

Gardening in Spain

Join your friends in becoming self sufficient

By Clodagh and Dick Handscombe Practical holistic gardeners authors and broadcasters living in Spain for some 25 years



Introduction

As many readers will realise many expatriates coming to Spain are young singles or couples with little experience of gardening or are in their early retirement or retirement years with lots of experience but shorter in puff and general health than they used to be. And some are divorcees, widowers or widows for whom gardening is an essential part of their lives.

Many of these groups would love to be able to be self sufficient but don't have the energy or motivation to do it alone but would love to share the tasks with a like minded group for the possibility of motivating each other, sharing out the work to best use the physical strengths and experience of the others and most importantly for companionship and eating well. Even the chance to dine together occasionally to enjoy their self grown produce together.

Discussing this at talks and with groups of friends we recently launched the practical concept of 'Growing Circles' on our website www.gardeninqinspain.com.

No, not the circles of flattened grain crops that still mystify agriculturalists but small groups of friends and neighbours each growing one or more crop on behalf of other members of the circle and swapping on a sharing or barter basis. And of course what members of a Growing Circle can grow and share goes beyond vegetables. It also includes herbs, flowering and evergreen plants, fruit and nuts and ecological eggs.

Who could be members?

The idea is especially practical for groups of neighbours and friends living in :-

- the same block of flats - especially if all on the same or two floors
- the same urbanisation - especially if all are in the same street or zone
- the same village - especially if in the same street or area or being in ,
- the same gardening club - who can swap crops at weekly meetings
- the same U3A - University of the third age - group such as we gave a talk to yesterday
- the same school gardening club - where groups of pupils could specialize in growing specific crops.

Yes although we focussed on the older age groups in the introduction 'Growing Circles' could be set up informally or formally by any age group.

It could even stimulate the growing of healthier plants by those youngsters who already have experience of growing tender cannabis plants. We were taken aback the first time that youngsters came to our Question and Answer stall at a charity event and asked for advise on what ecological insecticides and fertilizers they could use.

What can be grown?

The world is your oyster - literally in two senses. Firstly as explained in our best selling books 'Growing Healthy Vegetables in Spain' and 'Growing Healthy Fruit in Spain' many more vegetables

Gardening in Spain

can be grown and more easily in Spain than in the UK and other northern European countries as the Spanish climate specially along the Mediterranean coast creates longer growing seasons and two springs - Spring and Autumn - in climatic terms.

Secondly oyster and other healthy varieties of mushrooms can be easily grown in pre-spawned grow bags or self spawned logs. The bag we purchased a week ago has already produced a kilo of wild mushrooms -called setas in Spain - in a corner of a north facing porch. But it could equally be located in the kitchen, on a shady terrace, or in the garage or under build.

Where can Growing Circle members grow their produce?

As explained in the two books mentioned above plus 'Your Garden in Spain' many crops can be grown in containers on apartment terraces and in patio gardens if you don't have room for a raised bed or traditional vegetable plot.

Naturally it is also possible that a group of friends share an allotment or adjacent allotments which are becoming available in several towns and villages for young and retired people or working part of the large garden of a friend who can no longer cope with their large garden due to infirmity.

Your starting point is Part Two of the above vegetable and fruit books which focus on what one can grow in less than one square foot and one square metre for those with small spaces and least time or energy and Parts Three that explain a range of ways in which growing areas can be established in larger gardens from raised beds to strip beds in orchards to a 'Ten Tub vegetable garden or orchard'.

And of course the Growing Circle could be a mixed group, one member growing a range of sprouting seeds in their kitchen, another wild mushrooms in a utility room garage or under build, another a range of herbs in containers or a raised bed, another at last finding an outlet for their gluts of seasonal fruits or tomatoes and peppers, one growing comfrey plants and producing organic composts for the group, and one growing flowering plants from cutting or seeds for the others etc.. The possibilities are endless.

The benefits

The main benefits are obviously having a handy source of locally grown inexpensive foodstuffs and companionship but there is a third. That is the advantages of bulk buying.

For instance the Growing Circle members could share a load of horse or goat manure, a sack rather than a small box of Neudorff Ferramol snail bait, a large versus small container of TerraCottem soil improver water retaining gel, a load of compost from the Ecopark composting units, a large roll of black plastic, a supply of canes, placing a bulk order for seeds with a mail order supplier such as Thompson and Morgan or Sutton seeds for things that cannot be found in Spain, etc..

There is also the possibility of a circle specialising in the preservation of traditional local varieties of fruits and vegetables and achieving the Slow Food aim of expanding the growing of traditional crops ecologically locally and with a fair return to the growers.

Hopefully some readers will get Growing Circles off the ground. If you do let us know and send in a photograph to via our website www.gardeningspain.com

© Clodagh and Dick Handscombe November 2009.