



COMMUNITY FOOD GROWING REPORT

2025/2026



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Scottish Borders Council launched 'Cultivating Communities', the region's first ever Community Food Growing Strategy, in March 2021. The Strategy covers a 5-year period - 2021-2026, a timescale set by the legislative requirements of Part 9 of the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015*. This is an update on Year 5 of the Strategy.

In recognition of the importance of supporting community food growing as part of sustainable, resilient communities, Scottish Borders Council appointed a Greenspace Programme Officer in September 2021, with a specific remit of supporting the delivery of the Community Food Growing Strategy. The post was established to support the creation of a network of Community Food Growers in the Scottish Borders (Grow Borders), supporting and facilitating community growing in all its guises by providing guidance and resources for anyone who is interested in starting, or already running, a community food growing project.

This year we have:

Delivered **4,200** hours of volunteering work in the Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden over **180** volunteer sessions with **28** volunteers

Continued to develop partnership working with Community Engagement Officers across all **5** locality areas

Assisted with **5** funding bids across Scottish Borders communities, enabling community orchards, community gardens and 3rd sector projects

Expanded our dedicated resource to support the community food growing agenda

Provided **58** tonnes of soil improver to **16** community gardens as part of our Community Benefits scheme

Promoted the Greener Gateway 'Schools Award', specifically to recognise food growing, biodiversity and sustainability projects within schools as part of Scottish Borders Council's Greener Gateway Community Awards, attracting **9** entries from both Primary and Secondary Schools



Grow Borders Network

The Network was founded in May 2021 by Council Officers as a direct response to the consultation feedback received during the creation of the Food Growing Strategy. There was a need for community growing projects to feel more connected, have a place to come together, share best practice and to discuss the wider needs of community growing. The Grow Borders Network formerly met online every quarter, with monthly newsletters sharing case studies, events, funding opportunities and relevant growing information. Over the past two years, members have requested a mix of both in-person and Teams meetings.



During 2025/26 we have:

- Hosted 4 Scottish Borders Community Food Growers Network Meetings (3 in person, 1 online)
- Published 12 Community Food Growing Newsletters

Feedback from our Grow Borders Network members

'The Grow Borders group has been a fantastic initiative and exceptionally well facilitated by Amy. It has created a welcoming space for people to come together, share knowledge, exchange practical growing tips, and learn about funding opportunities. The group has helped strengthen connections across the Scottish Borders and inspired collaboration, making a real contribution to building more resilient and sustainable communities'

Caitlin Hume, Scottish Borders Climate Action Network

'The Grow Borders meeting has real value in bringing together a diverse range of community growing groups. The Living Hubs project (in Langlee and Melrose Gait) might not have developed in such an interconnected way without our in-person catch-up in Peebles. Combining face-to-face conversations with ongoing online communication makes it much easier to share ideas and reach out for troubleshooting and advice'

Lita McHale, Eildon Housing

'Grow Borders meetings continue to be fascinating, meeting fellow growers and having a good snoop around other growers' community gardens'

Donald McPhillimy, A greener Melrose

'I have enjoyed attending some of the Grow Borders network meetings. Most of the meetings I have attended have been interesting, and it is especially good when visiting another community garden is involved. It is great to meet other food growers and see how they garden. This is very helpful for new community gardeners. The newsletters are also very welcome. I look forward to reading them and passing them onto my fellow gardeners. Sometimes we want to blow our own trumpet and send in an article'

Shelagh King, Cornerstone Community Garden

Feedback from our Grow Borders Network members

"I have attended several of the Grow Borders Meetings and have found them really useful opportunities to meet with other community growers and to share knowledge about growing especially in an informal community setting. This contact with others makes you realise that you are not alone in wanting to see community growing happening across our local authority"

Christine Johnston, Coldstream Community Larder Garden

"The Grow Borders Meetings are friendly, informative gatherings. The combination of online meetings, and also at hosting meetings at community gardens across the borders mean they are accessible to attend and have good variety. It is always a highlight to visit a new garden, (and even return to visit a garden to see the changes), with one of the leading garden volunteers or staff member to give us a special tour of the space.

The experience of community growing does vary between every site in the Borders, different growing conditions, and features of each site, mean all of our gardens are unique and interesting. There are also many common threads, and the meetings are a great way to bring community growers together, to discuss challenges, resolutions, inspirations and successes"

Nichole Dow, Greener Peebles Community Garden



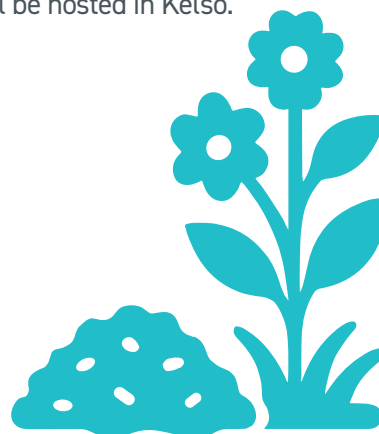
Grow Borders 'in person' meetings

Originally, all Grow Borders Network meetings were held on either Zoom or Teams as a requirement of being able to host meetings during Covid. However, as time has moved on Network members requested an 'in-person' meeting instead. After the success of the first in-person meeting hosted at Burnfoot Community Hub, we have hosted three of our four meetings during 2025/6 as in person meetings.

Our Grow Borders members have enjoyed visits to Eyemouth High School, Abundant Borders Eyemouth Community Garden, Tweeddale Youth Action and Greener Peebles Community Garden. All meetings involve approximately an hour of discussion on relevant themes, with guest speakers and representatives from SBC.

This is followed by a tour of the garden/project being visited, which members have found useful and insightful, often taking inspiration from the garden they were visiting to explore in their own gardens/project.

Members are keen to keep up the in-person meetings, the next one is scheduled for June 2026, and will be hosted in Kelso.



Eyemouth High School





Abundant Borders Community Garden, Eyemouth



Tweeddale Community Action



Greener Peebles



Listening to our Network Members

More Free Green Goodness

After the popular provision of free soil improver (Green Goodness) for Community Food Growing Groups in 2024/5, we successfully secured another round of free Green Goodness this year to be distributed to members of the Network and wider community food growing community.



The compost was utilised by 16 Community Food Growing groups who received over 58 tonnes of compost between them.

'The annual order of Green Goodness compost we receive in partnership with SBC and Caledonian Horticulture is a huge asset to our community garden. The significant discount means we can source 5 bulk bags of compost for our community garden - quality soil is crucial to successful food growing, so this makes a big difference. Whilst we also make our own compost in the garden, we do need the order with SBC, as this gives us access to a greater quantity than we could produce ourselves. Arranging the orders for early in spring means it arrives just in time to replenish our busy growing spaces, and our volunteers always enjoy getting stuck into a barrowing task, in anticipation of spring. We look forward to it every year! Thank you to all parties who make this possible.'

Nichole Dow, Greener Peebles Community Garden

'As a new community gardening group, we're delighted to get Green Goodness compost for our developing garden. It was a godsend, as we were just beginners. Unfortunately, we had to move site a couple of times, and made a point of bagging what Green Goodness we had, with us, to take to our new garden.'

Shelagh King, Cornerstone Community Garden

'Having a low cost, high quality option for the bulk purchasing of compost has made all the difference to our customers living at Poynder Apartments (Extra Care Housing) in Kelso. The gardening group there have lots of plans for the year ahead to grow veg and flowers in their communal raised beds.'

Eildon Housing: Lita McHale

'Thanks for the Green Goodness this year. Our Plotolders really appreciate it both on their plots and in the planters in the polycrub. It gives a neat finish and adds nutrients to the soil.'

Donald McPhillimy, A greener Melrose

Drygrange Community Garden and Woodland using their Green Goodness



Eildon Housing Association using their Green Goodness





Cornerstone Community Garden using their Green Goodness



Community Food Growers Newsletter



The monthly Community Food Growers newsletter is a key communication tool supporting the Grow Borders Network, as well as partner organisations and internal Scottish Borders Council teams such as NHS, Live Borders, and Planning and Community Engagement colleagues. It is regularly circulated to community groups, allotment associations, schools, and partner organisations involved in food growing across the Scottish Borders, helping to share updates, promote collaboration, and highlight opportunities and achievements across the network.

The newsletter plays an important role in connecting groups, sharing knowledge, and promoting opportunities. Its key functions include:

- Sharing updates and news from community food growing groups across the region, highlighting a range of local projects and activities
- Promoting upcoming events, workshops, and volunteering opportunities relevant to community growers
- Providing information on funding opportunities, grants, and support available to community groups
- Showcasing successful projects, case studies, and examples of good practice to inspire others
- Including contributions from network members, helping to reflect the diversity and activity of groups across the Borders
- Supporting communication between network meetings, ensuring groups remain informed and connected throughout the year





'I look forward to receiving my newsletter every time it comes out. It is nice and short, well illustrated and I always learn something new'

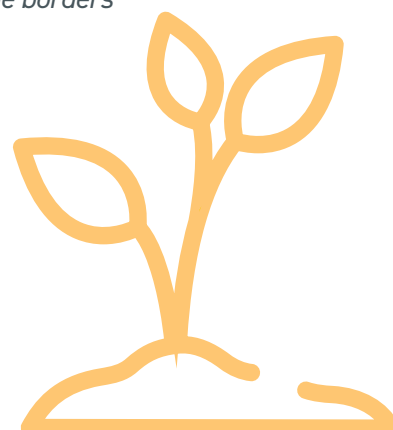
Donald McPhillimy, A greener Melrose

'The Community Food Growers newsletter complements the Grow Borders Meetings and is a very useful way of sharing with our volunteers the amount and type of activity that is going on elsewhere'

Christine Johnston, Coldstream Community Larder Garden

'The newsletter is a great resource which brings together updates from community gardens across the borders. Although the gardens are all separated across different towns, it provides an opportunity to see what others groups are up to, which is inspiring. For the public, it will help people to see the different opportunities to get involved in community growing across the borders'

Nichole Dow, Greener Peebles Community Garden



Community Food Growing Support and Site Visits

Site visits to community growing projects, meeting with groups who have an idea for a growing project, and meeting individuals who want to discuss a growing project, are all key elements of delivering a successful community food growing strategy. Since the adoption of 'Cultivating Communities', we have had many requests for information, advice and site visits.

During 2025/26 we have:



Advice requests vary widely and include advice on plants, planting containers, where to source community garden insurance, how to apply for funding, how to apply for planning permission, how to hold community consultations and much more.

Supporting Community Food Growing within the Scottish Borders

Below you will find two case studies of projects where Council Officers have helped secure funding and offered advice and support through the development of their projects. We continue to support these projects through the Grow Borders Network.



Case Study: Lilliesleaf Community Allotment

The Lilliesleaf Community Allotment is situated on Lilliesleaf Green in the centre of the village. The allotment was created in late 2022 to allow villagers and others to grow organic vegetables and fruit. It is open to everyone, and participants of all abilities are encouraged to get involved and have a go. The site includes a raised growing bed that can be accessed by people with limited mobility.

The outdoor beds are tended using a "no-dig" cultivation practice, and the allotment also includes a well-utilised polytunnel. The space is currently maintained by a team of around eight volunteers. Growing activity is supported by rainwater captured from the polytunnel roof. Over three successful growing seasons, the volunteers have gradually extended the cultivated areas and increased the range of vegetables grown.

Volunteers take produce home, and fruit and vegetables are also made available to people in the village in exchange for a donation. The allotment has been well supported by the local community, and donations create a small fund that helps purchase plants and tools for the next growing season.

One of the notable successes has been the allotment's links with the local primary school. A growing bed has been allocated to the school, and pupils have been actively and enthusiastically involved in growing vegetables and flowers from seed.



Case Study: Burnfoot Community Futures

Burnfoot Hub Community Garden was created by Burnfoot Community Futures in 2018 with funding from Climate Challenge Fund. This enabled the area around Burnfoot Community Hub to be landscaped and developed into a Community Food Growing area.

The project aimed to address climate change by reducing food waste going to landfill, encouraging community food growing and supporting the community to make lower carbon food choices. This process generated a new community garden with growing areas, polycrubb and space for learning and family activities. When project funding ended in 2020, we continued the work in the community garden enhancing the growing and volunteering opportunities.

Due to the scale and diversity of our Garden we utilise various growing methods which helps in the variety and quantity of produce we grow. Our fully accessible growing beds, polycrubb, hanging baskets and re-purposed tyres enable us to grow produce year-round.





Companion planting is used to ensure plants are productive and healthy and successional planting prolongs our growing season. To help protect our garden we use organic gardening methods creating a healthy and sustainable garden. Our freshly grown produce is shared with our community through our Foodshare Project.

Local volunteers help us to maintain and care for our Community Garden, giving many hours of their time to sustain this project. We also host seasonal events encouraging community members to come along and try growing, showing them how they can grow food in their own gardens at home. Working with local schools also helps younger people to learn about the food cycle from seed to plate. Cooking workshops are held regularly to enable people to participate in this cycle, enabling them to cook with, and get the best out of the food we grow locally.

Our garden is a place where our community and our volunteers flourish. Their confidence in gardening has grown and they have a sense of pride watching plants thrive under their care.



Working with Schools

'Cultivating Communities' acknowledges the vital role that schools can play with helping children to foster an interest in food growing and its relationship to healthy eating and improved mental health. With this in mind, we have developed the 'Schools Award' for Primary and Secondary students as part of the Greener Gateway Community Awards to celebrate schools' successes, as well as working with three schools this year to help develop their community food growing projects.

The Greenspace Programme Officer visited/supported Hawick High School, Eyemouth High School and Jedburgh Grammar Campus during 2025/6.

Jedburgh Grammar Campus Case Study

During lockdown, our 3-18 school worked with Generations Working Together to recruit older people from the community to work with our young people in the school garden. Over the last 4 years, we have built up the gardening space and our volunteer team (we have had 8 volunteers to date) and we meet once a week to work with primary age children to teach them gardening skills and chicken wrangling. Some of our volunteers come through social prescribing. All our volunteers have some gardening experience, but their most important attribute is that they love working with the children.

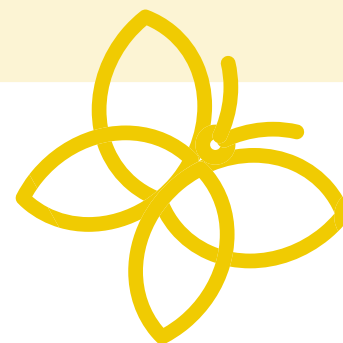
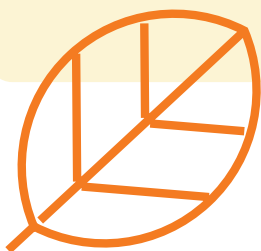


The children are so excited about coming to the garden and seeing the volunteers. They pick fruit and vegetables, dig, weed, sow seeds, prick out and pot on.

They also do craft activities, and they love to look for eggs. Produce is shared with the children to take home or given to Home Economics for cookery lessons. Surplus plants are shared with the children and the community. We have also facilitated an enterprise project with a class. We have had a visit from Education Scotland and 2 visits from academics in Australia who are interested in how the project works. We have worked with P2, P4 and P5 pupils so far. The children enjoy being outside and chat about gardening that they do at home. One boy used the skills he had gained in school to be responsible for the plants at home. The children also take part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and the P7 class made birdboxes to increase biodiversity in the garden.

Casual conversations in the garden work towards improving the pupil communication skills. Children enjoy being outside the classroom and doing physical and practical jobs with a purpose, where they can see their skills developing, improving self-confidence and self-esteem. The volunteers have developed their own bonds with each other and the children, and this helps to combat anxiety and loneliness in some. It gives them a purpose.

We garden organically and record wildlife in the garden for our Eco Club Sightings Board. We discuss how gardeners can look after wildlife and increase biodiversity with the children as we garden. Our S2 classes use the garden when learning about sampling using quadrats and pitfall traps and this year we had many violet beetles, whilst the mint plant attracted dozens of butterflies. We have mammal traps, a wildlife camera and a moth trap to enable us to monitor wildlife in the garden. We encourage composting and rainwater harvesting and much of our garden equipment and resources are preloved.



Celebrating Success – Cultivating Communities and Schools Award



In 2022 the 'Greener Gateway Community Awards' were launched which replaced the previous Floral Gateway Competition. The awards celebrate and recognise community achievements in an additional two new categories, which are the Cultivating Communities Award (for community food growing) and the Sustainability Award.

In 2025, the Council again invited entries for the Awards from community groups, individual projects, schools and other organisations. The event was launched in April with a deadline for submissions in August. Submissions were assessed and gold, silver and bronze certificate awards were presented accordingly (ensuring it was not a competitive format, celebrating success rather than pitting groups against each other).

In 2024 we added the 'Schools Award' to our portfolio, recognising the important projects that schools provide relating to biodiversity, sustainability, food growing and intergenerational working. We opened up the School Award again in 2025 and received nine submissions for the awards.

An awards evening for the entrants was held in September at the Inspire Learning Academy, Tweedbank which was well attended and the feedback was very positive.

Burnfoot Community Futures, Gold Award Winner, Cultivating Communities



Overall Primary School Winners



Overall Secondary School Winners



Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden, Hawick

The Scottish Borders Council-managed Community Garden (Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden) has continued to thrive during 2025/2026 and plays a key part in ensuring that the Park retained its Green Flag Award Status, recognising the outstanding work achieved by both the dedicated team of volunteers and the Community Greenspace Officer who manages the Garden.

The Community Garden is a space for volunteers from across the Scottish Borders to attend weekly sessions, leading the way for 'no dig' and organic gardening. There is a mix of accessible raised beds, ground beds, fruit bushes and fruit trees, alongside areas of wildflowers and herbaceous borders, creating a sustainable, biodiverse and extremely productive garden for the community and visitors to enjoy.



Our Community Greenspace Officer also shares advice and expertise with other community food growing projects across the Scottish Borders and welcomes them to visit the garden for tours. Volunteer sessions are tailored around the volunteers' needs and ambitions, with a sociable element to celebrate the day's achievements and take a well-earned rest and cup of tea. This year, the Community Garden worked with 32 volunteers over 220 volunteering days totalling 4,800 volunteer hours.

Volunteers are encouraged to take produce they have grown in the garden away with them during the harvest season, which encourages people to use and enjoy local, seasonal produce that they may not be able to source elsewhere. Organisations who are referring volunteers to the Community Garden are:

- NHS Community Mental Health South Team
- Social Work
- Local Area Co-ordinators, SBC Adult Services
- Workplus
- Job Centre Plus
- Borders College
- Borders Community Action
- Wellbeing Worker, Criminal Justice Team
- Ark Housing
- Cornerstone Charity
- Macmillan Move More



Next Steps



- 1 Continue supporting communities to take on leases, apply for funding and develop projects that create new community food growing opportunities across the Scottish Borders.
- 2 Work with partner organisations to develop and deliver new community food growing projects.
- 3 Develop engagement with schools to promoting the GreenerGateway Community Awards 'Schools Award' programme, while offering practical food growing support and planning a Schools Forest Garden project.
- 4 Continue to develop the Grow Borders Network by hosting more in-person meetings, tours and creating opportunities for members to connect and collaborate.
- 5 Deliver the refreshed the Community Food Growing Strategy, Cultivating Communities 2026-2031.



