

Menstrie Primary School Garden

Elmbank, Menstrie



Where: The garden is situated within the school grounds of Menstrie Primary School, Elmbank, Menstrie, FK11 7AP

What: The school has three raised beds, a small orchard and a garden shed. The garden was established 18 months ago and 2017 is the first full growing season the school has had. The funding for establishing the garden has come from the Food for Thought programme – 2 grants of £3000 each.

Why: Menstrie Primary School has a strong focus on Food Education and Sustainability as part of the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence. One of the Class teachers is a keen champion of the garden and has good support from management and parents.

Who: It is mainly the children from P6 who look after the garden, but the school is keen to involve all classes in the garden at some stage. The school also works in partnership with Ochil Community Garden at the Ben Cleuch Centre in Tillicoultry.

1. What are you most proud of?

It is great to hear the children talk about what they are growing at home in their own gardens. This might have happened regardless as a lot of the parents are very supportive, but it is still great to hear them share stories about their own harvest.

Learning about where food comes from and how to sow, grow and cook is a life skill that I am proud we are helping the children get.

2. What was hard?

There are always time constraints in a busy curriculum. It takes a bit of planning to link different parts of the curriculum together to be able to fit it all in.

It has been a challenge not having a polytunnel or a covered outdoor space where we can work when it is wet weather. I have had to use my classroom, so it's been covered in soil and seeds at times! We recently received Bags of Help funding to build a poly tunnel/outdoor class room.

Now and then it has been a challenge knowing what I can use the land for in terms of soil quality and permissions from the Council.

We have had some financial constraints, but have been successful in applying for external funding from the Food for Thought programme and Bags of Help. We also sell some of our produce to parents – plums and plum jam for example. We use the proceeds to buy new equipment for the garden or for cooking with the produce.

3. What surprised you?

The children's lack of knowledge of where food comes from has surprised me. There is a lot of knowledge about growing and food that we take for granted that they don't have.

It has surprised the kids, not so much me, that not all we sow in the garden grows. And sometimes it is surprising what does work! For example, a group of kids sowed carrot seeds in a small raised bed and I was expecting the surplus back, but they used them all. However, it turned out to be the best carrot crop we have had.

4. What would you do differently?

I wish I had been more involved in the construction of the raised beds. They do the job, but it would have been better if they were wider. Then you could work from both sides and it would be harder for the children to jump over them.

It would have been good to have the wider community involved more from the outset. We would like to run a summer gardening club and members of the community could be involved in this and help us look after the garden when the school is closed.



5. What advice would you give to others?

Look for external funding such as Food for Thought from Education Scotland and Bags of Help to establish your garden.

Keep in contact with the Council – they have been very helpful to us and you do need the appropriate permissions.

The Food for Thought programme is a very good programme to get involved to learn from others. I have just attended a national event and am a member of a Yammer group where experiences are shared.

I have attended a couple of good RHS school gardening courses which count as CPD for teachers – I would recommend these to others.

Last, but not least – It's important to walk before you run and to go through one growing season to find out what the pitfalls are. Don't give up if it doesn't work the first time.

6. Contacts

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Food for Thought Education Scotland

Website: <https://www.education.gov.scot/what-we-do/ensuring-the-impact-of-cfe/Food%20for%20Thought%20Education%20Fund>

RHS campaign for school gardening training courses

Website: <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/about-us>