

# CASE STUDY

THE GROWING SCHOOLS GARDEN

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Woodland and Willow Nest

## Costessey High School, Norwich

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## Why we got involved

Since it was planned back in Summer 2003 by a group of fourteen University of the First Age pupils during an Environmental Challenge, our Olympic Wildlife Garden has proved to be the small acorn from which mighty oaks have grown in the Costessey area! It was created by pupils working with a number of Norfolk environmental groups such as Norwich Fringe Project, and a number of organisations generously offered discounts and free labour. A successful application for a Lottery Awards For All grant enabled the purchase of a large bird hide/workshop/mini field-study centre, and resulted in our being

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able to offer this environmental resource for our entire local area to share. Groups of Cubs and Brownies study for their Wildlife Explorer badges and the Wildlife Watch junior branch of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust meet once a year to study the diversity of wildlife within this multi-habitat area. Not only do the pupils at Costessey High benefit from the garden but all of our primary feeder schools visit, usually during the summer term, for 'hands-on' ecology lessons, involving pond-dipping and mini-beast hunting activities. In 2005 the garden was a Case Study for the new Learning through Landscapes' Workout publication, designed to support the development of secondary-school grounds, and the school went on to be awarded the Norfolk Schools Environment Award for Best Secondary School Grounds Project as well as the BTCV Award for Education.

A number of Norfolk schools interested in creating their own environmental areas send staff, sometimes accompanied by a group of pupils, to learn about how to start to create their own garden. Having realised the benefits to pupils of the development of school grounds, I have recently studied for LTL's Accreditation in both Training and Facilitation and, once accredited, hope to work with many more schools to promote grounds development. With this background, we were delighted when we were approached by LTL to contribute towards the Growing Schools Garden, as this gave us an opportunity to demonstrate to a national audience what we are doing in our quiet backwater of Norfolk to improve the environmental education of our entire local community.

## What we made for the Woodland

As our contribution to the show garden, we were asked to produce a replica of our Bug Hotel, one of the outstanding features of our wildlife area created by four of our pupils during an Activities Week. The Bug Hotel replica was re-created using similar materials to those used in the original, such as silver birch logs, a bark-covered flower pot to act as a small mammal home, sections of plastic down-pipe filled with cut canes as bee homes, and a number of various-sized logs and flints all built on a base-board with willow framework, up which ivies could be grown to back the structure. This then had to be disassembled, stage-by-stage taking photos of each stage to enable the hotel to be re-constructed on the show garden site.

For other areas of the garden we grew a selection of herbs and flowers from seed (See the Growing Seeds Make It in the Food and Farming Zone); and provided local stone to fill a gabion basket, as well as decoration and a seat for the top (See the Gabion Make It in the Culture and Creativity Courtyard).

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## What we learned

This project has proved really successful in stimulating and motivating a group of pupils to take responsibility for rearing plants from seed. This group happily give up lunchtimes and are keen to meet many evenings after school. Not only is it stimulating an interest in Plant Science (notoriously difficult in secondary school pupils), but it is also encouraging teamwork, the development of important social skills (such as not squabbling over whose turn it is to use the hose!), and most importantly, these pupils are learning by doing in an outdoor environment and are having FUN!

The interest that the group has developed in gardening is now beginning to feed into other grounds work within our own school grounds – last week the group weeded a neglected memorial area in preparation for planting it up with some bedding plants. Also, they are developing knowledge about the fauna within our wildlife area and some of the group assisted with a group of special-needs children who will be joining our school in September. The Grounds Force team members each worked with one of these children in the wildlife garden, assisting them with mini-beasting and pond-dipping, helping them to identify the creatures they had found. Early in July, they will be working with me at one of our feeder primary schools, assisting staff, parents and pupils there to restore their neglected and overgrown wildlife area, extending the area and instating new habitat areas.

This outreach into the community is a very positive result of the original creation of our environmental Olympic Wildlife Garden. The impetus given to this project by LTL's invitation to contribute towards the show garden has given Costessey High School a tremendous boost which will, I hope, lead to great improvements in our grounds and those of our feeder schools.



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## Photo gallery



## Other information

I feel privileged to have witnessed the development of a very committed group of pupils, who willingly give up their leisure time to work in the garden. They take responsibility for the care and maintenance of their seedlings while

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obviously enjoying the social interaction, and developing team-building skills and also enjoying themselves.

Although at times the work involved in contributing towards the show garden has appeared formidable in view of the time limitations imposed by the secondary school curriculum, the experiences will prove invaluable as anecdotal examples when I work with other schools as an LTL trainer and facilitator. I have already discovered that first-hand experience is a powerful tool when used to help convince members of school staff of the benefits of school grounds development.

As a Specialist Science College, Costessey High offers our students many opportunities for learning outside the classroom – not necessarily by teaching the formal curriculum outside in the school grounds, but by offering visits to local places of interest. This year alone, the Science department has arranged visits to Banham Zoo, the Ecotech Centre at Swaffham, the Sea Life Centre, and NWT Hickling Broad, whilst the Modern Foreign Languages department has arranged French exchanges and a trip to Germany. At the end of Year 7, all pupils are given the opportunity of a three-day camp at Coltishall as a valuable personal-development opportunity. These are only a few of the experiences that have been offered and, as a result, we hope to enrich the education of our pupils. Next year we hope to offer GCSE Agriculture to a group of Year 10 pupils. This course will be run in conjunction with our local agricultural college, Easton College of the Countryside, and pupils will visit the college to use their facilities. Although it will not involve the development of a School Farm, it should offer the opportunity to grow fruit and vegetables.

## Contact details

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