

CWA Woodland Gardens & Allotments Seminar

Ardrossan

Thursday 15 April 2010

Attendees: 22 people attended. We had to turn down a number of people. Greater numbers would have lessened participation. The geographical area represented was from Argyll to Dumfries & Galloway and the Borders. The interests represented ranged from community gardens / community managed greenspace to local authority and private sector interest; urban to rural settings. Most attendees were representing volunteer organisations; a few were in an official capacity.

Introduction

Hosts were Ron Gilchrist and Marion Jess representing Greenway Consulting. Ron is an accredited Trainer. Marion, also a trainer, dealt with organisation and practical running of the event. Unfortunately at the last moment, Michaela Hunter the other speaker was unable to attend due to a bereavement.

Marion detailed the Housekeeping arrangements for the day and then Rosslyn spoke about the work of CWA and the extent of its network of members.

Key Objectives:

- To realise the significance of growing sustainably
- To learn how to live sustainably from what ground we have
- To learn techniques for maximum plant and soil vigour
- To specify a personal or group task plan based on what we've learned

Presentation – Ron Gilchrist:

This took an interactive form - introducing technical information from Ron interspersed with group tasks for reinforcement. The sequence was as follows:

Group Task 1 – list the main problems facing the world in the next 25years. One group was asked to share what they'd come up with.

This was followed by encouragement to re-evaluate where we're at. Learn from the forest and woodland, which is not treated with fertilisers, yet without human interference will regenerate and stay in balance.

Group Task 2 – On a flipchart sheet with a small tree drawing in the middle – list all the physical and biological action going on in all levels of the tree's surroundings – from under the forest floor to above the tree canopy. Again one group was asked to share what they'd come up with.

Ron then explained what a powerful operation was taking place as each tree acts as a water pump – pumping water sometimes hundreds of metres above the ground. A drawing and explanation of the capillary action within a tree was given.

Learn from the Forest –

Fertility – the key to fertility is the recycling of the organic materials into wormcast.

Soil – build up the humus in the soil – chemicals harm – nature already shows us how to maximise soil fertility and hence plant vigour

Litter Worms – the surface dwelling litter worms which inhabit the forest floor and create nutritious waste from fallen leaves and other decaying material. Vermiculture is the process of copying the biological activity in the forest floor through worm husbandry.

Microbial Husbandry – We can harness these same litter worms to consume our organic waste/create wormcast which will give plants, trees etc in our gardens exceptional vigour. Add to this the trace elements missing from our soil [through the addition of basaltic rockdust] and the use of litter worms becomes of supreme importance = copying the forest.

Ron explained

- the chain of organisms required to make the whole composting [hot and cold] process work.
- the basics of worm husbandry with mineral enrichment.
- how, by keeping your garden heavily mulched, as the worm population increases in your soil, your garden will become self-fertilising. THEN you will be copying the sustainable fertility of the woodlands.
- showed some sample projects where these techniques were being used – from schools to householders to community gardens

For 30 minutes before lunch he asked Bill Gow [Organic Growers Bothwell] and Eoin Cox [Wooplaw] to each talk about their projects. This was a last minute arrangement – as Michaela could not be present.

After lunch

Group was bussed to see Fairlie Community Garden. They saw the “talk” in practical operation – a steaming hotbox, busy wormery, blooming raised bed mini allotments, polytunnels and were able to talk to some of the gardeners who were working on their beds - all happening on contaminated land.

On return to Ardrossan there was a Q & A session e.g. advice on trees/how to use wormcast, rockdust – where to get it and getting land leased from local Authorities.

Final Group Task 3

Write out your Action Plan: Think forwards – a week/month/year – what will you actually try to achieve as a result of what you’ve heard today.

Various attendees spent time speaking to Ron and Rosslyn about individual situations.

Dispersal was around 3.30 – 4pm.

List of Resources for future reference

Michael Lynch Centre Ardrossan - excellent facilities for accommodation, transport and very efficient.

Fairlie Community Garden

Kilfinan Forest Garden – Michaela invited CWA to visit her site whenever possible.