

Clarance House Conservation Garden

Our aim: to maintain Clarance House Conservation Garden in line with the decisions of Thaxted Parish Council as an amenity for the village and as an urban semi-wild space, encouraging indigenous flora and fauna in a controlled way.

Clarance House was once a private house but was acquired by Essex County Council in the mid 20th century for use as a residential adult education centre. It had a private garden and also a kitchen garden, separated by a narrow lane from the main property. When the kitchen garden was no longer of use to ECC, and had fallen into disuse and abandon, it was sold to Thaxted Parish Council (for £1). Volunteers revived it as a Conservation Garden, planting fruit trees, establishing a pond, shrubs and a meadow area to encourage wildlife, whilst maintaining a more formal lawn and borders near the entrance.

The gardens are now open at weekends and Bank Holidays (during BST). The Parish Council lets them out to hirers for various community events (eg supporting Thaxted Festival). Fruit can be picked in season and donations are collected.

Who we are: we are a small team of local residents.

What we do:

- Meet fortnightly (Sundays 10.30 – 1.00) to carry out garden maintenance
- Open and close the Gardens at weekends and Bank Holidays during the spring, summer and autumn (between the clocks going forward and back)
- Maintain a calendar for the Gardens, accessible by the volunteers and the Parish Clerk, for the purpose of the open/close rota and for any bookings
- Carry out maintenance whilst the garden is closed to the public (for Health and Safety reasons)
- Cut the grass - weekly during the summer and less frequently when the growth rate slows
- Promote the use of the Gardens
- Encourage wildlife by various means – such as the planting of indigenous species, providing bird boxes, providing log piles, having a nettle patch
- Maintain our own equipment (ie lawnmower, various garden tools)

- Organise and run the annual Wassail as a free community event (funded by donation)
- Organise contractors for jobs beyond our capacity:
 - Hedge cutting
 - Tree surgery/ major pruning
 - Wall repairs
 - Strimming meadow
- Pruning, weeding, planting, pond maintenance, removal of ivy from trees and walls
- Composting garden waste, using our own composting area and the UDC fortnightly collection for the excess and larger stuff
- Keeping an eye on the condition of the premises, including the walls and the schoolroom, and advising the PC of any concerns.
- Oversee Health and Safety and risk assessments, ensuring safe practice
- Collect and use money from donations left in the donation box to pay for minor expenditure (eg petrol for the mower)

What we don't do:

- Use pesticides