Garden Newsletter October 2024…….

Echo Eternal Curriculum Garden

The weather! ……

Look at the headline – what more can we say but the way our weather patterns are going something is going to have to change – the amount of rainfall has been absolutely ridiculous!

Coventry alone had the wettest September since 1883…….

Coventry experienced the dullest September since 2008…….

The only positive coming out of these statistics is that our poly tunnel water butts are full to the brim with rainwater – great for watering the plants that we have growing inside the poly tunnel, but as for the crops that we have tried to grow outdoors, the yields have been very poor…….

Part of the challenge of growing food – we will, along with plenty of much more commercial growers have to really start looking at what we can grow and how we look to adapt to the weather patterns……

Colourful Chillies……



Here you can see some of the chillies that we have harvested – they are certainly a bright mix of colours……

We will find out soon how "hot" they taste.

Another salad crop growing……

We always marvel about how seeds germinate – indeed, when you see the size of some seeds you have to be amazed at how they are able to not only start to grow but how they can push their way through the seed compost that they are growing in – below you can see a thickly sown row of Rocket seeds that have pushed their way through the compost and are making plenty of strong, healthy green growth…….



Always striving to help nature……

Building a Hibernaculum……

We are always looking at different ways that we can help nature whether it be building Bug Hotels, providing Solitary Bee Nesters, gardening organically by not using any pesticides, growing plenty of pollinator crops and flowers…….
Our latest attempt to help nature is to build a Hibernaculum which is basically an underground shelter where all sorts of creatures can shelter, or indeed look to hibernate. Follow the steps in the build of this structure……

How to build a Hibernaculum





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Now that the base has been cleared out, we have created a wood – log surround.. Also, we have added some rocks and pots to create shelter…….

Hibernaculum build continuing……



Here we have added some more big stones and some small logs….

Also, we have added some more shelter in the form of cardboard and some fresh grass clippings……..



More materials have been added to provide extra shelter…….

This kind of sheltered environment will hopefully provide a home for lots of insects and other creatures……



Now that we have created the sheltered base, we have built a support structure over the top using some strong logs……..
This will enable us to build some protection over the top of the support frame……

Hibernaculum….

Now for the roof…









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Hedgehog Highway……

With more and more of our safe green spaces, we will not call it Green Belt land because that term appears to be sadly forgotten now, with these spaces being overtaken for building houses this means that there are so many animals being displaced, none more so than hedgehogs. We have created a safe entry into our school
garden just by digging down under the fence to allow the hedgehogs to gain access……







Here you can see the three simple steps we have taken to create a Hedgehog Highway…. We have opened up a space under the fence.

Hedgehog Highway Set Up……

With access to green spaces becoming more and more limited, perimeter fences which often stop any movement from one area to another, the more access we can create for hedgehogs to move about freely and safely, then so much the better. Below, you can see the kind of space that an adult hedgehog needs to move through – not a massive space, and not difficult to create…….







HELPING NATURE……

Our Garden Space……

Ways we are helping nature……

Solitary Bee Nesters…… Bug Hotels….. Hibernaculum…….

Hedgehog Highway….. Hedgehog House….. NO PESTICIDES!

Pollinator Friendly Planting….. Extensive Herb Gardens…….

Bird Boxes……

FEVERFEW DOUBLE FLOWER……

This is a herb that is growing in a pot in our Echo Eternal Curriculum Garden….
A herb that readily self – seeds is said to have medicinal properties that help with migraine……



More autumn colour……..

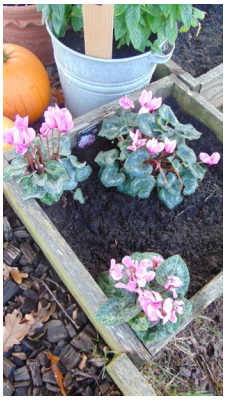
Below you can see some splendid autumn colour that we have planted up……

Cyclamens come in a variety of bright, vivid colours……..









Cyclamens

Autumn

Colour

More Seed Germination taking place……..



Here you can see another excellent example of the early stages of seed germination with the Rocket seeds that we have sown in the poly tunnel……

With the compost and the poly tunnel temperature still warm enough to promote seed germination, you can see the tiny seedlings have pushed there way through the compost in search of light so that they can start to photosynthesise and make their own food which in turn will see the yellow seedlings turn to a green colour……..

Seed Germination……

Poly tunnel salad crops looking lush…….

Here you can see some containers of lush green salad crops that are growing well in the poly tunnel – although the temperatures are still warm enough to allow this growth, what will slow any growth will be the light levels…….



Mixed Salad Leaves……..

American Land Cress……

Mizuna……..

Rocket……..

Outdoor Growth is still evident…….

Although we are now into October, the weather is still relatively mild and as a consequence, there is still plenty of growth taking place including the grass! … Indeed, we are still strimming the grass, but we will have to stop soon because with the weather so mild there is the possibility that we will start to see spring bulbs pushing there way through the ground. Here you can see anenomes that are making some strong green growth……..



Pumpkins……





Pumpkins…

Here you can see the pumpkins that we have harvested – this year we have grown some different varieties – these varieties were grown alongside the usual Atlantic Giant variety that we always grow. But unfortunately the giant pumpkins that we usually grow have failed completely, hence you can only see the smaller varieties that we have been able to harvest this year. Hopefully, next year we will have more success…….

One of the challenges of growing……..

Cabbages are growing really well……

Here you can see our cabbages that are growing really well – they are growing under the cover of a mesh tunnel to keep the butterflies and pigeons away from causing any damage…….





Brussel Sprouts…..



On the left you can see a close up of the cabbages and then on the right you can see our Brussel Sprouts that are also growing under the mesh cover.

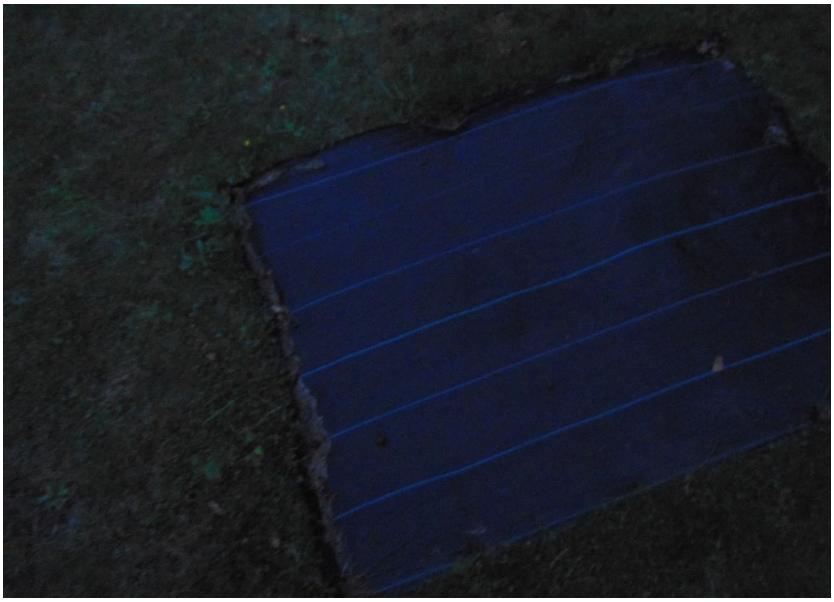
More Brassicas……

In another area of the vegetable garden, we have some more brassicas growing – these are netted to again keep the pigeons and butterflies off……

The Broccoli looks like it is ready to harvest – home grown vegetables cannot be beaten, no pesticides, no plastic packaging, straight from the ground to the kitchen – what could be better? ……..



More ground preparation…… Step by Step…..



Here you can see the first stage of how to develop and build a raised growing bed suitable for planting up ……..
Peg some weed suppressant membrane down over the area that you want to use to plant up. Leave this membrane down for as long as you can to make sure you suppress the weeds and grass.







The next stage or step is to remove the weed membrane which you can see has done its job by suppressing the grass or weed growth…….
Now we are going to lay some thick plain cardboard, never use the waxy cardboard because this does not break down plus make sure that you remove any Sellotape or plastic tape……
The cardboard will also act as a weed suppressant plus it will eventually decompose. Also, cardboard when it gets wet is great for the worms because it keeps the soil moist and dark, perfect for the worms to come to the surface and take any vegetation down underground…….

More Raised Beds being set up……

Below you can see that we have used some more thick cardboard to set up some more raised beds – never throw away cardboard, it is so useful in the garden. If you do not use it to suppress weeds, another really important use is to add it to the compost heap to balance out the green and brown materials within the compost heap. Too much green material and you end up with a smelly green mush, so add your brown material too…….



Re-cycling Cardboard……

More home grown produce……

What could be better than taking a fork, then go and dig up a root or two of home - grown potatoes – it is like digging for treasure……









Freshly dug home grown potatoes.

Add some fresh garden mint……

Digging for Treasure……

Well, not quite treasure, but the thrill when you did into the soil to find what you have grown – under the ground, you have no idea what has grown but when you do find out it makes the effort all worthwhile……..

Here you can see another root of potatoes that we have dug up……..



Some welcome autumn colour…….

Here you can see some isolated pots of colour with our calendula that are providing some much - needed cheer at this time of the year……







Definitely autumnal now……..

Although the weather and the temperatures are very mild, there are plenty of signs of autumn with not only lots of leaves falling but also, and significant from a growing standpoint, the light levels some days are very poor indeed…….

Now, one of the easiest ways to make compost in the form of leaf mould is to rake up as many fallen leaves as you can, make a leaf mould pile and then let the elements do the work for you – it is not a fast process but well worth showing some patience because you are generating a free resource! …….

Not only does raking up the leaves give you some exercise, it keeps you warm and then you have the satisfaction of clearing up your garden area……..

Also, if you are able to, strim or chop up your leaves so that the composting process is quicker, then you get results much quicker. One other thing to mention is that do not use any leaves that are waxy in texture because these do not decompose very quickly at all……

Here you can see the mature oak tree that is the real centrepiece and indeed a real landmark of the Echo Eternal Curriculum Garden……..

It would be fascinating to know how old the oak tree really is?……..









Leaf mould makes great compost!

Echo Eternal Curriculum Garden…

Super autumn colours……..



More striking autumn colours……

Here you can see some more examples of the changing colours of the leaves plus if you look at the striking red stems of the cornus……











Autumn colours……

Christmas tree standing tall and proud……

Here you can see a stunning Christmas tree towering over the perimeter of the school car park. A beautiful specimen tree……..



More tree planting……

When you look across the fields from the school particularly if you go upstairs, you will see that the local landscape is or has changed quite dramatically with an extensive house building programme taking place. It is sad to see such beautiful green fields, mature healthy trees and hedgerows all being sadly obliterated to be replaced by concrete and bricks! ……..

Sadly, planners seem to have a view now, that where there is open space it can be built on much to the detriment of the local environment and the habitat that our wildlife needs to flourish. Mature trees take a long time to establish and grow to a size like the ones that have been cut down – replacing them with tiny little saplings will take years to mature, that is if we don't get extremes of weather which has decimated many tree planting projects that have followed major construction projects around the country…….

Here at President Kennedy School, we are endeavouring to plant as many trees as we can fit into the space available. Working alongside Smart Learner Driving School we have planted 50 Flowering Cherry Trees, we have planted a fruit tree orchard with apple and damson trees, all funded again by Smart Learner, this in fact will be doubled shortly in the tree planting season, again due to the generosity of Smart Learner. Just recently another 10 Silver Birch trees have been planted in the Echo Eternal Curriculum Garden plus just recently 15 fast growing Christmas trees, or to give them their proper name,

Norway Spruce or Picea Abies, have been planted in the garden area…….



Here you can see one of the Norway Spruce trees that has been planted in the garden……..

So, effectively we are trying to create a vibrant green environment with trees that will be around for a long, long time……

If you look back in the history of the Holbrooks area, President Kennedy School founded in 1966 was originally to be called either Rookery Farm School or Holbrook High but the assassination of President John F Kennedy led to a name change. Rookery Farm implies that there was a farm on the school site ?…….

So, perhaps we are almost un- knowingly trying to return some of the school grounds to its original state – let us hope so, if we can plant lots more trees too – a lasting legacy……

More fruit trees planted……

Below you can see that we have planted two more apple trees – this variety is called Summer Red which we are growing as an espalier tree……

An espalier tree is grown either flat against a wall or trained along a wire…….

We are growing our two trees along a wire as you will see below……













Summer Red Apple Trees…….

Espalier trees..

Spring flower bulb planting is underway……

Spring seems a bit far away but planting wise, spring flowering bulbs can be planted now right up until the early part of the New Year although planting dates and times are all weather led – if the ground is too wet and soggy, then the bulbs will rot before they have time to start any early growth and then if we get a period of cold weather and the ground become frozen, then planting is difficult too. So, apart from tulips, get them in as and when you can……..

Tulips need planting later in the year……



Here you can see some of the colourful crocus that we have planted directly into the grass… Experience has taught us that by lifting the grass and then planting into the soil and then replacing the grass on top of the bulbs stops the squirrels from digging up the bulbs….







Spring bulb planting……

More bulb planting……

Not only are the spring flowering bulbs colourful but they also serve as an early source of pollen and nectar for the bees and any other pollinating insects that any warmer or dry weather in the early spring encourages them to search for food. Here you can see some more spring flowering bulbs……





Alliums planted up……





Here we are planting lots of alliums – these are bulbs that produce some really tall striking flowers that are loved by the bees and lots of other important pollinating insects..

Again, we are planting these bulbs under the grass, so we have lifted the grass, then the bulbs have been planted and then the grass has been put back to cover the bulbs over…

Blackcurrant Sage……..

This is a gorgeous herb that produces beautiful pink flowers and has a really distinctive blackcurrant smell too…….



Crab apples provide some autumn colour……..



Wild tulips planted……

Below you can see some packets of wild tulips that we are planting in the grass where they should naturalise and spread over the years……



Charity bulb planting is underway again……

We are once again indebted to Jo Wilson at Littlehurst Nursery and Garden Centre who has once again provided us with a sack of top - quality Narcissus flower bulbs and 100 pots - these flower bulbs have all been potted up and will be sold to raise funds for Myton Hospice……







Littlehurst
Nursery and
Garden Centre



NARCISSUS

Littlehurst Nursery and Garden Centre
Bennetts Road North,
Corley,
Coventry
CV7 8BG

01676 540178

Primroses are showing some colour……..

Here you can see some of our Primroses that have been planted for some time, they are naturalised now so they will come back from year to year……

They are giving us some very welcome autumn colour…….



Trees removed……



Sadly, it is never a good time when mature trees that have stood on the school site since before the 1960's have to be removed, but this is what has had to be done recently. The two Silver Birch trees in the photograph, from the school garden have had to be removed because they have brackets of fungus growing on them which in time will eat into the tree rendering the trees unsafe, so as sad as it is, safety is paramount….

We will put the logs to good use making raised beds, also some of the branches have been added to our Bug Hotel – at the bottom of the page you can see some of the logs that have
been left for us……..



Logs that have been left for us to put to good use…….



Here you can see one of the fungus brackets that was growing on the outside of one of the Silver Birch trees…….
BRACKETS OF FUNGUS…….
Absolutely fascinating!
BUT devastating too!

More logs









Trees have been replaced……

Following the removal of the two Silver Birch trees from the Echo Eternal Curriculum Garden, we have moved quickly to replace these two trees by planting ten new Silver Birch trees – although these trees are small saplings, in time they will hopefully grow and replace the two trees that have been cut down – below you can see this new planting…….



Silver Birch trees……

Watch out for even more tree planting soon……