



our shared plate community newsletter

a neighbourhood network initiative

O'Moore Place, Portlaoise



Welcome to the Our Shared Plate community newsletter for O'Moore Place!

The allotments have made amazing progress since 2017 when they were first set up on an abandoned field. Surviving some early growing pains and following COVID lockdowns, a core group of residents came together to create our shared growing space, which is now stronger and more diverse than ever. Thanks to the hard work of community members, there are now potatoes, beetroot, cabbage, carrots, pumpkins and much, much more

growing in O'Moore Place allotments! As well as providing food, the allotments have also given the community a chance to learn together and invite more groups to grow with us, such as the Portlaoise Women's Shed group.

In 2024, Our Shared Plate began to partner with the allotment community and Laois Partnership, supporting a range of workshops that gave people a chance to share growing tips, work on the allotment design, visit other community gardens and allotments, and try new foods and new cooking skills. This community newsletter provides a reflection of that journey together!

workshops with Kitty



Sharing stories and knowledge: 2024 'Building our Edible Garden' workshops with Kitty.

In September and October 2024, Kitty Scully facilitated a series of workshops about 'Building our Edible Garden' with members of the O'Moore Allotment and the Portlaoise Women's Shed. In the first workshop, people shared their stories and memories of gardening and eating fresh vegetables and herbs from their gardens, which indicated the importance of intergenerational memory. People also reflected on the importance of sharing food at harvest time, as well as shared tips about plants and food storage. Maynooth Geography researchers were there to talk to residents about their weekly food practices, such as where they shopped and what they cooked.

The Women's Shed group were also shown their growing area in the allotment and they worked with kitty to measure and design their future raised beds. Some people also went home with the gift of fresh vegetables from the garden!



Street Feast cooking demonstration in October 2024 by Eunice and Thomas.

The O'Moore Place Street Feast took place on the 19th of October 2024. Inside the community centre, while children drew and coloured in pictures in the kid's area, Chefs Eunice and Canice gave a wonderful, and tasty, cooking demonstration. Using the same produce as grown in the allotments. The two chefs showed how we can create delicious and nutritious meals with just a few simple ingredients. Eunice and Canice discussed how soup is such a versatile meal, open to adding in any vegetables you can find in your garden or allotment, from potatoes and carrots to peppers and pumpkins. Their vegetable soup was paired with traditional homemade Irish soda bread, containing just four simple ingredients: flour, bread soda, salt, and buttermilk.

During the Street Feast, Bridget's pyrographic creative work could be seen on display. The hand-crafted signs have now been firmly fixed in place in the compost area within the allotment. We also created a community food audit map of Portlaoise. Residents shared and charted their lived experience eating and growing in Portlaoise, and what food means to them. This map, which captured all the shared knowledge about the local foodscape, was then uploaded into a digital format.

From both our discussions and our map we can see that growing and eating food has a lot of importance, from being a source of health, sharing, and friendship, to intergenerational bonding and learning, to providing a space to just chill out and relax in the allotments.

We took a tour of the allotments where Kate Egan discussed food growing for beginners with helpful advice and tips to start our food growing journey. During our allotment walk with Kate answered all manner of food and growing related questions from the newly initiated to those with seasoned green fingers.



Bridget's pyrographic signs on display at the October 2024 Street Feast.



The O'More Place community created a food audit map.

The digital Portlaoise food audit map is available through this link:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1aq061cqplAj_AAosHC8Ut2SSogq55gQ&ll=53.0450513992474%2C-7.292097248344846&z=12

visit to Carlow

Members of the allotment enjoyed a trip to Carlow to visit some of the amazing community allotments and community gardens. Thanks Dee Sewell Environmental Awareness Officer in Carlow County Council for hosting us. We visited:

- An Gairdín Beo
The Plots
Elderflower Garden Club
- Delta Sensory Gardens

A visit to Delta Sensory Gardens completed our day with lunch and a beautiful walk among the gardens there.



workshops with Alex

In March 2025, three workshops with Alex Konieczka, a skilled facilitator, invited allotment members to focus on learning more practical skills for sustainable living, productive gardening, and food waste reduction. The three workshops were engaging and informative with lots of interactive activities and open discussions.

The first workshop was based around designing some rules for the gardening space. After a warm-up Alex ran an agree/disagree game where she presented statements about rules and behaviour in a community garden. There were some discussions around the need for the garden to be productive, maintained, and producing lots of food. People also talked about what rules would be good for the garden. Everyone shared their ideas and the group came up with a set of five values that they shared: trust, teamwork, resilience, fun and environmental stewardship. The workshop fostered a good atmosphere and discussions, as people talked about how to look after the garden and build a good sense of community.

The second workshop was focused on biodiversity in gardens. It aimed to teach community members skills such as identifying beneficial plants and animals, fighting pests, and maintaining soil and compost health.

Alex used an outdoor activity to teach people about the “Web of Life”, showing how plants and animals are connected. She also taught about compost piles, potassium tea, and the importance of microorganisms. The group identified various garden pests from images and discussed helpful insects and plants, such as solitary bees, clover, and borage. It was a great opportunity to learn about native species and the importance of relying too much on chemicals.





The third workshop focused on methods for storing and preserving food to reduce waste. Alex shared facts about global food waste and went through some practical tips for storing various fruits and vegetables to make them last longer. Attendees were introduced to pickling, fermenting, and salting, and together we fermented cucumbers for the upcoming Street Feast. There was even the opportunity to try some homemade carrot top pesto! At the end of the workshop the community members designed an imaginary "Zero Waste Restaurant" called "The Shed," which would use food grown in the garden.

street feast

On the 25th of April 2025, a **Street Feast** was held in the O'Moore Place allotments in collaboration with Our Shared Plate. This was an opportunity for people in the community to come together and celebrate their successes and share food. It was a huge success and buzzing with activity, despite the overcast weather! A marquee was set up in the allotments, filled with workshops tables, food, and conversations. There was lots of colourful bunting and pictures of the allotment hung up all around. The day was fun for all ages, with a face painting and colouring in for children while adults could sit down at one of the tables for a chat. The place was filled with music and chatter, and there were plenty of workshops to get involved with, including a willow workshop in the shed.



Our team from Maynooth University Geography set up a table with a community memory mapping activity and scrapbook. We printed out pictures from the Our Shared Plate workshops held at the allotment over the past year. Attendees could look through these and find pictures they liked and glued them into a community scrapbook, adding any comments. We also had a community map which attendees could add pictures to or write on. The map and the scrapbook were given to the community to build on in future.



Lots of pictures, showing people working on the allotment, the vegetables that had been grown, and events that people had participated in, were chosen for the scrapbook. Many pictures and comments from the year were provided by residents, reflecting on the great work of the community. Among many of the highlights were:

- The eco-toilet which has recently been installed in the allotments.
- The tyres which had been painted for the entrance to the allotment.
- Some of the delicious fruit and vegetables which have been grown in the allotments
- Flowers grown on the allotment – daisies and daffodils!
- The compost heap at the back of the allotment, where plant waste is recycled.
- The containers built for planting by community members.
- “Learning about all the creatures and bugs in the garden.”



Two stands in the gazebo focused on teaching attendees what they could do with all the wonderful food grown in the allotments. Ann Devitt ran a stand showing how to prepare meals just using vegetables, as these can cost very little and are very nutritious. She was also cooking some delicious vegetable curry, made using just vegetables, olive oil and curry powder! We all had a chance to try some with rice, and it was very popular. Another stand was run by Alex, who was known in the community from having run some workshops earlier this year. She was talking about food preservation and tricks for avoiding food waste. She showed us a pickle she'd made at one of the earlier events, and with help from the audience made a yummy carrot-top pesto for all to eat!



There was also a willow weaving workshop with Lynn Kirkham in the shed where attendees could learn how to weave their own willow baskets. Plenty of people stopped by to build a basket, or just to step out of the rain and watch for a bit. Attendees working in pairs were shown how to bend rods together, building a frame of strong rods, before filling it in with softer rods. This was hard work and required quite a bit of physical strength! Once they're built however, they can last for decades, so the baskets can be put to good use.



There are exciting plans for what's coming next! At the Street Feast Eilish Langton ran a stand on building a community oven for the allotments. She asked the community about what they wanted to use the oven for, how to design the oven, and what to name it. The aim oven will be great for holding events, such as a community café, and for cooking food grown on the allotments, including pizza! Eilish plans to come back with a design soon, and then hopefully an oven can be built to make the site even better!



thanks for a great year!

Together, through the 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.

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