A volunteer community gardening group

The Core Mission Statement

Coleford Grows is a community lead local group whose aim is to enhance areas of Coleford into vegetable gardens / flower beds for members of the community to embrace. It has been proven that encouraging people to engage in their community not only benefits in utilising forgotten / underused areas but significantly aids in people's mental health.

Our goal is to engage residents of all ages in gardening, promoting well-being and inclusivity. Gardening has proven to enhance people's sense of purpose and community connection, addressing feelings of isolation. Our Tufthorn Seed Exchange project showcased strong community support, which we intend to harness further to improve our cherished local areas.

Proposal

To identify and create a nurturing and accessible community gardening group in the heart of Coleford that cultivates not only healthy food, but also connection, confidence, and wellbeing, providing a sanctuary from isolation and a space for healing in the Forest of Dean. This may well take the form of working with local groups such as the Buchanan Open Community Orchard.

- Our projects look to use gardening as a vehicle for social inclusion and mental wellbeing.
- We address rural isolation by creating a purposeful, welcoming space for connection.
- We tackle loneliness by fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and mutual support.

The Aims

Aim 1: To improve mental health and combat loneliness through shared purpose and connection.

Why: Gardening is a tool for social prescribing. It offers a reason to leave the house, a sense of routine, and a space for informal, judgment-free social interaction. It's a place where people can feel needed.

Aim 2: To grow food and promote sustainable living, fostering a sense of achievement.

Why: The act of growing food provides a huge boost to self-esteem. There is a unique therapeutic value in nurturing a seed to fruition. This aim gives people tangible, positive feedback and a connection to the seasons.

Aim 3: To build an inclusive and resilient community.

Why: Loneliness is often about feeling excluded. This aim focuses on actively breaking down barriers, creating a sense of belonging, and connecting people to the history of their place, which provides a sense of identity and roots.

The Objectives

For Aim 1: To Improve Mental Health and Combat Loneliness through Shared Purpose and Connection.

- To establish a monthly "Tea and Trowel" session. This is a low-pressure, drop-in session where the primary goal is a cup of tea and a chat while gardening.

- To build a "Buddy Bench" system. New or isolated members can be paired with a welcoming "garden buddy" for their first few sessions to ensure they feel supported and connected.

For Aim 2: To grow food and promote sustainable living, fostering a sense of achievement.

- To create a simple "Plant of the Month" or "Recipe of the Week" board, celebrating small successes and sharing simple ways to use the harvest, building knowledge and confidence in a non-intimidating way.
- To host seasonal "Grow Your Own" workshops aimed at beginners, with a focus on the joy of the process, not just the perfect result. Topics could include "Sowing Your First Seeds" or "Growing Salad in a Pot."

For Aim 3: To build an inclusive and resilient community.

- To host an annual "Big Lunch" or "Summer Gathering" in the garden, actively inviting neighbours who may not be gardeners, to break down barriers and showcase the garden as a friendly, welcoming hub for the whole town.
- To create a simple photographic display or information board

Projects

Tufthorn Seed Exchange

A repurposed classic British Telephone box. We have cleaned up an abandoned telephone box and converted into a seed exchange which is open 24/7 all year.
We will need a small group of people to monitor the exchange, to keep it clean and open and to make sure the seeds are all in good condition. Some seeds might be out of date, these can be used but might not have the same results.
We hope that more people will donate seeds from their own plants and increase the local biodiversity.

Coop Wild Garden – a wildlife-friendly garden

This is mainly to tidy up and keep tidy an area of land near the local Co-op store in Coleford. There is a good variety of plants already growing in the patch and we hope to enhance it, rather than replace them.

The main aims of this area are two fold. First to make the area look nicer and secondly to show examples of what can be done in local gardens to help wildlife.

Some work has already taken place with the willow being cut back and some replanted, with the aim to encourage it to grow into a living fence.

The next task is to create a dead hedge; this is a collection of branches that are made into a fencelike structure using wooden stakes to hold them together. It will benefit local wildlife by creating a different habitat.

A bug hotel will be installed for insects and a small pond area for amphibians is to be created.

Coleford Medical Centre

We have made a connection with the GDoc Ltd, via the Patient Participation Group at Coleford Medical Centre, to put forward the idea of an accessible garden at the new Coleford Medical Centre, the build is due to start in June ’26. The local doctors are very keen to create a garden, which can be managed by residents and foster a sense of purpose, worth and inclusion. A similar project was successfully launched at the doctors in Ruspidge under the management of Wilde Earth Journeys with prescribed Mindfulness sessions being offered to patients and the creation of Friends Group to manage the garden.

There are many areas in and around Coleford that have been identified where residents could be engaged to better manage the areas of land.

Engagements

Acting as a conduit Coleford Grows could work with:

Forest Food Network
Feeding Gloucestershire – we are listed on the digital map
FODDC – Active Wellbeing
Two Rivers Housing Association
Local schools and youth groups
Veterans
Community Groups

Summary

We see our work as being a progression from the seed exchange to showcasing what can be achieved by working with local businesses and the community, enhancing the Co-Op Wild Garden into an area that people take note of and enjoy.

In fostering relationships with other organisations, we see Coleford Grows as a conduit to aiding in mental health, loneliness and bringing people together, from young children in growing their own seeds into plants, to the community coming together to tidy up are town and surrounding areas, forging a sense of ownership whilst combating mental health challenges.

#workingtogethergetsresults