

Gardening Journal Spring Term 1 2024

The weather has been great this term so we've been able to tackle some difficult and time consuming jobs that can't be done in the growing season:

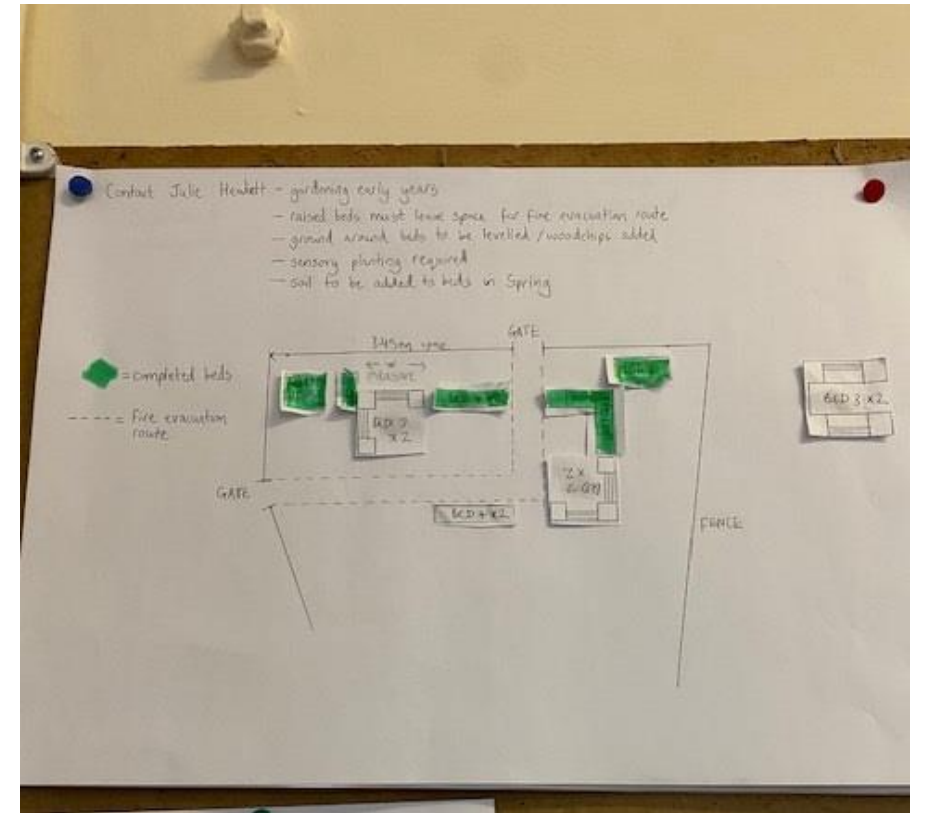
- Improving the growing areas in Woodlands
- Larger pruning jobs
- Repairs caused by weather damage
- Continuing to develop our no-dig beds
- Propagation using hardwood cuttings

Woodblocx Raised Beds

Our big project this term has been constructing raised beds. We are using them to create a wonderful new growing area in the Woodlands garden.

It's been a long process that started last January and it has involved lots of difficult work, including removing a play surface area with a digger.

We started to construct the beds this term and we're hoping to have it all completed ready to plant up in Spring.



Laying out the new beds





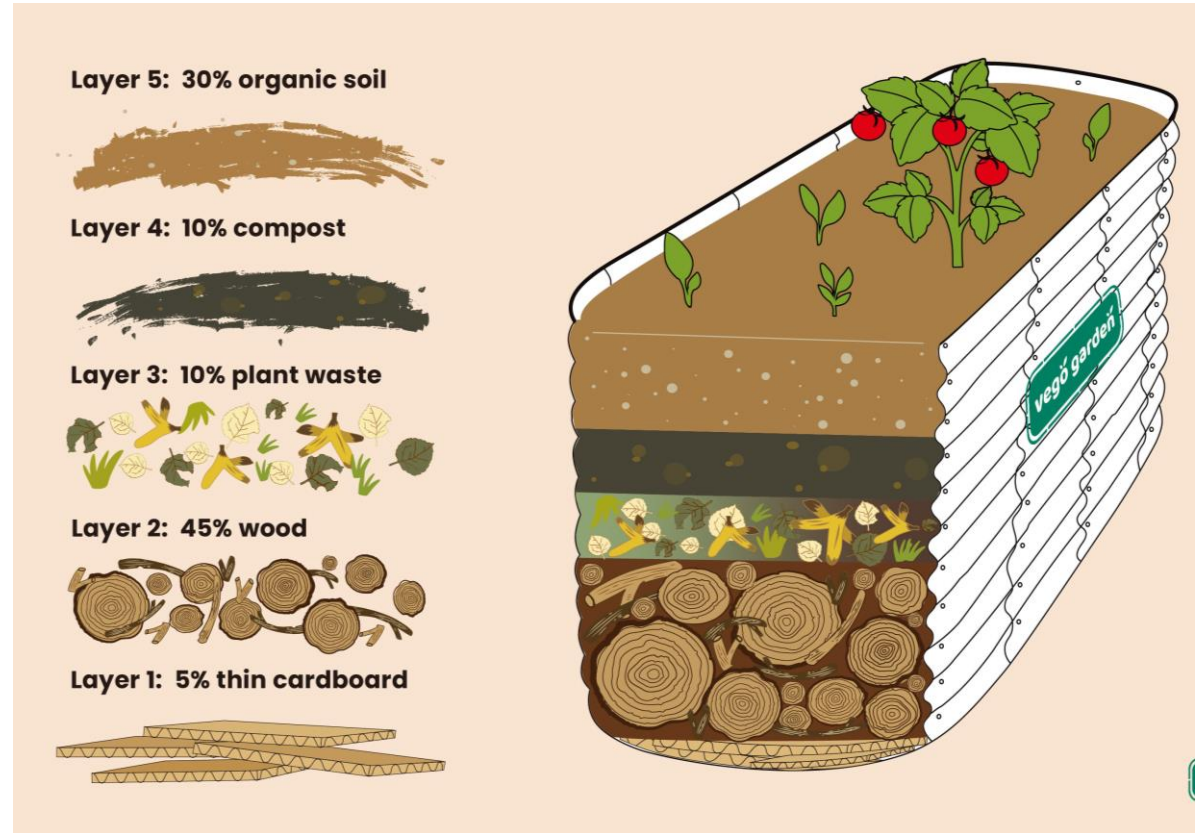
Building the benches



The completed beds



Two apple trees have been planted next to the benches to act as a focal point as you enter the garden. As they mature they will provide a shady area for sitting, as well as delicious fruit for the children to enjoy!



We have reused old compost sacks to provide lining for all of the beds. This will protect the bed and ensure that the wood lasts a long time without rotting.

Each bed has a thick layer of cardboard at the bottom to deter weeds. On top of this is a thick layer of broken sticks and leaf mold. This will be topped with soil to create 'Hugelkultur' beds, which provide nutrition and warmth to plants as the organic material breaks down.



A very large apple tree in the orchard garden has had a good prune to prevent the branches from damaging the roof and the fence. The long branches that were pruned off will be used by gardening club later in the year to create 'bug snugs'.





On the inset day, an untidy area of the playground was pruned right back. This will make it much easier to clear the litter that builds up in this area.



The very windy weather in January caused the side of the polytunnel to become unattached. This has now been successfully repaired.



We have continued to create no-dig beds in other parts of the school.

Propagating New Plants

Autumn/winter months are ideal for taking hardwood cuttings of woody plants.

This term we have been using stems that have been pruned off shrubs and bushes as propagation material.

The pictures opposite show Blackcurrants, Dogwood, Rhus Typhina, Hypericum and even grapes that we hope will grow on successfully in the polytunnel. These will be great for building up a supply of new shrubs for school in an environmentally friendly way.

If we have excess plants in the summer, we will share our plants with the children and their carers.



How to take hardwood cuttings

1. Select the stems you want to use- they should be about as thick as a pencil.
2. Using pruners, make a sloping cut just above a bud towards the top of the stem. The sloping cut will identify this end as the top of the cutting, as well as help rain/water run off to help prevent rotting.
3. Count 3-4 buds down towards the base of the stem and make a straight cut just below a bud- this will identify the bottom of the cutting which should be inserted into the soil.
4. In a pot filled with a perlite/compost mix, insert your cuttings into the soil so that just one bud is showing above soil level. Water well and place in a cold frame or polytunnel. Keep moist and in 3-5 months the cuttings should have rooted and will be ready to pot on into individual pots.

