

John's Tips for Greenspace Climate Action

Introduction

In February this year, Buddhists from a number of different groups and traditions, gathered to discuss right actions that could be taken in response to the climate problem. Greenspace projects featured strongly amongst the ideas that were shared, prompting NBO to develop this guidance. Its intention is to provide basic information to groups or individuals thinking about directing their climate action through the transformation of local public greenspace.

The value of greenspace projects in climate action

There are lots of ways you can engage in climate action but here are some of the benefits that can be gained from choosing a greenspace project.

- The direct effects** of greenspace in addressing the problem – plants and soil take in and store carbon, reducing the amount of Co₂ in the atmosphere.
- The cooling effect** of greenspaces- reducing the impact of temperature rises caused by climate change.
- The environmental benefits** of greenspaces generally, e.g for wildlife, flood relief and pollution control.
- The public awareness** that greenspace projects can raise about the nature and severity of the climate problem.
- The demonstration of methods** that people can use in their own gardens and allotments to reduce their carbon footprint.
- The wellbeing benefits that greenspaces bring** for the people working in them and using them.
- The working together towards tangible outcomes** i.e. real places that we can embrace, share and enjoy.

What kind of projects can you do?

Any greenspace project can bring some or all of the benefits outlined above. And the project you choose will depend largely on the identified needs of the landowner and community, as well as the

time/resource restrictions you have. Here are some typical examples of greenspace projects that might be possible for you.

-A community garden with an explicit climate theme. It can maximise on the 'direct effects' 'public awareness' and 'demonstration' benefits outlined above.

-Planting trees. Whether just one specimen or a whole little community woodland, the benefits are obvious.

-A community allotment. Great for demonstrating important methods that need to be applied more broadly at the agricultural scale.

-A community orchard can combine features of the three above, providing a nice simple space for casual use and community events.

-A community wildlife area. The 'wildlife conservation' and 'climate' messages are intertwined so great for raising awareness, demonstrating methods and lots more.

-A site for bringing people together such as an amphitheatre, reading circle or forest school. It could have a particular focus on environmental education, eco-therapy etc.

Projects won't always need to be specifically and primarily about the climate problem and will not necessarily be started from scratch. You can modify an existing space or just get involved in its management and care.

And a few words specifically about planting trees

Due to their size and longevity, trees are the most effective plants of all in capturing and storing carbon. And because tree planting projects are often seen as 'one-off' events, they are often the most popular type of greenspace climate action. But just a few important things to point out.

-You can't just plant them and leave them - they need all sorts of looking after while they get established; probably 2-3 years.

-Best not to plant in summer - they need lots of watering then which isn't good 'climate practice'. If looking for a summer activity, raise funds for tree planting and plan an event for the autumn.

-Smaller trees often make more sense, e.g. if you're planting oaks, buy small ones. They're much cheaper and will grow quickly with far less resource demands than larger plants. If you're just planting one big specimen somewhere, then that's different.

-Get expert advice on what species to choose in your situation. Trees need to be there for a long time so they must be right.

And this link might be useful: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/how-to-plant-a-tree>

It ain't what you do it 's the way that you do it

For a project to be optimal in directly addressing the climate problem, it might well be best to do nothing; just let nature plant its own trees and over time you'll see a site progress through its natural succession to woodland. You will have used no resources at the outset and will, sooner or later, achieve a richly structured natural vegetation and soil system that takes in and holds lots of carbon.

But realistically, and for all sorts of reasons, that is unlikely to be what the landowner and community want. So its important to recognise that any type of green cover, whether trees, shrubs or non-woody plants, or lawns or cropped areas etc. are all valid components of a green space with good climate credentials.

Whatever kind of project you do, first of all it needs to meet the needs of the local community.

And then it's how you develop the site and how you maintain it that matters.

Important practical choices that we can make

Choosing the right project is essential of course to get the land and resources you need, and the support from the community. But having chosen your project here are some practical ways you can make it as climate friendly as possible.

-Choose construction materials wisely. Check out their carbon footprint as best you can. Choose recycled materials and those that can be recycled after use. Choose local materials and avoid concrete.
-And plants too. Use hardy plants suited to the conditions you have. Field grown plants might be best. Try to avoid plants grown in heated greenhouses, peat-based composts and non-recyclable containers.
-Save mains water. Watering doesn't only use water but energy too. So be water-wise. Harvest rainwater. Plant in autumn/early spring.

Mulch when soil is wet and try to avoid container-growing.

- Recycle green waste.** Send to local recycling or, better still, compost on site. Yes it does produce Co2 but so does breathing. Good aerobic garden composting is climate friendly.
- Maintain soil organic matter.** Apply mulches, sow green manures and use no-dig methods for crop production. Avoid fertilisers, especially synthetic ones.
- Use natural energy.** This means hand tools for everything. Battery powered machines may be possible as may renewable technologies for lighting etc. But avoid petrol power.

Here are some links to help with some of the things mentioned above.

Composting: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=444>

green manures: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=373>

Water harvesting: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=313>

Mulching: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=323>

Getting started and finding help

The quickest and easiest way to get started is to join an existing group with a site up-and-running. But if you're setting out on something new, here are some tips.

- Suitable sites** might be under ownership of Local Authorities (typically Borough/District or Parish Councils). Schools or hospitals may also be interested, or maybe a Housing Association.

- Get people on board**, i.e. the landowners and the local community. Contact local residents. Meet face-to face and do online surveys.

- Official things that need sorting.** You'll need public liability insurance and risk assessments. There may be a lease on the land your adopting and further demands if looking for grants.

- Find some funding.** The landowners may help but are likely to want help from you too. Look to grants, sponsorships and crowdfunding.

- Other resources.** Local gardeners, landscapers, builders, artists and nurseries can be keen to help. Technical/design support may be available from council officers.

- Communication and community relations** is key to everything.

Use digital methods of course but also consider on-site notice boards, interpretation and interpretative artwork.

An enthusiastic and vibrant 'Friends' group will always be the most valuable resource you can have. But here's some useful stuff to help you get started.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/community-gardening/resources>.

With Metta.

Produced for Buddhist Action Month 2019 by John Marder, member of the committee of the Network of Buddhist Organisations UK. www.nbo.org.uk

John Marder Bio:

I hold a range of qualifications up to MSc Level in amenity (landscape-environmental) horticulture. I worked most of my life as a Lecturer in horticulture at an FE college and for the last 12 years have been Horticulture/ Landscape Officer at my local Council working with greenspaces and with community groups looking after greenspaces.

I had a book published on Water Efficient Gardening following the droughts in 2005/06 and work I'd been doing with Southern water on raising awareness (designing and creating demonstration gardens) about water conservation in the light of climate change.