



North Runcton 'Low Carbon' Newsletter

April 2021 – Environment Conscious Gardening

WELCOME to the fourth of our North Runcton 'Low Carbon' newsletters.

As part of a Norfolk-wide initiative to 'Cut a Tonne in 21', NRPC are encouraging all residents to think about how they can reduce their personal and household 'carbon footprint'.

Anyone who is following the debate about how we can shift to a 'carbon neutral' economy will know that farming and land management are seen as key areas that we need to reform.

This might not seem directly relevant to all of us – it's somebody else's job to sort. But if we own a garden, then we are farmers and land managers too!

There are estimated to be 23 million gardens in the UK – 83% of households have one. They cover over 10 million acres – more than all the designated nature reserves in the UK put together.

So how we manage our 'land' potentially has a major influence on our individual and household 'carbon footprints' – as well as offering many other sustainable lifestyle benefits.

LOW CARBON GARDENS

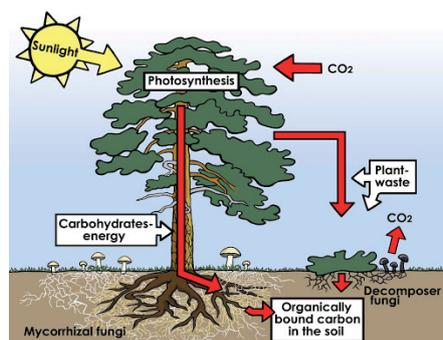
As a nation we take gardening pretty seriously. The garden industry sector was said to be worth more than £24b in 2017. Given the last year, even working around 'lockdowns', one imagines the value is now even greater.

While gardening can be a very 'environmentally friendly' hobby, certain activities, such as mowing the lawn, using peat-based composts and even buying plants, involve a great deal of natural resources, which all contribute to your garden's carbon footprint.

But you don't have to garden in a resource-heavy way. There are plenty of small changes you can make that will reduce the impact you and your garden have on the planet.

GARDENS ARE 'CARBON SINKS'

Gardens can lock up and store large amounts of carbon. It is widely understood that a growing tree will absorb carbon and 'lock it up', sometimes for centuries. But we often forget that all the tiny organisms in soil do the same.



Healthy soils can store large amounts of carbon – and cultivation often releases it. Usually the more organic material you have in your soil (e.g. compost) the more carbon the soil will hold.

Peatlands hold huge amounts of carbon and, as it is laid down very slowly (about 1mm/year), a peat bog can represent thousands of years of carbon storage. That is just one reason why they are so important to preserve.



10 THINGS TO REDUCE YOUR GARDEN CARBON FOOTPRINT

1. Only buy peat-free composts. Read the labels. Labels that say 'organic' and 'environment friendly' do not necessarily mean 'peat-free'.
2. Make your own composts and fertilisers (see previous newsletter).
3. Stop buying chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Producing these in large chemical works has a massive carbon footprint. Then they are generally sold in plastic throw-away containers that can't be recycled. They are also often harmful to soil organisms.
4. Consider 'no-dig' gardening. Every time you dig over soil, it releases carbon into the atmosphere and disturbs the microfauna that help store carbon.
5. Use mulches on garden beds. Mulches stop weed growth, retain moisture and break down to 'feed' your soil.
6. Mow lawns less often. Unless you have a putting/croquet/bowling green, why do you need short grass? Many people mow their lawns 10–15 times a year which wastes time and fuel and is often not even good for the grass. In hot, dry spells short lawns just go brown or die – or require regular irrigation. Leave some or all of your lawn long. Just mow a pathway if you need one. Flowers you would have cut will benefit insects. Also consider reducing the size of your lawn and plant it up!





7. Consider bulk-buying compost and other products with friends and neighbours. So many garden products come in plastic tubs, plastic bottles and plastic bags. If you can buy in bigger containers, at least you can reduce the amount of waste plastic. And it's generally cheaper!

8. Grow plants from seed. A lot of nursery plants come in peat (although this will be banned soon). But the production and distribution of plants has a massive carbon footprint. If you grow plants from seed or bulbs, you save money and the planet!

9. Use hand tools. Whether petrol or electric, power tools use a lot of energy and their production has a massive carbon footprint. Is a leaf blower really better than a rake? How often do you really need a strimmer? Good hand tools last a lifetime, keep you fit and are less likely to upset your neighbours!

10. Reduce mains water use. If you haven't already got water butts, fit them to your downpipes. If you are building new or have the space, have an underground cistern installed to catch more roof water. In a dry summer, you can easily use 10,000 litres of water on a garden and if that is purified mains drinking water, it is expensive and wasteful. Plants prefer rainwater anyway.



GARDEN RETREAT

There are of course some other very basic benefits of a garden that might help you reduce your carbon footprint.
 ~ Gardening keeps you fit – saves a trip to the gym!
 ~ Sitting in an attractive garden is a great place to unwind or entertain – saves a drive to some other venue!
 ~ And – you can grow your own food!

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5 BENEFITS OF GROWING YOUR OWN FOOD

1. Even if you only produce some of your food, some of the time, you will still save lots of food miles – and can produce tasty organic food.
2. Some of the easiest food to grow are things like salad leaves. From the shop, they often don't last long – and they will never be fresher than from your own garden.
3. Some of the easiest things to grow are most expensive at the supermarket. Think about herbs or soft fruits.
4. You can share and barter with neighbours and friends.
5. Leftovers can be composted to benefit your garden next year.



MAKE A POND !

We all know that a pond can be an attractive garden feature and of great benefit for a range of wildlife. But did you also realise a pond can store a lot of carbon? Aquatic plants often grow very quickly, taking up carbon. When they die and break down at the end of the growing season, they help form carbon-rich sediment on the pond bottom. Many other aquatic processes and organisms also lock-up carbon. Read more: <https://www.froglife.org/2021/04/22/ponds-against-climate-change>

Remember to CALCULATE YOUR OWN CARBON FOOTPRINT !

If you haven't already looked at it, check out the GIKI carbon footprint calculator – which will help you understand the sorts of activities that build your carbon footprint.

It is FREE and you can quickly learn what key aspects of your life you might be able to change in order to cut your CO² emissions. All you need is internet access. Go to <https://giki.earth/> and set up an account.

You can then go back any time and explore different ways in which you might reduce your carbon footprint.



Thought for the month...

"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."

Audrey Hepburn

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Our May newsletter will be about cutting our carbon footprint during the summer holidays.

All these newsletters are also available on the Parish website: <https://northrunctonpc.norfolkparishes.gov.uk/>

