

PRESS RELEASE

Long hot summer leads to bumper crop in Eden's outdoor gardens

Some varieties are thriving while others are stunted by the scorching heat

Chickpeas, cucumbers, courgettes and gherkins are among crops growing in superabundance outdoors at the Eden Project this summer.

The Eden team are seeing a big shift in rates of growth within the Global Gardens exhibit near the centre of the former china clay quarry, largely due to the record temperatures.

The sharp rise in temperature has meant that while some veg has thrived, other crops traditionally grown with ease in the garden and across the country have struggled.

Eden horticulturists say that the bigger, more unusual yields have been made all the more noticeable due to a slow start to the year.

Despite a lack of rain through winter and spring, night temperatures remained low until early summer, meaning the crops were expected to play a slow catch-up but instead are doing so at fast pace.

Eden's Global Gardens are full of examples of crops grown and harvested by different communities established in the UK including China, India, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe, and as such provides an experimental exhibit, well placed to give a snapshot of how the heat is changing growing habits.

Among other crops currently thriving more than usual are tomatoes, butternut squash and aubergines. The team also recently harvested a huge number of onions, now in a drying process ready to be used by the chefs in Eden's kitchens.

The team also reports an impressive potato harvest despite the dry weather, aided by the amount of organic matter in the soil used in the garden.

There has also been a noticeably larger amount of inflorescence, (the structure of flowers), on banana plants which are now fruiting in the garden. It often amazes Eden's visitors to see bananas growing outside in the UK. The plant in the Global

Gardens is a hardy variety of banana from Japan so is perfectly adapted to growing in the UK, however, it is unusual to see so many inflorescences at once.

While these crops have benefited from the summer weather, others more commonly grown in the UK have struggled. In particular, swedes, which usually grow with relative ease, have developed far slower than normal and are suffering from wilting leaves. Similarly, leeks and beetroot have also failed to grow to the same level anticipated.

Living Landscapes Educator Flo Mansbridge, who looks after the Global Gardens, said: "The sudden change in temperature this summer has made developing our garden quite a challenging task.

"It is great to see some things growing in abundance but it is very concerning to see some usually common crops struggling so much to grow and this only highlights the very real issues the planet is currently facing.

"We have adapted the garden to experiment with new varieties of crops and have been surprised at how much success we have had. We are already planning for next year and are hoping to plant even more tomatoes and attempt to grow melons.

"In an attempt to help some of the more traditional crops thrive again, we are aiming to plant Sichuan pepper, peach and apricot trees, which are adapted to warmer climates and will provide a new level of shade from the sun and heat."

To help produce a bigger yield of crops this year, Flo has started experimenting with the 'no-dig' method of growing as a way of improving the soil structure and to also help keep on top of weeds.

Between national lockdowns, she assembled layers of cardboard, woodchip and Eden's green waste compost. When she returned to the garden, she was able to plant straight into the layers as they had started to decompose. She found the area had remained weed-free and the soil structure was highly improved.

Since then, Flo avoids digging in the garden where possible and tries to not leave any bare soil. She also puts down bark chips or straw to protect the soil.

The no-dig method helps retain moisture within the soil as it is not exposed to dry air conditions. It also allows organisms which are often harmed through cultivation to thrive, such as mycorrhizal fungi and beneficial bacteria.

The method also helps with the planetary emergency as it keeps carbon stored in the soil from being released as carbon dioxide.

Flo and the Eden team are hoping the Global Gardens exhibit will now act as a way to inform and inspire visitors on how they can make changes in their own gardens to help the environment and tackle climate change.

Within the garden, Eden's own examples of composting on display show visitors its importance. This is a good use of garden and kitchen waste and means less organic waste heads to landfill, leading to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

The team only use rainwater to irrigate the garden. They achieve this by capturing rainwater off shed roofs and using Eden's rainwater harvesting system which collects rainwater from the Biomes.

Flowers such as marigolds and borage have also been purposely selected to attract beneficial insects into the garden. Allowing plants such as fennel and coriander go into flower also supports this.

Flo said: "Visitors exploring our Global Gardens can have a go at all of these methods at home, each of which will make a positive difference to the natural environment."

ENDS

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For high res images

see: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ndwgz6vcqyaiubuhice4/h?dl=0&rlkey=w7wfkoin1fz9qdpbabggt2o70>

Caption 1 and 2: Living Landscapes Educator Flo Mansbridge in the Eden Project's Global Gardens

Caption 3: Chickpeas are among crops growing in superabundance outdoors at the Eden Project this summer.

Caption 4: Banana plants which are now fruiting in the Eden Project's outdoor Global Gardens

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