



Circle of Life Garden, Salthill

View of the Circle of Life Garden, Salthill, Galway. **Photograph:** Lynn O’Keeffe-Lascar

Lynn O’Keeffe-Lascar continues her series on wildlife gardens with a visit to the Circle of Life Garden in Salthill, Galway, an urban garden run by volunteers.



After several years of writing articles giving gardening advice to readers of *Wings*, I’ve decided to get away from the laptop and visit some gardens to see what people are doing in their plots. I am visiting a selection of urban, suburban and rural gardens and looking to find interesting adaptations for wildlife.

more street-cleaning, power-washing and an acceptance of a certain amount of ‘weeds’ by the public.

I recently went to a park in Salthill in Galway that used to be rundown until a group of volunteers took it over with support from **Galway City Council**. They have created an oasis for visitors.

The **Circle of Life Garden** was set up by **Denis and Martina Goggin** in memory of their son and all who have become organ donors and recipients.

The two-acre park was originally donated to Galway City Council in 1985 by **Digital**, a huge employer at the time. The park was of

its era, with lawns and trees and a large pond. It was well overdue a make-over when Denis and Martina came up with the idea of creating a national organ donor commemorative garden.

Patrick Harris was employed to landscape the park, with the remit of providing a sense of quiet oasis with year-round colour and form. This has most certainly been achieved.

The garden is dipped below road level, with a bank of mature sycamores helping to shield the garden from traffic noises and providing shelter from sea winds. Mature trees throughout the garden were retained, and lots of sculpted stonework and raised beds added and planted with flowers and ornamental grasses, along with winding paths and inspiring quotes. Opened in 2014, the garden attracts visitors from across the globe as well as regular local users.

Having got through the mammoth task of negotiating the use of the park, raising the money and designing and constructing the garden, the creators are now in a position to look at improvements such as encouraging more wildlife to make it their home.

Commemorative garden

City parks are often overlooked for their contribution to our wellbeing and that of the wildlife which shares our urban areas with us.

Urban parks improve the health of those who use them by increasing physical exercise and creating a sense of wellbeing. A well-run urban park supports the community around it, facilitates events and increases property values. A poorly managed urban park becomes a magnet for antisocial behaviour, a no-go area, litter-strewn, uninviting and potentially even dangerous.

Parks can be havens for wildlife, too, and there has been much progress in our public parks. For instance, both South Dublin County Council and Leitrim County Council have committed to cutting out **glyphosphate** herbicide use in public spaces. This will require

MARTINA GOGGIN



Grey Heron appearing to mimic a heron statue on an island on the main pond.

Value for wildlife

I visited the park on a Sunday evening in September with the sun setting on Galway Bay. Though wildlife was not taken into account originally, a lot has actually been achieved. Leaving the mature trees in place has meant that there is plenty of nesting habitat for tree-nesting birds and for roosting,



Denis Goggin, co-founder (left) and Ryan Crowell, volunteer, in the garden.



Robin. Photo: Brian Burke

as well as shelter from winds for flying insects.

The planting is very diverse. This means there are plants in flower over an extended season, as well as a good mix of species for insects to live on, too.

The large pond, the bare areas under trees and the grass management could be improved. The pond has become pea soup. The pump doesn't work, there's no plantlife in it, and a heron has eaten the fish! The planned replacement of the pump will help to circulate and oxygenate the water. Not putting fish back in will allow the larvae of dragonflies and other insects to develop, as well as helping frogspawn to survive.

Plantlife, like floating oxygenators, as well as marginal plants, will also clear up the water, and pond snails will eat some of the algae. It can take a few seasons to get a pond to

balance out and become full of life.

Under-mature trees can be planted with an under-storey instead of being kept clear through hoeing or spraying. The under-storey can be of plants that grow in shade or in spring light (before the trees leaf up) such as **native bluebells, primroses, daffodils, ferns, foxgloves** and **alpine strawberries**; even **ivy** looks good under trees.

Grassy bank

There's also a large grassy bank, some of which could be left as hay meadow, cut annually at the end of summer. This can be an issue in public parks as it is very messy to pick litter from long grass, so it's not suitable in every location. It can be tried for a season and, if it doesn't work, you just go back to normal mowing again the following season. A thorough scarification followed by wildflower seed-sowing in spring can introduce some more colourful species.

It is inspiring to see volunteers take on a public park and do so much with it. There's lots of talk about community gardens, but it doesn't have to be only about vegetables. People also need restorative spaces, gardens to ease the soul and the mind and that encourage reflection and introspection, a moment out of the busy lives we lead; the Circle of Life garden offers this.

➔ For more information on the Circle of Life garden, visit organdonation.ie/circleoflife or find it on Facebook at 'Circle of Life Salthill'.

➔ I'm still on the hunt for **wildlife-friendly gardens** to visit, ideally urban or suburban.

Please get in touch via BirdWatch Ireland if you know of one.

➔ **Lynn O'Keeffe-Lascar** is an outreach horticulturist based in Co Galway who is involved in school and community gardening, teaching adults and transition-year students and helping Tidy Towns groups. She also works in Portumna Castle Gardens. She can be contacted at lynnsirishgardens@gmail.com or you can send her a tweet at [@OkeeffeLynn](https://twitter.com/OkeeffeLynn). Lynn runs a website at lynnsirishgardens.wixsite.com/kinvara.



The main pond seen through some pine trees.



The garden has year-round colour and form.