



# The Harvest Glut

**What to do with surplus produce at your school allotment?**

By George Bates, Papillon Project Research Lead

Border artwork by Holly Chantrill-Cheyette





## **Why it's important to think about surplus produce...**

One of the main objectives and joys of any keen grower fortunate enough to have an allotment, potager or growing space, no matter how big or small, is to produce a good range and quantity of delicious produce. Yet as is so often the case with the end of the growing season and harvesting in full swing, we can often end up with a glut of vegetables and fruits. It's very important to me mindful of food waste especially when trying to inspire young people with setting a good example. Sometimes, to be fair, we can struggle to use this surplus for our own personal consumption, regrettably leading to a lot of perfectly edible produce being left. Thankfully, there are a multitude of quick and easy methods that can help us use up our surplus produce and can even benefit others. Here is a list of tips and suggestions on what to do if you've had a bountiful harvest:

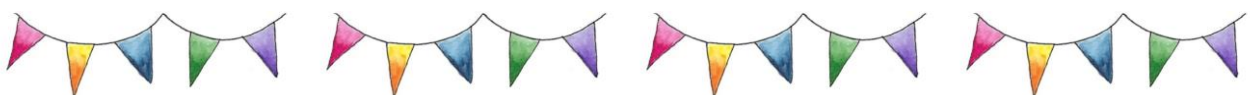




## 1. Create Gift Bags for Family and Friends



If you are fortunate to have a large social network, then they can be an easy way to give away a large quantity of your surplus produce. Simply, fill several paper bags with a range of your fruits and vegetables and give them to your family and friends when they are about to leave as a parting gift or use it as an excuse to see them. You could include a recipe note to help give them some inspiration.

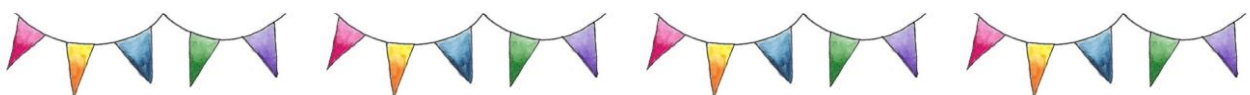




## 2. Cook a meal for those in need?



Sometimes we can all get very busy and stressed at some point in our lives, which can often mean that cooking and eating enough fruit and veg can become a challenge. So, if you have the spare time and produce you could cook a dish for someone you know who could use a hearty meal. Traybakes, curries and casseroles are a great way to use up a large amount of your produce and will provide several portions as well as being easy to freeze if needed for a later date.

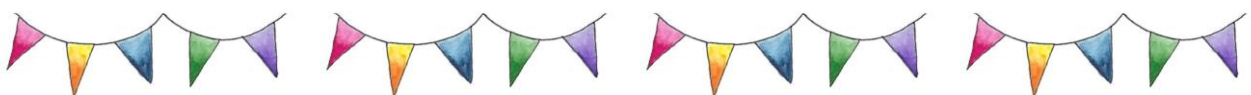




### 3. Have a 'Harvest Festival'?



It's often a tradition, historically speaking, to have a 'harvest festival' in the early autumn (around October) to celebrate a successful harvest. In schools, this often takes the form of a harvest festival assembly for young people to reflect on how fortunate it is to have food, but to also think and consider others who are struggling to feed themselves in their local community. A harvest festival is a wonderful opportunity for young people to become more mindful of their food, to reflect on food security and people who may be hungry.





## 4. Preserves and Canning



One of the best ways to store and prolong the shelf life of your produce is to turn it into jams, jellies, chutneys, relishes, pickles. It's also a great way to enjoy your summer produce during the winter. These can be stored in cans, mason jars or any container that has a sealable lid. You can purchase mason jars, cans as well as canning machines from several well-supplied garden centres, hardware stores or from the internet. Although it can cost you a little time and money, it is well worth the effort and investment if you use it annually and it will save you some money on your food shop during the winter and spring. There are plenty of delicious and easy recipes and video tutorials online to follow to give you some inspiration and guidance.

## 5. Freezing and Drying

Another great way to preserve your glut of fruit and veg is by making use of your freezer and oven. Most vegetables such as peas, sweetcorn, carrots, and green beans as well as summer berries are perfect for freezing and using in dishes later. These must be blanched beforehand in boiling water before being submerged in ice cold water to disinfect and prolong their shelf-life. This can be simply done with a large stock pot and strainer. Once they are in the freezer they can last for several months. You can also dry slices of vegetables such as tomatoes, apples, cauliflower, and herbs in the oven on a low temperature for several hours or use a food dehydrator which have a range of settings for different foods that you can preserve. This increases their shelf-life by reducing the moisture content and can make them last several months in an air-tight container/pack.

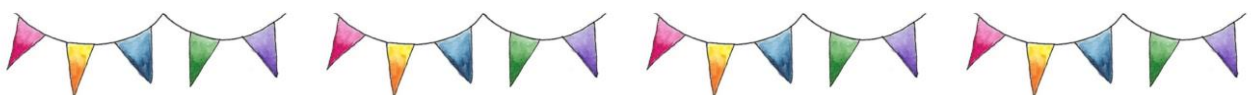




## 6. Dark Stores



A different way to increase the shelf-life of your produce whilst maintaining their freshness is by storing them in dark dry cupboards or boxes. For example, apples can be individually wrapped in newspaper and layered in boxes, while potatoes can be piled into hessian sacks, and onions and garlic can be hung in bunches. Root vegetables such as turnips, carrots and swede can also be stored in boxes layered with fine sand or grit which keeps them as fresh as if they were still in the earth. The roots can then be taken out and washed when needed.



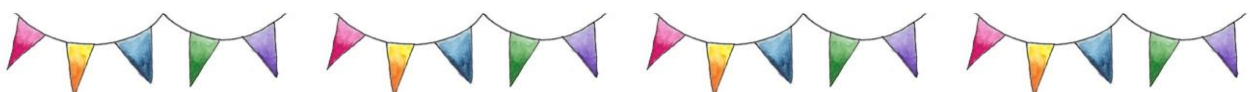


## 7. Donate to a Food Bank or Community Fridge?



If you can't preserve and store all your surplus produce, then donating it to a local food bank is a very generous alternative. It is no secret that unfortunately many people in the UK are reliant on the donations from food banks to feed themselves and their families. Most of their contents is dried, canned or readily prepared, so donating fresh produce will greatly benefit those who often can't afford to have a lot of fresh fruit and veg in their diet. [The Trussell Trust](#) website has a map showing the location and details of many food banks across the UK so that you can find your local one, where their collection points are and what you can donate.

## 8. Set up a Fruit and Veg Stall



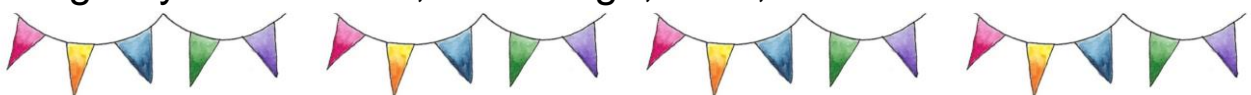




This is a very simple method of giving your surplus produce away and can even make a little money as well from your sales. It could be as simple as a table laid out with your fruit and veg or a few boxes with signs. If it is agreed upon by those involved, the stall could be set up in the reception of your school or at a location within the village or even in a local shop or business. This can also help you gain support for your school allotment by showing the produce that you can grow and may lead to donations or people offering to volunteer.

## 9. Bartering for Goods and Services

If you are fortunate enough to know the right people, you could exchange your produce for goods and services that could benefit your school allotment. Although at first these connections may sometimes be difficult to forge, they are often people that live within the local area that will be grateful for your produce and be willing to help your project. They may be able to give you their time, knowledge, tools, or seeds etc.

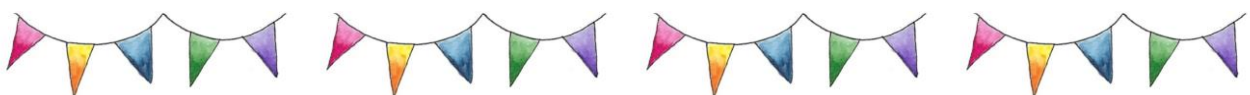




## **10: Donate or sell your produce to your school's kitchen, catering lessons, local cafés, pubs or restaurants?**



Although using your produce to help supply the school canteen and in school catering lessons is a great way to use your produce (and should be the primary destination for the any produce), not all your produce will be able to be used in this way. Another great way though to make sure the fruit and veg doesn't go to waste is to see if a local café, pub, or restaurant will take it. These local eateries are often grateful for the offer and will be glad to know they are helping a school project. This can often lead to them being a frequent receiver of your produce should there be enough to spare and can lead to possible donations. It will also spread the word about your project to customers if there is a close link between the business and the project and they are happy to advertise it.





Whether surplus produce goes to a school canteen, in school catering lessons or a local café, pub or restaurant, it's extremely important, with young people in mind, that they understand where their produce is going and that it is kept as local as possible being mindful of food miles and sustainability.

