

# our shared plate

## community newsletter

a neighbourhood network initiative

## Newbridge

Welcome to our community newsletter! In September 2024, Our Shared Plate began working with the Newbridge Family Resource Centre and local residents to develop and create a community garden together. This newsletter provides an overview of the workshops people participated in. In our shared garden, people can come together to grow, share, cook and eat food together and celebrate our diverse community.



*Woodland planting workshop.*

# planning with Lucy

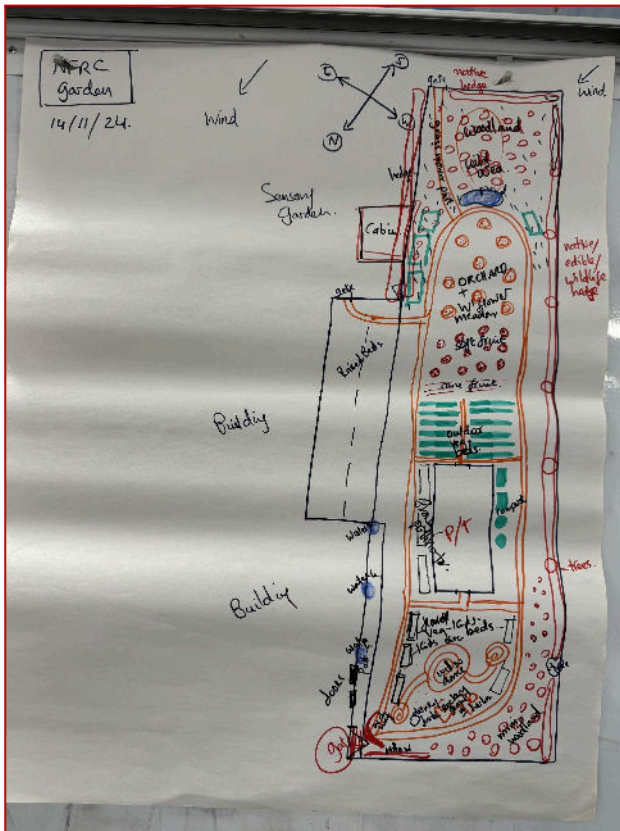


*Celebrating the Platinum Clubhouse graduation with some tasty BBQ food in the polytunnel.*

This past winter, the adult group at Newbridge Family Resource Centre — known as the *Pixels + Petals group* — began their journey with Our Shared Plate by envisioning the community garden. With the support of organic grower Lucy Bell and digital tutor, Mary, the “Pixels + Petals” participants attended a series of winter workshops (October 2024 to December 2024) to map out the future space. These sessions were creative and collaborative, laying the foundation for a vibrant growing space by incorporating accessibility, biodiversity, and shared values.

Before all the hard work of planting began, the important process of planning what and where to plant was undertaken. A detailed plan of the future garden was created including features that community members would like to see incorporated into the garden, such as a woodland area, an orchard, native hedging, and a composting space, to name a few.

*“It was the first time I felt part of a planning process like this. Seeing our ideas drawn up was really exciting.”* –Workshop participant



*Planning the community garden - from drawing up maps to testing the soil!*

As the community garden is also an edible food space, we looked at what the resident's favourite meals and favourite plants were. Drawing links between the two, we discussed the diverse range of meals that can be created from a few of our favourite plants. While growing food can sometimes be hard work, we agreed that harvesting and eating that delicious food is the best reward of all!

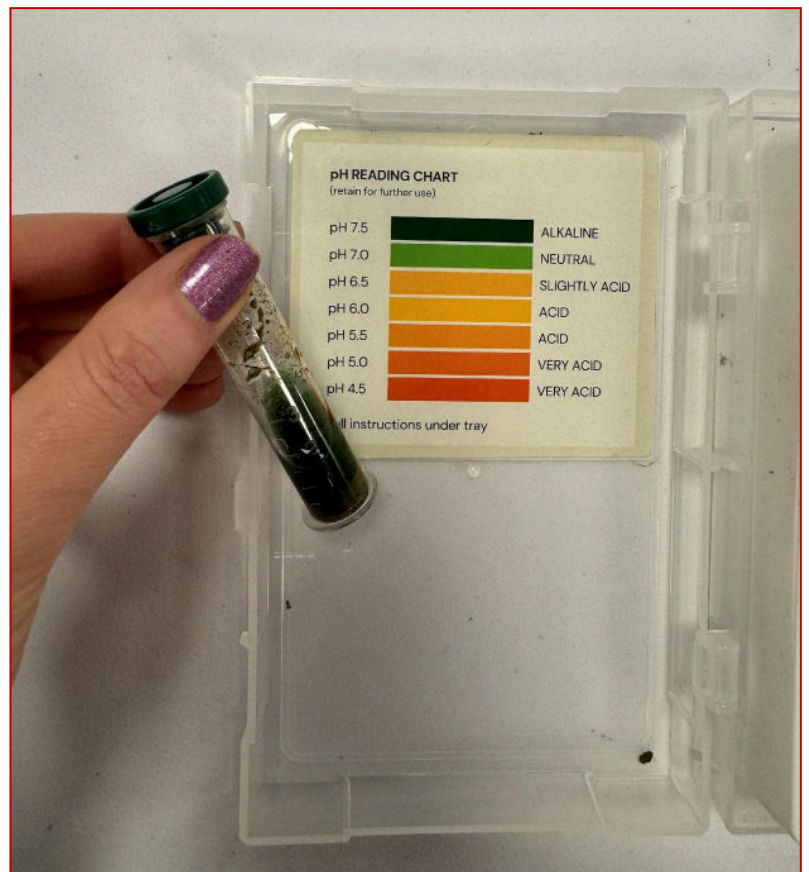
As part of the planning process, we also conducted a field test of the soil type around the Newbridge Family Resource Centre with Lucy Bell. We gathered samples and by using our senses and getting our hands dirty. We examined the soil by sight, smell, and touch -- who said planning wasn't dirty work!



To examine the structure and consistency of the soil, we used the touch test, the ball squeeze test, and ribbon test. We also measured the soil's pH levels. Our field test results show that the ground around the Family Resource Centre is a wetland, made up of an alkaline, fine-textured clay. All of our different workshops -- from designing and mapping a future community garden, to taking part in discussion sessions, to conducting soil testing -- have helped to inform us about what type of plants are best suited to our local geography and our needs and wants as a community!



*Lucy demonstrates how a sample of soil can be added to the testing solution.*



*The dark green colour indicated the presence of an alkaline soil type, which is typical for Kildare County.*

## Food mapping session and discussion

At our workshop in November, inside the Family Resource Centre and away from the chill of the winter wind, we also created a community food audit map. with the Maynooth Geography research team. The map captured the community members' different lived experience of the Newbridge foodscape, including where they shopped for food, where food was shared among the community, where people eat, and where people grew food. The map containing all the notes and additions shared by the workshop participants was then uploaded to a digital map.

From our shared discussions around the mapping table, we could see that Newbridge has a lot of shopping choices which reflect its diverse population, from large supermarkets to ethnic and specialty shops including African, Arabic, Asian, Eastern European, and multi-ethnic food stores. Places to eat also featured heavily on our map, from small cafes to large restaurants. The presence of two food sharing hubs, including the parish food cloud, shows the strong community spirit present in Newbridge. A shared growing space was mapped in Newbridge -- our own community garden at the Family Resource Centre! Overall, there was a strong desire expressed among the mapping participants to connect with nature and each other through the medium of food.

Here is the link to the digital Newbridge Food Audit Map which was updated with the local knowledge shared at our mapping station:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1jLB7KfNtYPq6QG5Da-hMVktI8BiSSMI&usp=sharing>



*Local residents shared their knowledge of the Newbridge foodscape by adding to the community food map. They discussed their experiences of living, eating, and growing in Newbridge with Maynooth geographers and artist in residence Jennie Moran.*

# planting with Lucy

Spring brought energy and action to the garden plans! In March and April 2025, over 40 community members, including local residents, Platinum Clubhouse members, St. Marks special school, volunteers, students from Newbridge YTDC and local resource centre service users, joined a three-part planting series. Led again by Lucy Bell, the group established an edible hedge, planted a native woodland, and created a small fruit orchard. These sessions were more than just practical -- they were seriously interactive moments of learning, connection, and fun, often ending with tea and shared stories in the polytunnel.

*"I never thought I'd plant a tree! This is something I'll be proud of every time I pass by."*

– Workshop participant

*"It's wonderful to see how much care has gone into each part of the garden. It's a shared space we can all enjoy."*

– Lucy Bell



*After our hard work planting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025, you can see the trees (neatly) covered with bark mulch behind us!*

## “Spring” into action: bringing our Newbridge garden to life!

From our first outdoor planting workshop in early March, we rolled up our sleeves for a series of vibrant planting! First, we worked together to plant trees around the Family Resource Centre perimeter, then we began establishing our small orchard in early April. We now have a fantastic foundation of native plum and apple trees, along with a row of fruit bushes. The energy in planting was infectious, and the community’s enthusiasm was evident as we dug in!

To get the trees firmly in place, we created zigzag patterns to maximise coverage and shield the strong winds that come into the Family Resource Centre. We learned innovative planting techniques such as creating X-slits for healthy root growth and using recycled cardboard, generously donated by locals, as a base for mulch, to enrich the soil. It was truly a hands-on experience for all involved.

One thing that excited us throughout the workshops was the spirit to share knowledge that emerged every step of the way from every person who got involved. Residents offered practical tips from ensuring roots are spread correctly to gently placing soil around new plants. Even a month after the tree-planting, it is incredible to see how well our first trees have taken root!



*Making sure we have enough space for our edible orchard’s roots to grow.*

## Edible hedges and seed libraries

April saw us plant our new trees and row of fruit bushes- an incredible addition which will be beneficial for pollination and the wider ecosystem around the FRC. We established a clear team dynamic, with some of us breaking down cardboard, shovelling the mulch and wheelbarrowing it over, and carefully digging and covering the newer plants.

It was an amazing sight to see that in just a month, grass had taken over the mulch and wind breaking material was set up to protect our first batch of trees! Another amazing aspect of these workshops was seeing many communities across generations and backgrounds come together, bringing endless sources of expertise and ideas.

Our edible hedge features a wide array of plants like alder, which helps the soil by fixing nitrogen, as well as black chokeberry, whose antioxidant-rich berries are perfect for jams and juices. These plants along with the fruit bushes of blackcurrants and raspberries will form a multifunctional living boundary for us – a hedge that protects the garden, supports wildlife, and provides diverse and interesting food sources for the community.



*Some of the resources you can get at your library- a great way to bring the lessons from the Newbridge community garden to your home!*

Also, County Kildare libraries provided a pop-up Seed Library that sparked fascinating discussions amongst residents about the importance of growing our own food produce. They host an amazing service – you can borrow seeds to grow at home and then, later in the year, you return harvested seeds to the library to share with other people! Contact Jean from the Naas branch of Kildare County Library Services for more information on their initiatives across the county.



*Community spirit kept us in great form as we had our work cut out for us, learning as we go.*

## other workshops

In addition to the winter planning and spring planting workshops, there were three additional workshops:

- **Composting:** On 7 December 2024, Craig Benton offered a hands-on workshop about the importance of examining soil types and learning about the differences in feeding our soil. He engaged participants by discussing their motivations and what they hoped to learn, such as soil sustainability, the role of worms in ecology, and composting. Other activities included creating leaf mould cages and compost bins for the garden.
- **Willow Weaving:** On 18 January 2025, Lynn Kirkham offered a workshop where participants made obelisks to be used as food growing support structures for peas, beans, cucumbers and even companion friendly flowers for the garden.
- **Water Harvesting:** On 2 May 2025, Craig Benton led a workshop on setting up basic rainwater collection systems and sustainable irrigation methods for community and home gardens.



*Enjoying the art of willow weaving*



*Installing our garden water butt with Craig*



*Our new compost bay in the evening sun!*

# artist in residence

We have excitedly engaged artist Jennie Moran to create an artistic response to the research and mapping being conducted in relation to Our Shared Plate. Jennie is an artist who uses the philosophy, culture, and infrastructure of hospitality to create opportunities for shared connection. She shared some of her delicious recipes already by making flapjacks for those attending the composting workshop in December!

# adult food education

In May and June 2025, Rebecca Vining, a Maynooth University Geography researcher, is working alongside organic horticulturist Lucy Bell and tutor Ann Devitt to develop a series of workshops to develop a food literacy programme. Members of the programme include a Women's Group and members of Platinum Clubhouse. The initial planting workshops will be followed by a series of cooking workshops linking the garden and kitchen.



# street feast

Some Newbridge locals described how they held their own street feasts before and after the pandemic. So, we are delighted to host the first (of many!) in the new community garden. We will celebrate community, food and fun with everyone involved in the resource centre.. This joyful Street Feast takes place on Friday 23rd May 2025, 12–3pm in the community garden. It is a pot-luck style event so everyone is encouraged to bring a dish to share. We will have a shared community lunch, outdoor cooking, willow weaving, a food preservation and zero waste workshop and a tour of the garden.

# thanks for a great year!

Through your great work, energy, support, and ideas, the community can continue growing, sharing, and eating food together and enjoy the many benefits of that harvest for all generations in the years to come. Claire and the Our Shared Plate team will also continue to support the garden group through other funded project opportunities and the development of signage to mark this community-built space.



**supporting neighbourhoods  
to **grow**, **cook** and **eat** together.**