?

We've had interior design, fine dining and makeover madness. Now all that is sooo last season as gardening has become the new 'in thing' with people of all ages across the whole country.

Reflective of our harsher economic climate where all things bling are less socially acceptable, gardening is an over dinner topic of conversation everyone is comfortable with.

Unlike recent fashions, gardening is a trend that has longevity. By its very nature, gardening takes time so we have to be patient and let growing take its course. Gardening is recession beating and provides truly organic, healthy food that hasn't flown anywhere before it reached your plate! With increased interest in our food's provenance and a growing awareness of the importance of reducing our carbon footprint, it is easy to see why 'growing your own' is enjoying a revival. With so many reasons to grow your own, don't forget the most important one is that it tastes better too.

The Plant Plot garden nursery in Lichfield has launched a new initiative, GRO4U, to encourage everyone to grow their own food at home.

"The point is that you don't need a huge amount of space so anyone, even flat dwellers with a window box, can give it a go" enthused Dave Muir, owner of the Plant Plot. "Our aim is to show people through practical advice and demonstrations how easy it really is."

So what to grow and where to grow it? Quite simply, you can grow all manner of things from herbs in a window box to potatoes in a deep tub. You can grow strawberries in a hanging basket and tomatoes from a gro-bag in your conservatory or porch. Pots and tubs can look very appealing with an interesting and tasty mix of fresh herbs growing in abundance, ready for the kitchen.

It makes sense to make the most of the space you have by being creative – this could include mixing herbs, vegetables and soft fruits amongst your existing planting – there is no reason why your produce needs to be separate from your main garden area.

At the Plant Plot, owners Dave and Diana are working on a number of useful ways to help educate and activate people into planning their own space effectively. "We are doing two main things" explained Diana. "We are producing a series of 'How to' leaflets supported with a growing chart to show what you could be planting or harvesting right now. Obviously we are always on hand to help and answer questions too. The second thing we are doing, which is really exciting, is transforming a large disused area on our site that will become a working, model allotment where we can fully demonstrate what we're talking about."

The Plant Plot's allotment area is currently in development and includes a chicken house and run complete with chickens, picnic spot, orchard, walkways, raised beds and even a small golf putting area! There are potting sheds, greenhouses and other preparation areas to show how plants are all started off.

The team at the centre will continue to cultivate the land over the coming months and begin to show what can be achieved across a range of planting areas. It is hoped that the allotment will become a community project with volunteers getting involved and taking home the fruits of their labour as their incentive and reward for helping.

There are lengthy waiting lists across the UK for allotments with over seven years here for the 6 main sites in Lichfield so if you're really keen, you need to get your name down on the lists right away. Some allotments have waiting lists of over 10 years due to the limited availability of land and increased building.

Growing your own food is satisfying, enjoyable and an excellent way to keep fit. It ensures your garden is cared for and will save you a lot of money. An additional benefit is a huge reduction in waste. There is much in the news at the moment about the estimated one third of all shopping being thrown away. If it's growing in your garden, you simply take what you need, when you need it, thereby minimising any wastage.

"We are most keen to let people know that growing your own food is really, really easy" commented Dave. "It is as simple as knowing the right time to plant and then watering your seeds, plants or bulbs until they flourish. Of course, there is more to learn as you get involved or even competitive but that's the basis of it."

Learning to grow your own can come from your local garden centre, the many TV programmes, friends and family but there is no substitute for just getting started and planting something you enjoy eating.

Check the Plant Plot website regularly or visit the centre for news and updates on how to grow your own food and for progress reports on the new allotment:
www.theplantplot.com.