



POWERSTOWN ALLOTMENTS

The health benefits of working an allotment are more than you think. Read on to find out the many unexpected ways you can benefit from growing your own.

ALLOTMENTS CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR NUTRITIONAL HEALTH:

It's obvious, isn't it? The food you grow yourself has not been regularly doused with chemical pesticides or force-fed artificial fertilizer. The food you grow yourself is poison free, fed with your own natural rich compost, and grown in natural conditions. It is bursting with natural health.

Your allotment crops arrive in your kitchen very shortly after you dig them from the ground or pick them from the plant. They haven't travelled for hundreds or even thousands of miles, losing nutrients on the way, or been picked before fully developed, kept in cold storage for weeks, then artificially ripened for sale.

We are encouraged to eat fruit and vegetables in as wide a range of colours as possible. Different colours, different nutrients. On your plot you can widen the range of fruit and vegetables available to your family. You won't find black or red currants in the supermarket, but they are a cinch to grow. Same goes for gooseberries, red and green. You won't find purple carrots or black tomatoes, red brussels sprouts or black kale. You can grow all of these and their diverse nutrients on your allotment,

Allotments Contribute to your Physical Health:

Not all of us enjoy the gym, but you will get a pretty good workout on your allotment. Preparing the ground, building a fence or a raised bed, digging in fruit bushes. That is all working your muscles and it doesn't even feel like work – until you get home!

While you should always take things at your own pace, setting up your allotment homestead to fit your needs is a physical undertaking which will give your body a good workout with the added benefit of filling your lungs with fresh air.

Allotments Contribute to your Mental Health

Science tells us that human beings crave the natural environment, that it is important for our mental health, and we should make sure to get out there whenever we can. But in an urban environment, what are the options? Overcrowded parks or an expensive family trip to outside the city, right? Not so, if you have an allotment. On the allotment, you grow food for yourself, you build what you need (raised beds, a gate, a bench) and you spend your time enjoying the surrounding trees, greenery and birdsong. These are basic activities which are both hugely satisfying, and generally lacking in the common working day, which is spent usually indoors, often under strip lighting and staring at computer screens, often shoulder to shoulder with other people all day. Stressful to say the least.

On the allotment, your space is your own, your time is your own, you have natural light and fresh air, life slows down to a natural pace. It is your decision whether to weed that bed, or sit with a coffee for an hour or two, watching the robin collecting food for its chicks, or the bees gathering pollen from your mint plants. Tough decision. Cost zero.

The allotments are a relaxing space for children too. A great place for informal learning through observation. There is no exam or evaluation stress, no comparisons, just the joy of discovering that some bees make nests in the ground, or that weird looking black insect will one day be a ladybird, or that we can't use the shed for a while because the wren has built a nest in there. (It happens more often than you'd think!). Allotments are a place for children to eat peas from the pod and strawberries from the plant. A place to wind down from endless technological inputs. A place to relax and just be in the open air.

Here are some very healthy, nutritious options to grow on the allotment.

Black currants: So easy to grow, and so full of goodness. Blackcurrants contain lots of vitamin C, antioxidants and anthocyanins (amazing things that are antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, anti-obesity, and work against diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases)

As a bonus, blackcurrant leaf tea has great properties too. It is antimicrobial, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, antitoxic and anticancer.

Did You Know? Blackcurrants have a high amount of pectin, which is credited with removing heavy metals, and accumulated toxic substances from the body.

Mint: Maybe a bit too easy to grow! Keep this one in a large pot. Mint tea is helpful for nausea and indigestion. Drink it before a meal to buck up your appetite. It is a lovely drink just for its own sake too. Not for the under 4s tho, try chamomile or dill instead for them.

Did You Know?: Mint (Menthe) is named after a Greek nymph Minthe, who was turned into a mint plant by Persephone for conduct unbecoming.

Sage: Sage is not only an important culinary herb, it has also been revered for its medicinal properties for centuries. Sage tea is a tonic and liver stimulant and can relieve night sweats in menopause. Do not overuse sage, it is a potent herb, one cup at night is plenty, and alternate with other herbs such as rosemary and mint. Do not use at all in cases of epilepsy.

Sage poultices are legendary in rapid healing of sprains and bruises. Dried powdered sage with bread soda, makes an effective toothpaste, reputed to tighten up teeth that have been loosened. Sage has many uses, read up on it, if you are interested in learning more.

Did You Know?: Sage was so valued by the Chinese, that they would trade three crates of tea for one of sage.

Thyme: An infusion of thyme is helpful for chest infections and stomach chills, and also for irritable bowel. Inhaling steam from a steam bath with thyme, is helpful for dry coughs and general chest infections. Thyme is said to be helpful in cases of asthma too but be sure to ask your doctor about this.

Did You Know?: Spiders, ants and moths hate thyme! So sachets of dried thyme, or thyme oil can be a useful deterrent in wardrobes and kitchens.

Kale: All the cabbage family plants grow very well in the Irish climate. They are extremely nutritious as well, being full of vitamins, minerals, and fibre. Cook them properly to get their best flavour.

Kale contains: Vitamin C (cold prevention), Vitamin A (eye and bone health), Vitamin K (helps blood clotting and bone building), folate (a B vitamin that is key for brain development) and alpha linolenic acid, an omega 3 fatty acid.

Did You Know?: Kale is one of the most nutrient dense plants around, and the nutrients are largely not damaged by cooking. (there will be some loss of vitamin C)

Purslane: Keep this little emerald beauty in a large pot, it likes to wander! It grows horizontally, so a wide, shallow container is best. Purslane is one of the easiest and most nutritious salad plants you will ever grow.

Purslane has a salty/sour taste, giving an extra kick to salads and stir fries. You can't buy Purslane in the supermarket, you have to grow it yourself. You can choose to share your secret ingredient with your friends – or not.

Purslane contains the highest level of alpha-linolenic acid (an omega 3 fatty acid essential for human nutrition) of any plant. Purslane also contains vitamin C, Vitamin E, calcium, magnesium, potassium and iron.

Did You Know?: Purslane contains more vitamin E than spinach, and more beta carotene than carrots. **NB!!** Purslane does contain oxalates, which are to be avoided if you suffer from kidney disease.

If you are interested in growing your own food on an allotment, contact Fingal County Council on their website at Fingal.ie. Google Fingal Allotments Management for their application form. Fingal currently manage four allotment sites (900 allotments) at Donabate, Skerries, Balbriggan and Powerstown. Powerstown is currently the only municipal allotment site in Dublin 15.

As a new applicant you will need to fill out application form AL1.

Applications are taken from 1st January – 31st January.

Powerstown Allotments manage the following ongoing projects, instigated and maintained by allotment holders.

1. An orchard containing apples, pears, plums, damsons, greengages, cooking apples and cherries. This is a young orchard, and many of the trees are just coming into bearing. At this stage, the young trees need maintaining, ie feeding, weeding, pruning and monitoring for pests and diseases. A few have died and need replacing. The reward will be bountiful harvesting in years to come. (There is fruit every year, but not at full bearing yet)
2. An apiary. For anyone interested in learning the art of beekeeping, there is an active bee group on site.
3. A community polytunnel. Small plots are available to rent in the polytunnel, and impressive harvests of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and herbs are produced.
4. Community garden with BBQ, picnic tables and side planting.
5. Site wide composting has begun and the management of this will be decided in 2023.
6. Site maintenance is carried out by volunteers, who cut the grass, weed the flower beds, keep the community garden tidy. Manage the site composting

Interested in Local Biodiversity?

Recently plot holders have become interested in the biodiversity of the surrounding area, which includes a small native pine forest, a stream and a small wetland. These mini ecosystems are home to buzzards, a long-eared owl, lots of songbirds, frogs, newts and pygmy shrews.

This is an asset that should be preserved.

A Biodiversity Group will be forming in 2023 to take this interest further. The group will hopefully include plot holders and people from the local areas who are interested in biodiversity.

If you think you might be interested in this group, wherever you are based, please give me a call. Ritamary Bolton, 087 9977376. An initial meeting will be arranged early in the New Year.