



# Grangegorman Community Garden Living Lab

Living Lab Report 2024

# CONTENTS

Overview .....	3
Stakeholders .....	3
Initiation .....	3
Exploration .....	4
Experimentation .....	4
Discovery and changed plans .....	5
Evaluation .....	6
Conclusion .....	9

# INTRODUCTION

## Overview

The Grangegorman Community Garden is a collaborative living lab garden project to restore a previously neglected garden space as part of a year-long pilot in 2024. The objective of the living lab is to explore the development of a sustainable collaborative governance model for a community garden, co-created and trialled by a local stakeholder group.

## Stakeholders

Garden stakeholders include TU Dublin - both academic and professional services, Dublin 7 Educate Together National School (D7 ETNS), the Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA), and Workday. The Grangegorman Community Garden committee was formed at the start of 2024 and includes representatives from each of these groups.

As Grangegorman campus neighbours and residents, each member has an interest in enhancing the campus environment and providing their people with educational experiences and opportunities to spend time gardening and in nature.

## Initiation

The aim of the committee was to establish a permanent community garden space with robust investment, that can offer continuous support to gardening activity and welcome a new diverse group of garden users. The collective experiences and mutual interests of all stakeholders were heard and recorded at all stages of the project, and Miro was used at each meeting to capture sentiment, and record the needs, motivations and capacity as described by each member.

## Goals

Garden goals in 2024 included:

- To restore the green space as part of a year-long pilot project until December 2024.
- To develop a series of engaging and educational activities around sustainability and horticulture for both the garden users and the wider community.
- To explore a sustainable collaborative governance model for a community garden at Grangegorman.
- To propose a case for the long-term use of the garden that supports the community.
- To secure robust long-term funding to support the garden.
- To document the collaboration with an interim and end-of-year report.

## Exploration

Community gardens can have many different types of governance models, depending on their scale, setting, investment and purpose. In Dublin, some large community gardens are designed and managed using a top-down approach by property management companies or local authorities, and some smaller community garden projects are developed using a bottom-up approach by NGOs or community groups. That we know of, there has been little experimentation around developing a sustainable governance structure for a community garden, with mutual benefit for a multi-stakeholder group on a shared campus site with different patterns of use throughout the gardening year.

## Experimentation

### Key project activities 2024:

- Garden plots divided among the growers (Culinary Arts students and D7 ETNS).
- 4 committee meetings held.
- 4 co-creation workshops hosted.
- Funding secured from Hook & MacDonald and Workday, with budget allocated to finance garden resources and educational workshops.
- 15 gardening and maintenance sessions by students and volunteers.
- Started to tell the story of our garden through the garden webpage and online platforms.
- 7 educational workshops delivered by experts and enablers to support the project mission



- 1 workshop (to co-create signage) delivered by Living Lab Coordinator for D7 ETNS.
- 1 'Colour in Nature' forage workshop delivered by Living Lab Coordinator for D7 ETNS.
- 5 Budding Biodiversity workshops delivered by Global Action Plan (GAP) to the D7 ETNS.
- 1 Community Gardens for Wellbeing workshop delivered by GAP for the wider community.
- Soil enrichment by TU Dublin students, enabled by TU Dublin Student Volunteering.
- Soil testing carried out as action research by academics and students from the School of Chemical & Biopharmaceutical Sciences.
- New subgroup of academic stakeholders convened to review the results of the soil analysis and recommend next steps for the garden.

## Discovery and changed plans

In May 2024, the soil at the garden site was tested by a student of Analytical Chemistry. Initial results indicated elevated levels of lead. As a result of this finding, gardening activity was immediately paused while the committee awaited the results from an environmental consultant who was engaged by the GDA to carry out further testing using an accredited laboratory.

A shift in objectives and priorities for the garden was needed and the committee reviewed the potential emerging scenarios of how to deal with making the soil safe for growing. To that end, the group adapted the growing plan during this period to deliver educational activities on site and to mobilise an expanding network of stakeholders and garden users. Simultaneously, the group began to respond to the challenges of urban gardening and food production and of the complexities of gardening collaboration.

Soil and leaf tissue samples from the Grangegorman Community Garden area were gathered and tested by an accredited environmental consultant in June 2024. The test report was issued in July confirming elevated levels of metallic elements in the samples gathered. The report confirmed that these elements occur naturally in the environment and can also occur in food. As per the recommendation in the report gardening activity did not recommence in 2024. TU Dublin implemented a new health and safety assessment and risk management plan. Processes, and actions were taken to remove food grown in the four beds. The committee did not continue to plan for funding for 2025, until the future of gardening activity and soil use in the garden is clear.

## Evaluation

Garden stakeholders worked together to explore how to care for a community garden in Grangegorman in 2024. Based on the insights gained through this collaboration a 'Recipe for Sustainable Community Garden' was drafted. It features 12 ingredients (illustrated in Figure 1) that describe what is needed to make a community garden in Grangegorman a success.

- **Governance:** Create a stable governance structure to support collaborative decision making.
- **Values:** Agree important values e.g. community cohesion, growing organic, supporting biodiversity, circular economy, health and wellbeing, shared space.
- **Roles:** Understand how people want to participate and organise into growers, volunteers and governance roles.
- **Garden Committee:** Engage a diverse committee including members from civil society, government, academia, and industry.
- **Autonomy:** Be autonomous or have a license agreement to develop the site and erect structures e.g., poly tunnel, raised beds, shed, benches.
- **Horticulturist:** An expert horticulturist or head gardener should lead garden management and development working in collaboration with garden users.
- **Calendar:** Co-create a calendar for the garden year to include garden activity, collaboration and engagement.
- **Administration:** Plan for administrative workload ensuring that Health and Safety (H&S), insurance, safeguarding, Terms of Reference (ToR), funding, procurement, and communication plans are in place.
- **Access to Services:** Engage with campus planners and decision makers to choose an optimal site location with direct access to running water, composting, structures and tool storage.
- **Accessibility:** Plan for the site to be accessible for all users with access to transport, multi-level planters, and hard surface paths.
- **Soil Testing:** Where crops are produced for food, soil should be tested in advance and analysed regularly for metals including Cd (cadmium), Cr (chromium), Hg (mercury), Cu (copper), Zn (zinc), Ni (nickel), As (arsenic) and Pb (lead).
- **Soil Quality:** Establish regenerative methods that support healthy soil, e.g., crop rotation, resting, nutrient restoration.

Though developed for a campus location with different patterns of use throughout the growing year, these ingredients can be a useful checklist for any multi-stakeholder group to consider before starting a community garden.

## A Sustainable Community Garden recipe - Key Learnings



### Governance

Create a stable governance structure to support collaborative decision making



### Values

Agree important values; e.g., community cohesion, growing organic, supporting biodiversity, circular economy, health and wellbeing, shared space



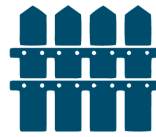
### Roles

Understand how people want to participate and organise into growers, volunteers and governance roles



### Garden Committee

Engage a diverse committee including members from civil society, government, academia, and industry



### Autonomy

Be autonomous or have a license agreement to develop the site and erect structures e.g., poly tunnel, raised beds, shed, benches



### Horticulturist

An expert horticulturist or head gardener should lead the garden development in collaboration with users



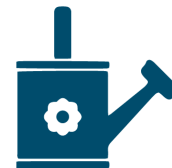
### Calendar

Plan a calendar for the garden year to include garden activity, collaboration and engagement



### Admin

Plan for administrative workload ensuring that: H&S, insurance, safeguarding, ToR, funding, procurement, and communication plans are in place



### Access to Services

Engage with planners to choose optimal site location with direct access to running water, composting, structures and tool storage



### Accessibility

Plan the site to be accessible for all users with access to transport, multi-level planters, and hard surface paths



### Soil Testing

Where crops are produced for food, soil should be tested in advance and analysed regularly for the metals; Cd, Cr, Hg, Cu, Zn, Ni, As & Pb



### Soil Quality

Establish regenerative methods that support healthy soil, e.g., crop rotation, resting, nutrient restoration

Figure 1: A Sustainable Community Garden Recipe - Key Learnings



## Conclusion

The Grangegorman Community Garden Living Lab pilot is complete. During 2024 the committee explored how they can garden together, faced some gardening challenges, and developed a recipe for a sustainable community garden at Grangegorman. Working together showed that maintaining a garden on the Grangegorman site is possible, however the committee found gardening a difficult challenge – made even more complex because of the condition of the soil.

Where gardening can continue at the site, the committee propose implementing the 12 ingredients described in the ‘Recipe for a Sustainable Community Garden’ and to continue to engage with the Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA) to improve the design of the Grangegorman Community Garden.

TU Dublin has proposed to enter a new iteration of the living lab project with a focus on soil health and soil restoration and is in discussion with the GDA to explore how gardening activity can continue at Grangegorman in 2025.

The current garden stakeholders will be provided with a copy of this report and be invited to become involved in the 2025 plans for the garden.