

COP26 – Friends of Starbank Park – small local changes matter

This article has been provided by the Friends of Starbank Park as part of our series of articles to be published in our November newspaper – a COP26 special.

The Edinburgh Reporter posed a simple question to several individuals and organisations in the city: What are you doing to address climate change?

With all the world looking at Glasgow during COP26, and in the face of climate emergency, it is clear that the time to do something about climate change, no matter how small, is now.

Climate Change, small local changes matter

What are the Friends of Starbank Park doing to address climate change? Starbank Park is a beautiful oasis overlooking the Forth in Trinity, where the Friends meet every week to keep the garden looking beautiful.



27th May 2021 Edinburgh – Prince William and Kate visit Starbank Park in Edinburgh as part of their visit to Scotland. Janet McArthur shows them round. PHOTO Live Edinburgh News
Janet McArthur is Chair, Friends of Starbank Park.

She explained the Friends' ethos: As individuals, as members of our communities and as a small part of our complex and clearly changing Earth system we all need to do something.

The good news is that we are all environmentalists as we need to breathe and live on a beautiful planet and we can all make a change even if it's only a small change. Whether it's buying less or recycling more.

We are lucky to have a group of individuals who are all committed to greener living as we all love our walled garden and as gardeners we are naturally 'Wombles – making use of the things that we find, things that everyday folks leave behind!' Repairing our tools, making new plants and trees by collecting our own seeds, taking cuttings and splitting herbaceous plants. We recycle plants pots filling them with young plants and donated house plants in exchange for donations from our local community.

We make our own compost which is one of the most satisfying of pursuits (we also make leaf mulch) and collect rainwater to water our greenhouse plants and seedlings.

You will have noticed, but our summers are definitely warmer and drier and for the last few years in early spring it has hardly rained as all. This has made us consider, sometimes not knowingly, planting more draught tolerant plants in the park such as lavenders, calendula, sedums, eryngiums and the late season flowering rudbeckias. We have figs trees (variety Brown Turkey) in the park that are growing extremely well in these changing climate conditions.

As a group we are planting more bulbs which naturalise and are pollinator friendly and we don't use any pesticides!

We have planted an orchard of fruit trees (we were told by the Orchard Project that more than five fruits trees is considered an Orchard). We have been crushing Rowan berries to grow new saplings. We are trying to think about more native plants and

tree species in the park. We have a fascinating Fernery planted in one dry corner of the park. Ferns are an ancient group of plants which followed the first land plants and are fantastic for removing common airborne pollutants by filtering toxins.

It is important to us to pass on our knowledge by teaching the younger volunteers, like our Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers, to grow their own food. We have successfully grown sweetcorn, pumpkins, courgettes, beetroot, potatoes, tomatoes, salad leaves, chard, chillies and radishes this year. Teaching the next generation how to grow their own food is essential as it cuts down food miles and packaging. But it's also fun and the produce is delicious.

Going back to our 'Womble' nature we have two little Free Libraries at Starbank Park. These were well loved and used during lockdown when libraries were closed. One library contains children's books and the other contains adult books – people enjoy checking them on the daily walks and adding in new books. Our community also hand in jam jars which we use to make chutneys and preserves from our fruit and courgettes.

We have many other household items handed in, which we place on our 'swapping table' , such as photo frames, jigsaws, mugs, toys and games. These unwanted but almost new toys gave us the idea for a children's toy box on our nature trail. It's been designed in the shape of a robot and provides wooden educational puzzles and toys for our younger park users. Our community also donate items such as unused stationary and paper which we use when we hold art events or groups visit the park.

By sharing our ideas, our good news stories and our failures we can help educate and influence those in and around the park on the dangers of climate change and the need to act positively to do something, no matter how small, to try to

slow down or stop what mans actions and to an extent inactions have set in motion. As an example of recent activity we've been trying to raise awareness by linking with other projects from Keep Scotland Beautiful and produced a Forth Rail bridge sculpture with seabirds made from plastics found locally highlighting that 80% of plastics end up in the sea by being washed in from the land.

So let's be more like wombles and clean up our own parks and community!

