



Reader Submission by Bill Thornton

About twelve months ago, I was invited down to have a look at the Live Well, Eat Well allotment run by Pendle Leisure Trust at Hodge House Allotments, Nelson.

Upon arrival at the allotments, the first thing that grabbed me was the sheer size of the operation. The area is taking up by more than a hundred self contained allotments. Each allotment has its own unique character with a variable amount of sheds, caravans, polytunnels and greenhouses adorning each plot. One allotment in particular housed a homemade greenhouse constructed entirely out of recycled plastic bottles and it soon became apparent that life in allotment world is very much waste-not, want-not. An old bath or toilet can quickly be transformed into a floral masterpiece or strawberry haven. My colleague Chris and I quickly quenched our thirsts with some wonderful ice cold Elderflower juice which we were presented with and at that point we decided that we wanted a slice of life on the allotment. Upon making enquiries we were informed that there was a large waiting list but our application would be considered should any plots become available (highly unlikely as waiting lists across the country are growing by the day) then in May of this year we got the call?.

Due to work/life commitments, Chris and I had already decided that we were going to share an allotment as spare time was of the essence and our prior knowledge was limited (I had previously tended to a small blueberry bush and Chris had helped his mum pull up a few onions from her garden!) After having a little tour of the available allotments, we ended up selecting a plot that appeared to need less work and was south-facing to maximise the power of the sun. We soon realised that this year was all about preparation for next year. We have missed the majority of the growing season so our intention was (or still is) to prepare the land, fix the fences, get the necessary greenhouses and polytunnels in place and maintain the leaky caravan. Now bearing in mind that our allotment had been dormant for about three years, you can probably imagine the size and depth of the weeds and grass. We purchased a petrol strimmer (the lack of electricity on the allotment is something that you quickly get used to) and Chris got to work with the powerful beast and soon revealed five beds that had previously been constructed as well as a pathway that went right down the middle of the allotment.

My main role was now to fork the soil, removing the myriad dock leaves and assorted weeds and prepare a bed fit for planting. We had been donated several plants and seedlings so decided to plant them and hope for the best. Chris was now concentrating his efforts on the deconstruction of the chicken coop that we had been left with. Our allotment neighbours had informed us that the previous tenants had been contacted by the local RSPCA and subsequently evicted due to the condition of the would-be egg making factory and its inhabitants. This monstrosity of a shack made with corrugated iron, kitchen cabinet doors and any other bits of wood was proving a real nightmare for Chris but he eventually got through it, separating the good wood from the rotten. It was now time to plant for the first time. We were both excited at this prospect because at the end of the day that was why we were there. Our fellow allotmenters busied themselves with pigeons, chickens and bees but our intention is primarily to grow. After only a couple of months in the business I can definitely see the benefits of having an allotment. It is a 'safe haven', somewhere to go to reflect, take away the stress of modern life and more importantly quite literally see the fruit of your labours! I suppose only time will tell whether all the effort is worth it or if it's easier to simply visit the fruit and veg aisle of the local supermarket.

To be continued?