

Carol's Physic Garden Adventures

It is not often that I act on my New Year resolutions; however, my idea of developing a mini physic garden (for medicinal plants) has actually come to fruition this year.

My interest in medicinal plants stems from my time working at the Poison Garden at Alnwick Garden and undertaking a Foundation Course in Plant Medicine at Dilston Physic Garden.

When U3A Northumbria Region was looking for an active learning initiative I suggested the C21st Northumbria Herbal Project (see Regional Website). As I had a patch of garden in need of a makeover I thought I should lead by example and create my own mini physic garden. Neck and back problems meant that I wanted a low maintenance garden full of plants that I could watch grow and more importantly use.

My adventures began in December 2017 when horticulturist Anna Corbett and I got together to do an initial survey of the plot, discuss my visions for the garden and look at the medicinal plants I already had and those I would like to grow. I had some packets of seed. They included Echinacea, wild thyme, and liquorice as well as lemon balm, cat nip, trailing tomato and borage.

In early January this year I found 5 end of line hexagonal planters in Homebase at a bargain price. This spurred me on to invite Anna back to produce a proper garden survey and proposal. Then the bad weather (do you remember the Beast from the East?) scuppered my plans! It wasn't until April that a local gardener Gavin and friend were able to start digging. In three days in between rain and snow shower the plot was transformed and my partner Eddie and I bought and filled each planter with 400 litres of compost.

I purchased miniature apple, pear and plum trees for the planters and a Morello cherry for the south facing border. I acquired plants from friends and neighbours, the National Trust and Dilston Physic Garden and planted seeds in trays - some indoors, some outdoors. By 13th May the first stage of planting was complete.

There were casualties: the wild thyme and liquorice seeds did not germinate. I nearly lost hope of seeing marigold and borage which were very late flowering this year. Then the hot summer - lots of worrying and watering paid off. August rains have helped the garden thrive.

September 8th - Anna has just popped round and was amazed at the transformation. We discussed how best to train the Morello cherry, prune the fruit trees, ideas for moving some of the larger plants such as angelica and valerian creating two new beds and introducing new plants next year.

One of my objectives this year was to use and experiment with medicinal plants: thyme and oregano for cooking, lovage in nettle soup, lemon balm and mint for teas, choc mint for cake, rose hips for rose hip syrup and Morello cherries in brandy for Christmas.

It certainly has been an active learning project for me. However, just as important are the benefits to my mental and physical health. An hour in the garden does wonders, followed by a relaxing lemon balm tea!

April 2018 – Men at work!



August 2018 - My mini physic garden

