Overview

Ladybur Housing Co-operative in Tottenham N17 was formed in 1975 to provide 150 affordable homes to approximately 300 residents. The Co-operative aims to encourage a social atmosphere and promote tenants’ involvement in the management and maintenance of their living spaces.

In 2012, led by Estate Manager David Mead, the Trust launched a plan to visibly enhance their harsh concrete and tarmac exterior spaces. The plan sought to soften the outside spaces, increase the green growing spaces around the estate and provide opportunity for residents to grow food. With limited funds removing the tarmac was too costly so huge planters were positioned on top of the tarmac and next to the existing raised beds.

The challenge

Promoting the advantages of fruitful, fertile outside spaces was a trial. Urban residents familiar with their existing outside environment needed encouragement. David chose to start with a splattering of herb plots in raised planters.

The soil in the existing concrete planters had been ignored for 20 years and was of poor nutrient value. The existing oak trees, bushes and plants in these beds were damaged and diseased.

They had to be removed and the concrete planters on the tarmac area also needed filling with compost and fresh healthy foliage.

Adding structure-rich organic matter in the form of compost would improve the composition of the existing soil. However many tenants were not keen. They certainly did not relish the rural aromas associated with fresh compost and were reluctant to get involved with any planting.

David found that if residents were not well informed about where the compost was made, what it is made from, and why it smelt they were less willing to support the project and participate.
Strategy

To encourage a healthy soil-ecosystem in the raised beds and the new planters Ladybur’s landscape gardener blended the compost into the soil. This encouraged earthworms and other organisms to work their magic and enrich the soil.

Residents were kept informed about plans, progress and planting. They were also encouraged to use EcoPark Compost in and around their own properties as well as in the open spaces.

Willing and able to share in the greening of their outside living spaces residents have witnessed a transformation. Some planted up window boxes and added hanging baskets. These pockets of plush colour have transformed previously harsh concrete areas. In fact the estate is a lush and thriving patchwork of colour and foliage, particularly in the summer.

Over coming years green areas will be expanded and the original planters and raised beds will nurture plants, vegetables and fruit.

Ladybur Housing plan to register with Capital Growth, (a partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, and the Big Lottery’s Local Food Fund). This partnership offers Master Gardener training as well as support for residents to grow their own produce in the planters as well as in and around their homes.

In future using Master Gardeners’ expertise, residents will be further inspired to grow, harvest, store and cook with herbs and other produce grown within their estate. This knowledge will be shared and passed on.

Benefits

Regular loads of EcoPark Compost have improved the soil quality and since using the compost, foliage flourishes around the communal beds. Residents say that it has improved the plants.

“Also every year we have grown sunflowers. Since using the compost we have seen a significant growth in the height of the flowers than in previous years.” said David

Using EcoPark Compost Fact sheets, residents are also encouraged to appreciate the nutrient value in the product.

The benefits of using a locally produced product are clear for all to see.