

# OrganicLea

Community • Food • Growing



Annual Review

2023-2024

## About OrganicLea

OrganicLea grows and sells food in north-east London, and helps others to do the same. Based at Hawkwood Plant Nursery, our 12-acre organic market garden and wildlife haven in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, we help Londoners to connect, learn and build their skills and confidence for work and life. We work for change in the food system locally and globally, in solidarity with peasant farmers and campaigners, taking action for ecological and just farming systems.

We do this by:

**Growing Food:** we grow vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers at Hawkwood Nursery, involving volunteers, trainees, apprentices and course students in the work. We operate a weekly box scheme and farm stall, selling our own produce and produce supplied by farmers in East Anglia, plus some

UK-wide and European produce. We sell produce and some processed goods to our own outlets and to restaurants, cafes and shops. We sell plants through our own outlets and to individuals and community groups.

**Growing People:** we run a volunteer programme at our market garden, open to all and including referrals from agencies and partners for people with higher support needs. We run a variety of training courses including accredited Level 1 and Level 2 gardening courses, an apprenticeship, traineeships and programmes for newly arrived migrants and for young people with special educational needs.

**Growing Community:** OrganicLea helps facilitate the Waltham Forest Food Growers Network, a collective of community food-growing projects, from schools to residents' associations to grassroots projects, all working to transform the local food system. OrganicLea runs a Forest School, community engagement workshops, activities and tours at our site and at other local community events.



## The Year of the Squash

This year we grew 75 different crops at our Hawkwood growing site. Some highlights for us were tomatoes, which had their best year yet, and squash, which we grew 'field scale' in our Old Kitchen Garden. All of the 756kg of squash we harvested went to our box scheme members: one of the many joyful things about this growing site is how little goes to waste.

Overall, we harvested 12,662kg of produce and grew over 10,000 food plants that were purchased by local gardeners. As ever, the plants weren't the only stars of the garden: it would have been a less vibrant, less productive place without the volunteers, learners and work placements that make up our wonderful team.



*Squash curing in the glasshouse to harden up the skin to improve storage life.*

## Waltham Forest Food Growers Network

The Food Growers Network has grown in strength and numbers. OrganicLea's role this year has been to enable connection between food growing groups, facilitate and fund skill-sharing workshops and provide compost, plants and advice. We recognise the need for the network to be actively anti-racist and challenge all forms of oppression, and are beginning the journey of working out what this means in practice. We also launched the WalthamWild project, which supports partner groups to monitor biodiversity on their sites and increase wildlife habitats.



*Photos: Top: Hedge planting with residents at Tenby Court, part of the Waltham Forest Food Growers Network. Bottom: Batman hoverfly ID'd at Mulberry Close Community Apothecary Garden, a WalthamWild partner.*

## English in the garden

This year saw the consolidation of a valued partnership with Waltham Forest College's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) team. They work with hundreds of young adults, many of whom have recently arrived to the UK seeking sanctuary yet face an uncertain future. As part of their ESOL learning at the College, students can complete work experience at the Hawkwood site.

Record numbers took up this opportunity this year. They are awarded a certificate of achievement that includes a reference of the skills and abilities demonstrated during their time with us. Some graduates continued to attend after the work experience, taking a key role in activities at our Sunday Open Days, for example.



*The Garcia family first connected to OrganicLea via Josefath's participation in an English learning work experience at Hawkwood Plant Nursery. The family took part in activities including leading us to cook Honduran speciality Pastelitos con chimol inspired by seasonal Hawkwood produce for 200 people at one of our Open Days.*

## Highlights of the year

We produced organic produce and plants with a value of **£83,259**, distributing it alongside **£170,668** worth of produce from small-scale organic growers and wholesalers, including the Better Food Shed.

We delivered **35,207 fruit and veg bags** to Waltham Forest residents.

We ran our first year of **taproom events** linked to our onsite micro brewery, with beers featuring produce grown at our Hawkwood site.

We delivered regular food growing sessions and **nature-based learning** with seven schools in Waltham Forest and neighbouring boroughs, and expanded our **Forest School offer** with an afternoon session for families with older children.

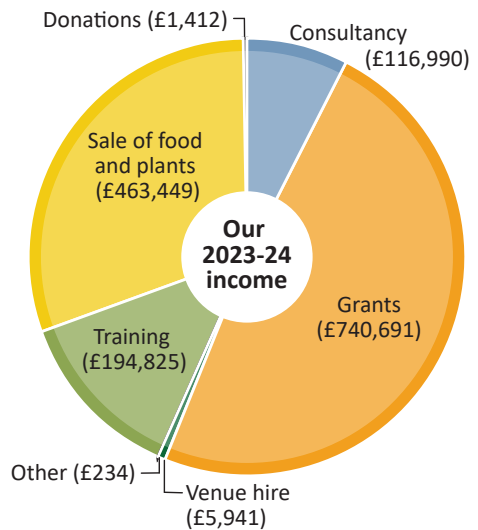
Our volunteer offer has deepened with **47 vocational learning placements** and **293 people** introduced to horticultural volunteering.

We joined the **Waltham Forest Community Living Rooms Network** providing a free to access, friendly community space.

Our courses supported a wide range of learners to achieve skills, including food growing, practical horticulture, biodiversity and cooking skills. We supported **200 learners** to achieve certificates, including **99 learners** on accredited City & Guilds courses.

## Financial review

- Income: £1,380,873
- Expenditure: £1,373,068
- Net surplus: £7,805
- Total funds carried forward: £212,965, including £26,811 fixed assets
- Self-generated income: 51% of turnover
- Income: 11% higher than previous year due to increase in grant income



**Thank you** to the many grant funders who supported our activities this year, including the National Lottery Community Fund, Access - The Foundation for Social Investment, Worshipful Company of Gardeners, Ernest Cook Trust, William Wates Foundation, Heritage Lottery Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Royal Horticultural Society.

## Find out more

### **Box Scheme and Farm Stall:**

Fresh, sustainably grown fruit and veg every week in your neighbourhood. Find out more on our website or email [box@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:box@organiclea.org.uk).

**Produce Distribution:** Whilst we grow mainly for our own box scheme, we also sell our mixed salad leaves to select restaurants, cafes and shops in north east London. We also offer a Kitchen Garden scheme for restaurants wanting to grow with us. For more information contact 020 8524 4994 or [info@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:info@organiclea.org.uk).

**Training:** We offer a range of formal training courses, including accredited horticulture courses. Email [courses@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:courses@organiclea.org.uk) for more information.

**Volunteering:** We have a vibrant and diverse volunteer community. Email [volunteering@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@organiclea.org.uk) if you would like to volunteer or do a placement with us, or if you would like to refer someone.

**Food Growers Network:** If you are involved in a food growing project and would like to know more about joining the network please contact [info@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:info@organiclea.org.uk).

**Schools and young people:** We can offer school visits, activities within schools, and programmes for young people and families. We also offer tailored programmes for pupils with Special Educational Needs and in alternative provision. Email [schools@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:schools@organiclea.org.uk) for more information.

**Forest School:** We hold weekly Forest School sessions for 2 to 7 year olds. See our website for availability.

**Plants:** Our main plant season is from April to June, with winter plants for sale in August and September. Contact [plants@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:plants@organiclea.org.uk) or go to our website for more details.

**Donations:** If you'd like to support our work financially, please get in touch. Contact [info@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:info@organiclea.org.uk) for more information.

## OrganicLea CIC

Founded in February 2001 as a workers' co-operative. Not-for-profit Company Limited by Guarantee (Community Interest Company), Number 05135926, VAT Reg 161 391029

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