**Holy Isle organic vegetable garden in a nutshell**

**Thank you for your interest in the organic vegetable garden lead gardener role at the Centre for World Peace and Health/ Interfaith Centre on Holy Isle.**

We are looking for a lead gardener who is able to oversee and run all aspects of the garden, while working as part of a team of joyful gardeners and living as part of the Holy Isle community. Working in Holy Isle organic vegetable garden is very rewarding work, which not only contributes to Lama Yeshe Rinpoche’s vision for Holy Isle, but also grows food which is very much appreciated by the kitchen, guests and volunteers alike. There are lots of opportunities for creativity in creating a beautiful garden space and the chance to grow a wide variety of crops. Work here is never boring and the island itself is a truly magical place to be!

Background

The organic vegetable garden was started 6 years ago, as part of Lama Yeshe Rinpoche’s vision to create a peaceful and ecologically sustainable environment on Holy Isle. It complements well the existing ‘Flower and Mandala garden’ surrounding the Centre, which is taken care of by resident volunteers.

We try to be a self- sufficient community, producing some of our own food and also energy. We have already taken important steps in this direction and there are plans for further development in these areas. There is also another organic vegetable garden at the closed Tibetan Retreat at the south end of the island.

The Organic Vegetable Garden

In recent years we have been working hard to expand the garden, creating more growing space for vegetables and fruit, building new polytunnels and always seeking to improve our methods of growing. Over this time the garden has grown into a professional organic kitchen garden. We provide fresh produce for our vegetarian whole food kitchen and at times we cook for up to 90 people, but on average we cater for about 45 people. The garden, as part of the guest house is enjoyed by all who visit the island and some of the garden is also open to public /day visitors who visit the island.

*Our Garden Team:*

We are usually a team of three full time volunteers during the growing season and 2 – 1.5 gardeners in the winter months. We are also helped by short term volunteers who play and active role in assisting us to run the garden.

The lead gardener outlines and implements an overall growing plan for the season and also oversees all the crops, their propagation, planting and harvesting etc. We have records of previous years growing plans for reference.

*What we grow:*

We grow an excellent range of fruit and vegetables, such as:

* A large variety of greens, including salad leaves, kale cabbage, chard and herbs.
* Seasonal vegetables, including onions, potatoes, swedes, beans, leeks, tomatoes, etc , which complement the vegetables that we buy in.
* Seasonal fruit, such as rhubarb, berries, apples, strawberries, plums, wild fruit and others
* Flowers and herbs to decorate the centre and generally enhance the beauty of the place and also support wildlife

*Our growing area:*

In the organic vegetable production we have approximately 135 beds (1.5m x 5m on average), a total of 1013 sq. m.

We also have 3 tunnels, with the total size of 177 sq. m protected space.

*Our methods of growing*

We grow using a 6 year crop rotation and our overarching aim is to support a healthy organic garden using the following methods:

-Composts, comfrey liquid feeds, green manures and mulching over the winter with seaweed are our main methods to enhance the soil fertility.

-For three years, biodynamic methods and preparations have been used to improve the natural balance of soil and plants. It is hoped that the garden continues to be biodynamic.

- We have integrated permaculture principles and wish to continue with this approach, as the garden develops further.

So far, we have not applied for organic or biodynamic certification.

*Our climate*

We are situated in an exposed part of Scotland! The growing season here is very short and some crops don’t grow well here at all. We experience relatively cold summers, with winters being relatively mild compared to central Scotland. The last two years we measured around 2000mm rainfall. (The met office average is 1200 mm a year). These amounts of rainfall constantly wash out vital nutrients and turn soil pH acidic. Therefore, restoring the soils balance needs attention and experience.

Storms and high winds also have a large impact on the garden. Plants can be ’rocked out’ and/or burnt with salt spray. Therefore, wind protection has to be used e.g. windbreaks with hedges, netting and others forms of protection are important. The tunnels especially, need constant attention, to ensure they withstand the high winds without damage.

In summary, the gardeners really have to be on the ball to get the best out of this short growing season.

*Our soil*

The soil began as a shingle beach which has developed a thin soil covering since the last ice age. It is very stony, but drains well. Most vegetable beds are raised beds, which helps with drainage.

*Our compost*

Our composts are a vital part of the garden as they provide nutrients for the plants, fertility for the soil and improve the soil structure. Apart from a winter seaweed cover on some beds and liquid comfrey feed, the composts are the main and only plant food. We use no other material to feed the crops. The main ingredients for the composts are horse manure, seaweed and bracken, all collected on the island. We established a guideline for the amount of compost we use during a year, which is to compile a compost of 5 cubic meters (3m x1.5m x 1m) every month.

We use different composts for different purposes and all organic waste (cooked and raw) from the kitchen is successfully composted.

*Our way of working*

Since we live on an island, we work with little input from outside. We have no power tools/machinery, except for a lawnmower and strimmer. Most of movement of material is done by wheelbarrow.

Many of the plants require propagation, due to our short growing season. We undertake all the plant propagation ourselves and we make our own soil mixture for this purpose.

*The gardens connection with the kitchen*

The gardeners work very closely with the kitchen team.

In the season, the lead gardener is expected to write out a list showing the available garden produce and quantities every week. This person plans and oversees the produce available for the kitchen and communicates this information to the kitchen staff. Based on this information the lead gardener is responsible for ordering all other wholesale vegetables and fruit for the kitchen.

*Other responsibilities of the gardeners*

* Help out in the community, if needed.
* Support working of community e.g. attend/chair meetings etc.
* Conduct short garden tours for guests and new volunteers.
* Purchase tools, material, seeds, plants etc.
* Write info, documentations, signage etc. for garden.
* Oversee maintenance of garden work spaces.
* Help with garden volunteer recruitment.