



## Climate Change and Your Garden

It has become clear that climate change is affecting every aspect of life on our little planet. Although an increase of 1 – 2 degrees may not seem much it represents an enormous amount of extra energy in the world. Think of what happens when we turn our central heating thermostat down (or up) one degree – it makes a noticeable difference to our heating bill. We can't simply turn the thermostat down on the global system but we can make changes in the way we garden. Already changes in the climate are causing changes in what thrives, survives or dies in the garden but with only small effort we can have great gardens and add a small buffer against climate change. It's not just about climate either: the number of species of plants and animals is falling as humans put more pressure on the environment.

As we move into spring, albeit likely a bit earlier each year, we can get into the garden and make a difference. If you already have trees, you're doing the right thing. If you haven't got trees, then consider planting some. They don't have to be great soaring oaks but many of the dwarf or medium varieties will do just as well. If you can plant climbers on the walls of your house, you will partially insulate it from extreme summer heat and help keep it warmer in winter. Ivy is particularly good as it provides a dense layer of insulation and supports many species of insect. Hedges, too are good at mopping up car fumes and provide super habitats for small birds.

Garden ponds are great way of enhancing the local environment. They can slow the run off of heavy rain, increase biodiversity and are very decorative. If you're worried about the heron taking the fish, then don't stock the pond with fish, or put a net just below the water surface. Those of us with ponds marvel at the wildlife that the pond attracts. We have several species of dragon fly, water boatmen (How did they get there?), frogs and newts. Ponds don't have to be sunk into the ground, so if you're short of space, you may still be able to have one. Not only do ponds increase biodiversity, they also store carbon dioxide in the sediment at the bottom, possibly even more than the same area of woodland or meadow.



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You may already have a compost heap. Give yourself a star! Recycling vegetable waste into compost is an excellent way of reducing our impact. If vegetable waste is simply buried, it generates more methane than if it is composted aerobically. Methane is a much more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, though it doesn't persist quite as long. Adding your compost to your garden makes good use of the waste, improves your soil, which helps to capture carbon dioxide.

Have you had your power tools serviced? If they use petrol, servicing can make them run more efficiently and even electric ones benefit from cleaning and sharpening. On the other

hand, we should be moving away from petrol power tools. They are highly polluting, especially 2-strokes, and burn fossil fuel that releases more greenhouse gas. If you have switched to an electricity supplier who supplies from renewable sources, electric power tools have a lower impact. Batteries have improved so that tools that use them last longer before the battery runs flat. Having a spare battery to switch in means little break in using your mower, strimmer etc. You can also help bumble bees by not mowing off the daisies in your lawn.

Looking back in old gardening books, we can see that digging and turning the soil was considered essential to get good crops, suppress weeds and general garden health. Apprentice gardeners will be set to double dig beds, mainly to give them a job to do. Now it is recognised that digging can do more harm than good. Soil holds lots of carbon dioxide and supports diverse forms of life that we need for our plants. Digging breaks up the soil structure, releases carbon dioxide and can deplete earthworm populations. On farms, it has been known for many years that deep ploughing is detrimental to soil health. Some ploughing is still needed at times but much less than was once practised. It's the same in our gardens. We only need to dig to plant shrubs and trees. Seed beds can be prepared by lightly turning the top soil and raking over. Even adding compost can be done without digging. Worms will take the compost down and incorporate it. Mulching with compost will suppress weeds and a light hoeing will keep them in check. Taking care of the soil like this gives high yields of vegetables and saves time and effort.

Whilst we are getting warmer, wetter winters, summers are going to be hotter and drier. That affects how well the vegetable garden will do. We can choose to grow varieties that will cope better with the drier conditions. Many will be what we're used to growing, such as carrots, potatoes, beans and beet. Others are less familiar as they've usually been grown abroad and not here. Many people grow peppers and tomatoes in greenhouses but with the drier



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summers, they will usually thrive outside. Aubergines are another possibility as are sweet potatoes and Swiss chard. We need to take care where we plant our vegetables, too. Finding shadier spots will mitigate the scorching summer sun and planting earlier will get plants established before it gets too hot.

Without water, none of our plants will survive. Having rainwater butts helps provide water in the summer. After watering it's a good idea to mulch as this will help retain moisture in the soil. Mulches can be compost, grass clippings or wood chips which will slow

evaporation and fertilise the soil. Another option is to make use of grey water – from washing up, baths, showers, washing machines and similar. It can be quite difficult to collect this and care must be taken in storage unless it goes foul but it is better to use it than mains water.

**Richard Marshall**

*We need more members. Several of the current committee are stepping down very soon. If you're concerned about climate change, the future for your children or grandchildren please come and join us. Contact me:*  
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