

Urban Growth Learning Gardens CIC Environmental Policy

1. Introduction

Urban Growth Learning Gardens CIC works with community groups, businesses and government to make London greener and healthier for all. Through education, inspiration and collaboration, we promote sustainable practices and create vibrant green spaces that benefit our city. This policy draws together the key principles and practices that underpin and define everything we do. It is reviewed annually or more often as required by legislation and research.

2. Our Beliefs and Values

We believe:

- in a pioneering approach to urban greening, by collaborating with communities & developers to create a healthier city.
- in creating inclusive and accessible green spaces that are open to all.
- in the healing power of nature to enhance both our physical and mental well-being.
- that through transforming spaces, we have the power to transform lives.

3. Garden Design Principles

Our garden design principles and practices are inspired by designers such as [Marian Boswall](#), [Tom Massey](#) and [Global Generation](#), and informed by the research of industry leaders such as [Noel Kingsbury](#), [Kew Gardens](#) and the [RHS](#).

We are also guided by the Three Ethics of Permaculture:

1. Earth Care: Rebuild natural capital to ensure resilience and promote thriving.
2. People Care: To serve others, we must care for ourselves. By serving others, we are enriched and make healthy ecosystems possible.
3. Fair Share: Imbalance leads to sickness. By redressing injustice and sharing abundance, we achieve and will receive more than we could on our own.

Action Points:

- Plant choices:
 - We choose drought-tolerant plants, ideally perennials which are either long lived or which reproduce and spread so that replacements are unnecessary.
 - Deploy diverse species which form populations [naturally resistant to pests and disease](#), and which provide a wide range of food and shelter for fauna throughout the year. Establish resilient polycultures through companion planting.
 - Specify young plants wherever possible, to reduce resource usage and minimise losses.
 - Avoid specifying lawns whenever possible. Use wildflower meadow instead.

- Garden features and furniture:
 - Avoid hard landscaping and the use of concrete or cement wherever possible. Install permeable paving instead.
 - Source furniture from ethical and sustainable suppliers. Employ local craftspeople wherever possible, instead of purchasing mass-manufactured, prefabricated items.
 - Make structures modular and capable of future adaptation and changes, to avoid things being thrown away and replaced.
 - Insist on products with a minimum outdoor lifespan of five years. The longer the better.

- Soil management:
 - Avoid bare soil. Mulch everywhere with locally sourced woodchip from diverse species. Leave prunings on the ground.
 - Avoid disturbing the soil wherever possible.
 - Avoid the use of peat in all growing media. Minimise the use of high energy input materials such as LECA or vermiculite.
 - Plant in autumn whenever possible and avoid planting during times of drought.
 - Add organic matter as the primary way to ensure soil health.
 - Install composting systems wherever possible.

- Water management:
 - Design systems which do not need irrigation, through permaculture principles.
 - Where irrigation is needed, use drippers not sprinklers.
 - Allow lawns to go yellow.
 - Install water harvesting systems wherever possible.

- Pest and disease management
 - Never use synthetic pesticides, except when subcontracting for the removal of Japanese knotweed or Himalayan balsam.
 - Deploy integrated pest management through designing polycultures, encouraging and deploying natural predators, and balancing preventative with responsive control systems.
 - Use homemade or naturally derived pesticides only, and only when essential for plant survival.

- Fertilisers:
 - Use no synthetic fertilisers.
 - Use locally sourced or homemade compost and organic fertilisers.
 - Focus on soil health through vermiculture, nutrient balancers and conditioners such as seaweed derivatives.

4. Sustainable, Ethical, Local Procurement and Resource Efficiency

Inspired and informed by leaders such as The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, we will implement circular economy principles to maximise resource efficiency and minimise waste in our gardening operations.

Action Points:

- We source as locally as possible. However, we also know that sustainable production processes can easily offset the emissions of transport, and so balance our prioritisation of local with an analysis of the wider supply chain.
- We always look for recycled, re-used or refurbished materials. We balance our desire for these qualities with an assessment of safety, durability and longevity.
- We base our storage and workshop facilities at [The Remakery](#) in order to maximise our access to circular materials and local specialists in the sector.
- We minimise our landfill footprint and increase the efficiency of our recycling by working with [Quantum Waste](#) to sort and dispose of what we can no longer use.
- We avoid using Amazon wherever possible, and use portals such as [SEUK's Buy Social Portal](#) to identify ethical suppliers.
- We request that our plant nurseries stock recyclable plant pots, and give our preference to those who have most widely implemented that practice.

5. Education, Inclusion and Climate Action

Education has always been at the heart of what we do. One of our core business activities is to educate people about the natural world on their doorstep, and to empower and inspire them to take positive action that contributes to a healthier urban ecosystem for everyone. Everything in this guide contributes to that mission.

Action Points:

- Communicate key elements of this guide to our volunteers, the participants in our workshops, our clients, suppliers and partners. Encourage them to take action informed by permaculture, circular and social justice principles. Enable them to do so through the style and content of our workshops.
- Encourage clients to dedicate larger sections of their budgets to education, engagement and inspiration activities.
- Seek partnerships which enable us to deliver these activities for free.
- Prioritise supporting those groups who are most at risk from the climate crisis, and those who have the least access to resources that enable healthy, sustainable lifestyles.

6. Continuous Improvement and Impact Measurement

Informed by the permaculture ethic of People Care, we consider the wellbeing and development of our team to be foundational for everything we do.

Action Points:

- We provide monthly Inspiration Days for all staff, when they can leave their daily work in order to learn and be inspired by a place, event, person or activity of their choosing. This enables them to stay abreast of the latest developments in the industry and the city, bringing back their learning and inspiration to share with the team.
- Everyone is entitled to 'No Questions Asked' days, which allow them to take a day of leave at short notice, with no need for an explanation.
- We provide an annual budget of £500 per person (in 2023, increased annually) for continuous professional development, enabling staff to go on courses and workshops which will enhance their skills and deepen their passion for our work. By improving our skills and commitment, we can better serve our corporate purpose of making London a city where everyone feels connected to nature.
- We work with specialists such as [Tranquil City](#) and the [Impact Hub](#) to improve how we measure our impact. We use multiple different indices according to the project and the budget available, which include:
 - [NEF's Five Ways to Wellbeing](#)
 - [Social Value's National TOMs](#)
 - [Mayor of London's Urban Greening Factor](#)
 - [National Biodiversity Net Gain](#)
- We provide clients with impact reports wherever budgets allow, tracking human and environmental outcomes. We aspire to publish a retrospective impact report by the end of our tenth year, in June 2024, and to then issue an annual impact report every year.

7. Compliance and Legislation

We adhere to all relevant environmental laws, regulations and standards governing gardening and landscape management practices. As this guide demonstrates, we actively seek to exceed compliance requirements wherever possible, and encourage our stakeholders to do the same.

8. Conclusion

This Environmental Policy reflects our dedication to a sustainable future and our aspiration to be leaders of environmental responsibility in London and the landscape management industry more widely. It will be reviewed at least annually and updated to reflect changes in best practices and industry standards.