

Community Workshop

Funded by the University of Warwick



The Poetry of Plants

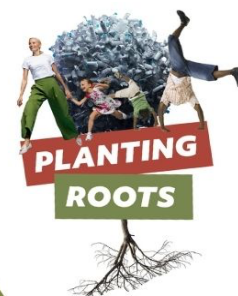
Grow new plants through the magic of words

Friday 15th September 11 am - 1.30 pm

Foleshill Centre Medicine Garden

combining gentle movement and mindfulness practices & readings of nature poetry to facilitate creative writing & co-created artwork

FREE TO ATTEND



POETRY OF PLANTS WITH SUJATHA

This holistic workshop combines gentle movement and mindfulness with readings of nature poetry to facilitate creative writing. Using the medicinal garden as inspiration, Sujatha will guide you through a fun and accessible exploration of the power of plants and poetry! You will be growing new types of plants through the magic of the written word and planting them in a co-created artwork in the garden. No previous experience of creative writing or mindfulness practices is needed- just come relax and play! Recommended for ages 16+

Foleshill Community Centre, Friday 15 Sept 11am-1.30pm

AIMS: to engage members of the community in a series of creative activities that:

- promote holistic health & wellbeing
- facilitate the co-creation of a poem
- culminate in a collaborative poetry installation in the medicine garden
- encourage use of the centre and its resources
- strengthen the collaborative partnership between the centre and the university

TASK 1: MINDFUL MOVEMENT: watering our creative seeds! An integrated water themed yoga/qigong practice. This was a gentle, standing practice that did not require mats or other equipment. It could also be undertaken as a seated practice.

TASK 2: POETRY READINGS: taking time to absorb some examples of nature poetry whilst in a more relaxed and receptive state.

TASK 3: COLLECTING MATERIALS: after connecting with the garden through a mindful movement practice, and inspired by some beautiful poems we then began to explore the medicine garden using our 5 senses to guide us. We focused on the smells, sounds, tastes, textures and sights as we picked a variety of plants and filled our baskets.

TASK 4: EXPLORATION THROUGH DRAWING: participants were invited to look through the materials they had collected and to choose one plant to work with. They were then encouraged to draw it using coloured pens/A3 paper and record as much detail as possible. This was another exercise in mindfulness and observation as well as a creative activity to help facilitate the writing process later on.

TASK 5: EXPLORATION THROUGH WORDS: our micro-poems or seed poems were created through 5 progressive exercises:

1. Instead of labelling their drawings, participants were tasked with writing down any words or ideas that came to mind related to their chosen plant. As an example I explained that the word dandelion came from the French term *dent de lion* which means 'Lion's tooth' on account of their serrated leaves. So as well as writing down any associated words, memories, uses and descriptions, participants researched interesting information about their plants on Google and books I had shared such as *The Language of Flowers* by Mandy Kirby and *The Hedgerow Handbook: Recipes, Remedies & Rituals* by Adele Nozedar.

2. Following on from this exercise, participants were given a post-it note designed like a leaf. The next step was to write down 3 alternative names for their plant using the information they had recorded through drawing and writing (prompts). Participants were encouraged to 'think wild' and be cheeky and quirky in response to the title of the poem we were going to create titled: *Wildflowers*.

3. Each participant was then invited to dip into a plant pot filled with blue and pink folded post-it notes and pick one of each colour. The blue ones revealed words from the organic world while the pink ones had names of inorganic objects/things written in them.

4. The micro-poems or seed poems were finally created by creatively linking a reimagined plant/flower name with the two chosen words.

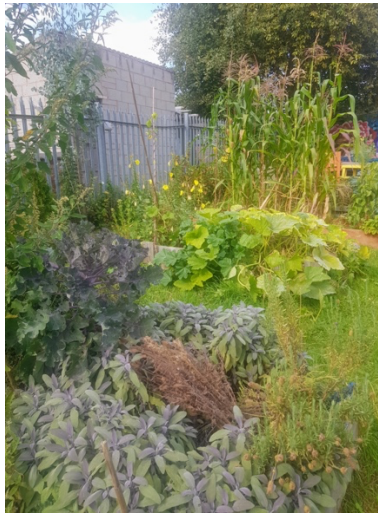
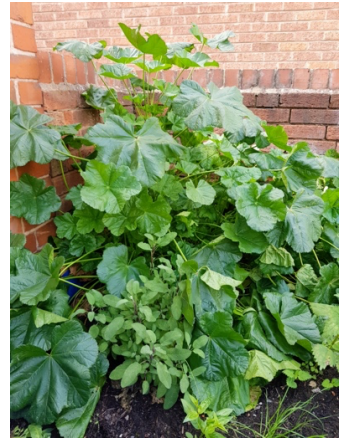
5. The new wildflower names were written onto hand-made/high germination/seeded paper hearts and planted in biodegradable bamboo plant pots, while the micro-poems were displayed on wooden T labels and stuck in the soil. We 'curated' the poem in the garden which could be read in many ways according to where the pots were placed. Post-production, I edited a version of the poem and recorded it as a spoken word piece. I will be sharing it in Collection 5 of my international publication: *Crowstep Poetry Journal* in the coming month.



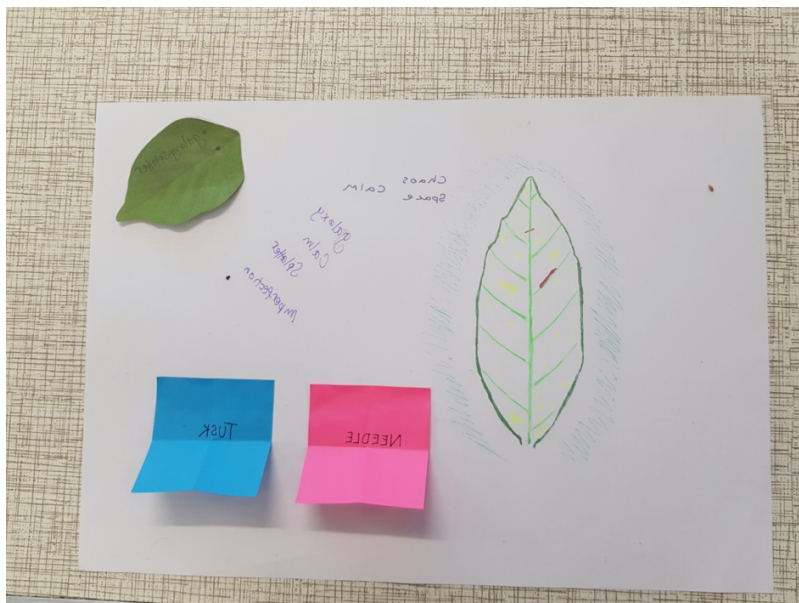
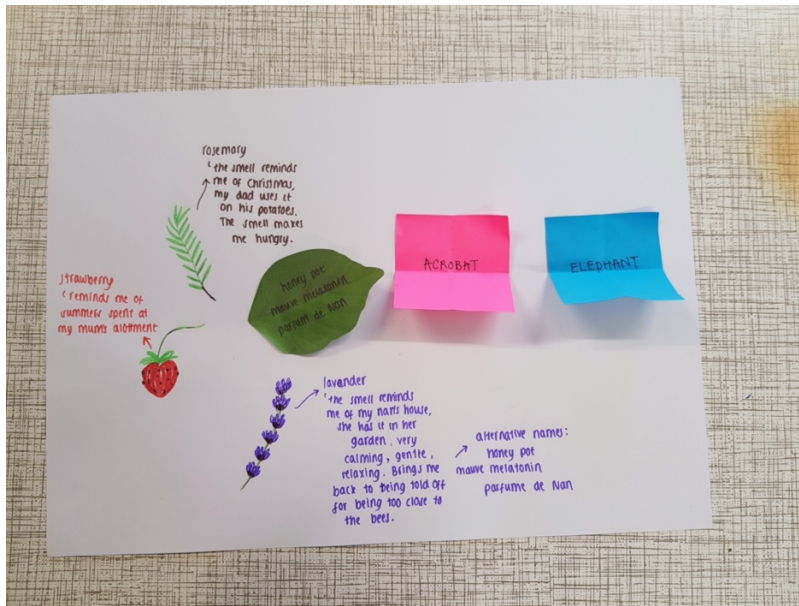
The courtyard of the rear medicine garden was perfect for our mindful movement session. Through gentle, standing yoga/qigong practices we developed heightened awareness to our environment through focusing on our 5 senses. This practice of mindfulness was carried over into the rest of the workshop to support the writing and creative process.



The medicine garden is home to an impressive variety of healing plants. I was delighted to find Holy Basil, a highly prized plant that is native to India and used in ayurvedic medicine. The multipurpose leaves of the tobacco and mallow plant are also grown here amongst: Sage, Bergamot, Chamomile, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Parsley, Rosemary, Mint (Chocolate/Lemon/Moroccan), Thyme, Lilac, Magnolia, Chives, multicoloured Sweetcorn, Tomatoes, Lettuce, Broccoli, Pumpkins, Potatoes, Strawberries, Green Beans, Sunflowers, Beardtongue, Marigolds and much more! All grown from heritage/heirloom seeds.



The 3 nature themed poetry readings were: *My Body* by Abigail Cook, *The Wilderness* by Rupi Kaur and *Houdinii* from my book *The Glass Puddle*





New imaginary species growing through the magic of the written word presented on hand-made/high germination/seeded paper hearts. These wild words will hopefully flower into what I hope will be the beginnings of a wildflower poetry garden.



NEW SPECIES (edited): Nico Wido (Tobacco plant), Illumin ate (lavender), Galaxy Splatter (Croton plant), Minted (Moroccan Mint), Babyfresh (Sunflower), Mauve Melatonin (Lavender)



Wildflowers

One whiff of the *Mauve Melatonin* left the boy
dreaming of acrobatic elephants
their alien tusks like needles lost in a *Galaxy Splatter*.

Meanwhile, *Illuminate* the peacock flying like a kite
bright as *Babyfresh* claws the kitchen floor where
poor *Nico Widow* all electrical, explodes like a pomegranate.

Minted, they might be wild and need a knife to cut them down
yet they sprawl and swing like green kissers.

*A poem co-created by members of Foleshill community and poet/artist Sujatha Menon



THE SOCIAL KITCHEN: I was super impressed with where many of the plants from the medicine garden end up. Along with the food donated by local shops and supermarkets, the garden plants are used to make delicious food at the centre. After the workshop, I was treated to an absolutely world class lunch by the very talented chef there. The Social Kitchen (pantry) is also a wonderful creative installation that sits to the side of The Garden Kitchen (cafe). The partnership between the University of Warwick and Foleshill Community Centre is doing amazing things to break down the barriers between the academic environment and the real world. I'm really proud to be a part of this project. I was moved to tears by the kindness, compassion and respect shown to everyone who walks into this urban sanctuary. It looks quite ordinary from the outside but inside, it is life affirming.

EVENT FEEDBACK

“Working with Su on Planting Roots has been a beautiful process. Her energy and enthusiasm created an introspective atmosphere that was perfect for workshop participants to connect with nature and their creativity. Through mindful movement, drawing and written prompts, people were brought together. This was all down to Su’s thoughtful workshop activities, inclusive practise, and meticulous approach.”

Kate Laister-Smith- Events Coordinator, Warwick Institute of Engagement

“I am illuminated, I am transformed”

DJ Asher (participant)