

# Natural Environment White Paper – The Natural Choice: Securing the value of nature case study

## Schools connecting with nature

### Gardening for wildlife

Spire Infant School was the national winner of the School Wildlife Garden of the Year 2010 award, from over 1,000 participating schools.

The school transformed an area of overgrown weeds and shrubs into a haven for wildlife, creating a bog garden, a woodland garden, a gravel garden and a 'secret garden', to which the children have added nesting boxes, bird tables and



baths, lacewing hotels, bee boxes and a hedgehog house. Sunflowers are grown to feed the birds and night-scented plants have been planted to attract moths and to feed the local bats which the children hope will take up residence in the ten bat boxes around the garden.

The school has planted 80 trees around the perimeter of its school field, creating a small woodland and allows areas of grass to grow long to provide wildlife corridors. There are also areas of wild flowers and shrubs and recently a wildlife pond has been established.

Jane Garrett, the head teacher, said:

*"It's lovely to see how much the children enjoy gardening, and the wildlife within the gardens and woodland, and how enthusiastically they share this with their parents, carers and class mates. Our feeder Junior and Secondary schools are now also developing garden areas and we feel sure that this will all have an improving effect on children's lives in the area and on the quality of the environment. There is historically much evidence of neglect and vandalism in the surrounding area so the garden and its wildlife inhabitants not only offer an oasis of calm and enrichment for our school and the community it serves, but it may also be an agent for change in the community."*

Gardens are vital refuges for wildlife and a few wildlife-friendly touches can make all the difference to the species they support. The year-long competition on the Big Wildlife Garden website is part of Natural England's One Million Children Outdoors programme and is designed to encourage children to develop wildlife-friendly gardens in their schools and to have fun learning more about the natural environment.

### Growing in schools

Kedington Primary School in Suffolk has used gardening to raise ecological awareness amongst its students and families. Children grow their own fruit and vegetables for the kitchen table and sell any surplus locally. The school has even built its own greenhouse from recycled plastic bottles. There is a wildlife area at the bottom of the school field, and the children's gardening club asked to plant more flowers there to attract bees and butterflies. The school has also established a new pond.

An extract from Kedington Primary School's Ofsted Inspection report (December 2008) indicates the value of growing food:

*“...Children grow their own fruit and vegetables for the kitchen table and sell any surplus locally. Recycling is a buzzword in their vocabulary as they compost waste and reuse materials wherever possible. This helps children to grow up being very aware of their future economic wellbeing and what it means to be responsible for their surroundings. Their personal development is outstanding.”*

Practical experience of food growing and cooking enables children to “reconnect with their food” and understand where it comes from and what is in season. Schools can also use growing food to help teach children about environmental, economic and health issues.

Defra is supporting a stakeholder-led **Food Growing in Schools Taskforce**. The Taskforce will define the benefits of food growing in schools, identify the challenges and barriers, and offer solutions. The Taskforce plans to publish its report in October 2011.

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