

A to Z Guide to Thrifty Gardening

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Growing Food and Composting Project



With the rising costs of fresh produce, more than ever before growing your own food makes financial sense.

Whether it's on a windowsill, or in the patio, garden or allotment, growing your own food can be fun, improve your health and also save you money on your groceries.

The commercial gardening industry, like many others has produced a huge range of products which gives the perception that to be a successful gardener, you need to have a large selection of tools and gadgets. However, this booklet is here to take things back to basics and inspire you to do things the thrifty way!



A is for Amend

Which means to correct or improve. To start growing food in a thrifty way you need to look at things differently, what can you borrow or recycle instead of buying new? You don't need to own every tool, you could share some with a neighbour or friend, if not, you can always buy second-hand.

What could you learn from others or the internet instead of going on a course or buying a book? Visiting an allotment or a community garden is also always a great source of inspiration. Amending your attitude to 'needing' new things will always ensure you save your money

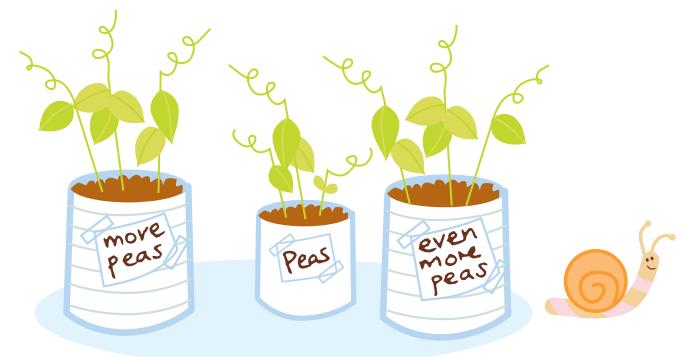


B is for Bamboo Canes

Why spend money on buying bamboo canes, when you can simply grow your own? Bamboo is very tolerant of most weather conditions and once established will give you a lifetime supply of canes for all of your gardening needs.

Just make sure you select the right variety as some types of bamboo are very vigorous, selecting a clumping variety should hopefully keep the bamboo in a manageable space. Ask someone else if you can take from theirs, remember that bamboo can give you tiny cuts or a rash so wear gloves and long sleeves when cutting bamboo.

Hazel is also another plant which can be grown to make plant supports and is traditionally used for pea sticks and bean poles. And why stop at canes or poles, New Zealand flax has been used for hundreds of years for its fibrous leaves, the fibres within the leaves can be pulled apart and used like regular twine.



C is for Comfrey

Comfrey is an excellent herb which can be used to make your own fertiliser, due to its high levels of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, as well as other trace elements.

To make your own fertiliser, simply fill a bucket with comfrey leaves and add water, you can use a brick or heavy stone on the leaves to keep them weighed down. After a few weeks, it will produce a most foul smelling liquid, which can be strained and then diluted (1:10) and used as a feed for your plants.

Comfrey leaves can also be placed around plants to act as mulch or added to a compost heap to aid decomposition. It is a vigorous grower, so it can be dug up from a friends patch quite easily and replanted for free.



D is for Drying

Drying your own produce is one of the easiest ways to preserve your harvest and drying herbs is the easiest of them all. For DIY herbal teas and flavoured oils which are fresh and flavoursome, simply select the herbs you want to dry and cut them from the plant. Remove the old, dead or diseased parts, tie the remainder in a bundle and hang them somewhere where the air can circulate, after several days drying, store them in an air-tight container.

When you harvest herbs for their seeds, the seed heads should be turning hard and brown. Besides cooking, you can also use dried herbs for a range of crafts and to make home-made presents like your own herbal bath tonics.



E is for Exotic

Why not try something different and reap the benefits, some exotic crops can be less susceptible to certain diseases, look good and taste great too. More commonly known are the oriental greens; pak choi, mibuna and mizuna, though you could also try hyacinth bean, oca and New Zealand spinach which are all prolific croppers with minimum fuss. Strawberry spinach, tomatillo, cape gooseberry, yard long beans, calaloo, fenugreek and sharkfin melons are other good vegetables to try.



F is for Fertiliser

We couldn't miss out on mentioning composting somewhere in this booklet and making your own compost is one of the easiest and best fertilisers for your soil and will save you money on buying soil improvers and tonics from a garden centre. Making compost is a free activity, as you are re-using waste products from your own household, so as money saving goes you can't do any better.

As an added extra you may want to feed your plants over the season, making your own fertiliser is easy and can be as simple as putting rotting perennial weeds in a bucket of water for a week or two and putting the watered down liquid into a watering can. As for comfrey in 'C', you can also steep borage and nettles in water to make your own fertiliser, whilst if feeling adventurous, seaweed is also good. Look online or in a library book for quantities and dilution rates.



G is for Garden-share

Another way to grow your own food is to garden-share with a neighbour or someone else in your local community, who has an unutilised garden. Private allotments are getting more expensive, so this form of collaborative gardening is especially good if you don't have a garden, or if you need extra food growing space. You can also share the costs of things you need, like tools and seeds. Whilst in some areas, local organisations oversee garden-share schemes and can provide additional support like tool-shares, gardening book libraries and advice.



H is for Homemade

There are so many things which can be made at home, with the minimum of fuss and cost. Many people make their own jams and chutneys but it doesn't have to end there, what about making your own gifts? A gardener's hand cream can be made from home grown calendula petals or you could give a present of a potted plant grown from one of your very own cuttings.

For something more potent why not make your own insecticide, a garlic spray can be made up with 1 bulb of garlic, blitzed up in a blender with 1 litre of water and left to steep for a couple of hours. Strain and keep in a spray bottle, it can be very effective against slugs and snails. Rhubarb leaves can also be used in a similar way and deter soft bodied pests.

Remember to keep these sprays in carefully labelled bottles and away from children, rhubarb leaves are very poisonous.



i is for invention, innovation & ideas

Being thrifter in the garden is about developing new ways to garden productively by inventing alternative ways to utilise the things that you find lying about at home or elsewhere. Continually remind yourself of the need to be innovative and of the many ways to improve your growing space cheaply rather than simply just buying more stuff.



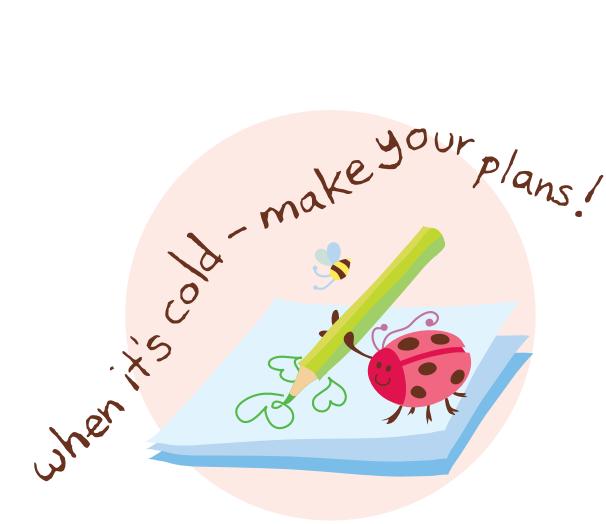
try new ways of propagation!

used as a weed suppressant, or old fine holed net curtain as netting against pests. Even old tights can be used as plant-ties or to hang up onions to dry, window frames can be transformed into cold frames and large catering tins thrown away at restaurants can be painted and used as stylish pots for herbs on your windowsill.



build a potato tower from old tyres

For instance, finely pierced plastic bottles can be made into self-watering systems for containers, polystyrene can be broken up to use as crocks in the base of containers, old roofing felt can be



J is for Jan Preparations

Being organised will always save you time and money, deciding on what you want to grow and what you actually have space for will save you money when buying seeds. It's easy to get carried away when shopping, so why not share seeds with friends and neighbours.

Knowing what did and didn't grow well the previous year by making records will also stand you in good stead for the future. Only grow what you know, or ask others what is suitable for the climate in your area. It's also important to think of what will save you space by intercropping or growing interdependently, for example you could use the 'three sisters' technique.

Most importantly, preparing the protection you will need in advance is key, there's no point in growing if you don't put the right protection down for crops. For some, it's better to have the supports and structures in place before you start sowing, so know your crops and what pests are likely in your area.

K is for Keyhole

Which is based on an African method of gardening, it operates as a small scale intensive raised bed growing system that is fed through a central composting system built within the design, which allows nutrients to access the soil where the plants are growing. With this method you don't need to feed your plants with costly commercial feeds and you are likely to get very productive results.



To make a Keyhole garden, you will need to make a circle with some reclaimed bricks or stones, layering them to up to a metre high, remembering to create a compost pile in the middle, contained with some wire mesh.

You will need to reach all of the crops that grow in this system and the composter, so you need to make a break in the circle to enable you to walk in (it will look like a keyhole from above), simply fill the bed with soil and compost.

L is for Ladybirds

Garden with nature and you avoid the environmental and economic costs of garden chemicals. You can reduce slug and snail destruction, infestations of aphids and sawfly damage by simply managing your garden in a way that supports beneficial wildlife habitats.



Encourage birds to your garden, let an area of lawn grow longer and pile wood in corners to provide insect hotels. Don't get rid of aphids as soon as you see them as usually ladybirds will be quick to appear on their tail! Make sure you know the larvae form of these friendly pests, especially ladybirds as they are quite different from the adult.

Overtime, this way of gardening will introduce natural food chains of predatory wildlife, and will result in pests being checked by their natural enemies.



M is for Maintenance

It's simple really, keeping a regular eye on things will make sure your investments (time and money), don't go to waste, always keep on top of weeding and make sure your plant protection is sturdy and strong. Things like cabbage root collars and other crop protections can often blow off in the wind and keeping slug deterrents topped up or in working order is a must.



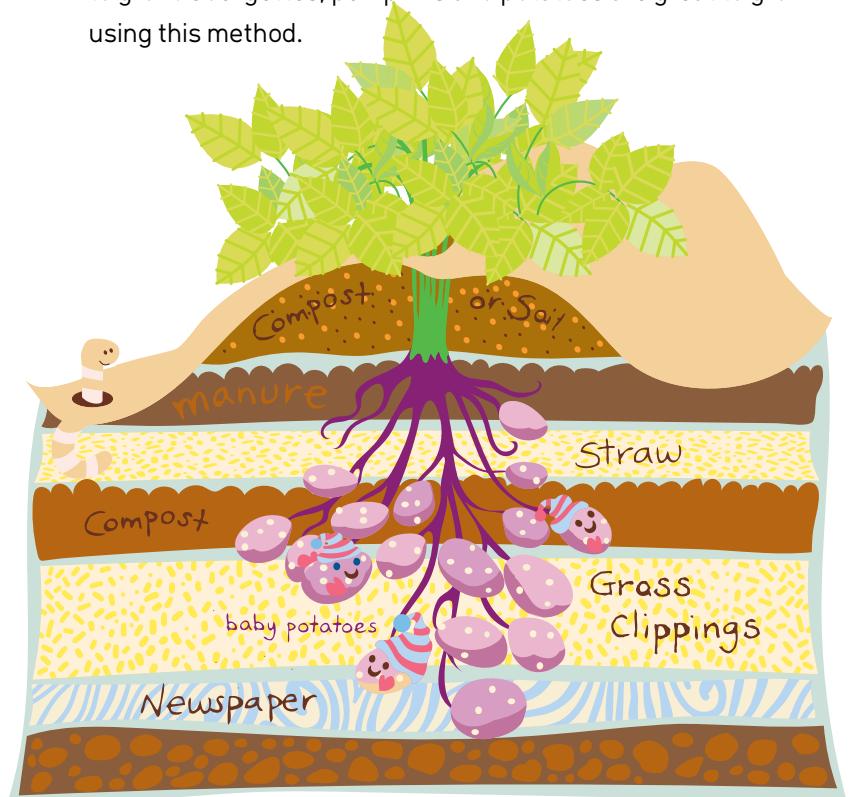
N is for No Dig

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Simply cut down any large weeds growing in the planned area and then completely cover the space with several layers of cardboard, which has been pre-soaked with water to help it rot. Add layers of other materials such as semi-rotted leaves, grass clippings, rotted manure or garden compost then add more cardboard. Repeat this process several times.

As the cardboard is wet, it's pretty easy to insert plants into but that the plant must have enough soil around the roots to hold it to grow. Courgettes, pumpkins and potatoes are great to grow using this method.





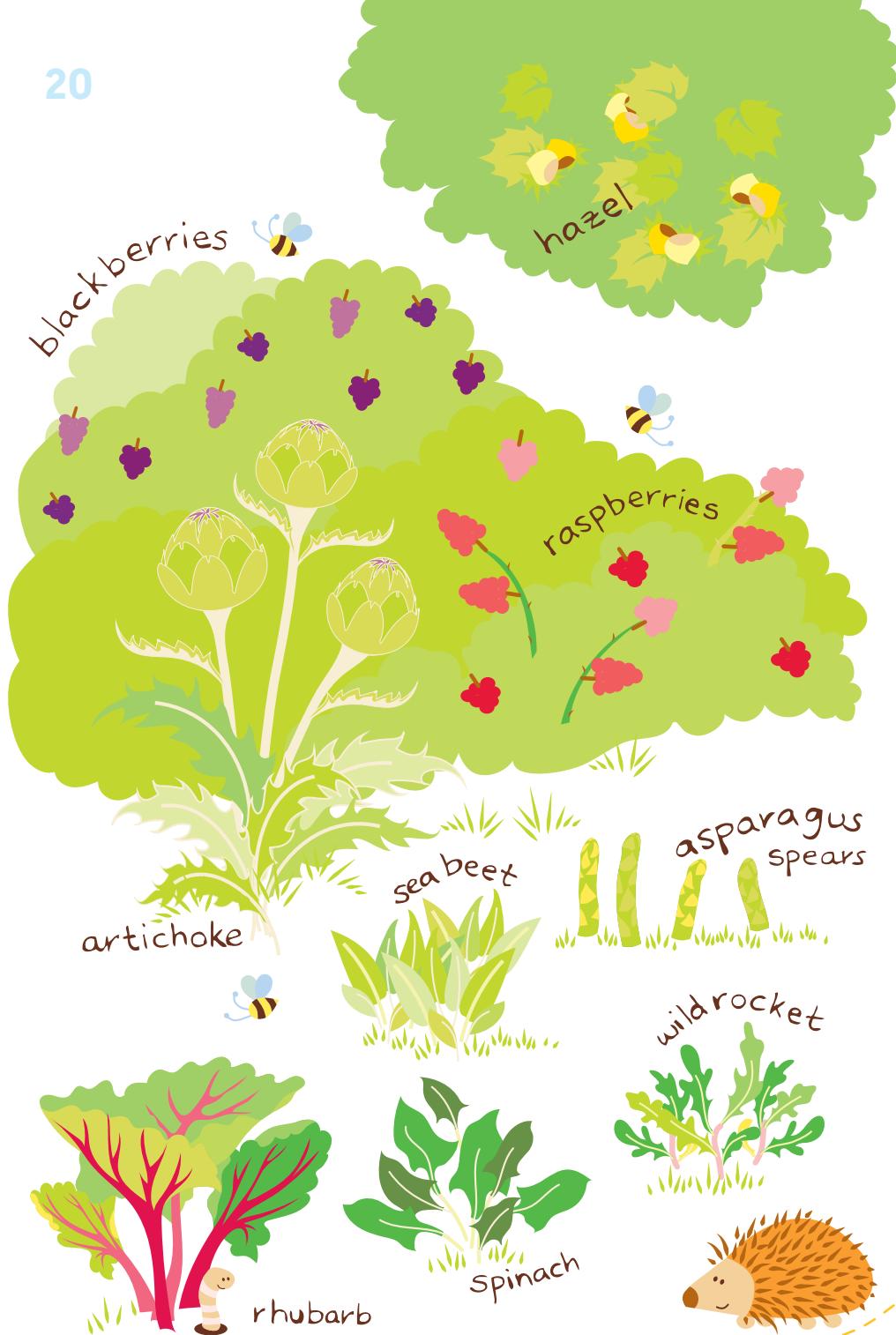
O is for ... and new life

You will be surprised at the range of things people regularly dispose of that can be re-used in the garden, great deals can be found at car boot or garage sales, whilst classifieds in the newspaper are useful as are internet sites like freecycle.

Always have a look out on rubbish collection day and never go past a waste skip without looking in, as there may always be something useful lurking within.

Most commonly known examples of re-using are plastic bottles and trays for cloches or growing containers, however old shelves could be re-cycled into vertical gardens and wardrobes turned on their sides, into raised beds for carrots and other root crops (great against carrot root fly). Old sisal rope can be used around plots as a slug deterrent as they don't like the roughness, whilst even plastic 'bags for life' can be sturdy enough as plant pots.

A lot of timber can be sourced for the garden for nothing, such as pallet wood, which can be found freely around trading estates as a waste product. It can be re-used into many things including potting stations, compost bays and insect hotels or as vertical planting containers.



P is for Perennial Gardening

Growing annuals like lettuce or potatoes requires yearly cultivation of ground, sowing the seeds, controlling the weeds, adding fertilisers and attempting to control pests and diseases. All this effort creates extra work, and costs time and money, compared to simply planting a perennial and waiting to harvest its yield, each year.

With warmer winters, perennial growing is an easy alternative or complimentary activity to enable you to enjoy home-grown food year after year, as your perennial plant once planted, can be enjoyed for many seasons with just a little care and maintenance.

Nearly all fruit and nuts are perennials, as are great number of herbs. Perennial vegetables include asparagus, perennial spinach, wild rocket, winter savoury, sea beet, lovage and all types of artichokes. Sometimes, you can pick up a perennial plant for free if someone is dividing up theirs to reinvigorate it.

Q is for Quick Growing Crops

These are available to buy as seeds and can provide a good on-going harvest, highly recommended are the various oriental greens; mustards, mizuna and pak choi. These quick growing, tasty and useful plants are traditionally sown from midsummer onwards, a period for sowing which is often overlooked by home gardeners.



Such crops can be very economical as they can be continually picked and will keep you in an abundance of greens, throughout late summer, autumn, winter and into the early days of spring – all for the price of a packet of seeds. Versatile and nutritious, they are good raw in salads, cooked alone, or added to stir-fries.





R is for Rainwater Re-use & Harvesting

Rainwater harvesting makes sense in the garden and will in the long-term save money from increasing water bills.

Rain can easily be collected from the roofs of homes, garages, greenhouses and other garden structures if they have gutters and a drain pipe. Traditionally water is collected in butts from either open or closed drain pipes. Although butts can be purchased from garden centres and DIY stores relatively cheaply, it is possible to re-use other containers as water butts, such as attic water storage tanks, dustbins and a range of industrial plastic containers or barrels.



S is for Seedaving

You don't actually need to buy seeds each year, you can simply start saving your own, and potentially overtime you can develop your own varieties for future years and hopefully become self-reliant.

When purchasing seeds or plants in the first place avoid buying F1 hybrid varieties as you may only produce mutated crops from subsequently saved seeds, if any at all. Also some crops are easier to save than others, peas and beans being some of the easiest, others like cabbages are more easily cross fertilised with similar crops so do some research first and remember you will always need to choose the healthiest plants free of disease.

After collecting seeds, ensure they are completely dried out before putting them into air-tight containers for storage.

make your store cupboard grow!



T is for Taking Cuttings

Although they take a little longer to establish, cuttings are a great way to produce new plants for free, especially as there are many different types of cutting you can take, so check your plant to find out the best method for the time of the year.

Many herbs can be grown on from cuttings like rosemary, oregano or lavender, whilst mint and chives are best taken from dividing the roots. Hard wood cuttings for fruit bushes are a great way to grow on your fruit stock, especially if taken from someone else's fruit bushes, e.g. blackcurrant or gooseberry. Strawberries can be taken from runners and raspberries can be dug up from shoots that come up around the plant.

Remember, you can also grow them on for cheap presents for friends or family or trade them with neighbours for their produce.

U is for Underground

Give most of your attention to what is going on underneath the soil, as having a healthy soil is the best way to save time and money on managing your plant health. A strong, steady growth will keep your plant healthy and reduce the risk of pest and disease attack.

Keep in mind that in a teaspoon of healthy soil there are more living organisms than people on the planet. How's that for encouraging you to compost!



W is for Weeds

There is a saying which goes, "one year seeding, seven years weeding" whilst another claims "a weed is just a plant in the wrong place".

Basically there are different arguments for and against letting some weeds grow or not. It usually depends on the circumstances and the best advice is to understand the weed problems you are facing and then work out the best plan of management.

Unfortunately weeds do compete with the plants you want to grow, which can waste effort and money spent. Nevertheless some weeds help deter or camouflage plants and could be beneficial. Whilst there are some weeds, such as dandelions, chickweed and hairy bittercress which are also edible, but you may also not want them taking over your garden!

V is for Vermicomposting

Vermicomposting is worm composting, through the transformation of kitchen waste (not onions or citrus fruit) into a horticultural resource, by using a wormery. This process produces a beneficial liquid which is full of nutrients, that once diluted with water (1:10) provides a very useful free plant feed.

Instead of buying a wormery you can simply build your own at a fraction of the cost and still produce the same result, whilst specialist worms can be purchased at fishing tackle shops cheaply. Search on the internet for wormery DIY tips.

X is for Xmas Decorations



There is a wealth of material in nature, that you can use to decorate your house at Christmas and save money at this expensive time of year.

You can make traditional Christmas wreaths using willow, dogwood or hazel and then weaving in evergreens like conifer and holly. If you don't have these in your own garden look around local green spaces, you will be surprised what you can find.

Teasel and pine cones can be found freely and can look great sprayed gold or hung on the Christmas tree. Whilst tomatillo and cape gooseberry husks, teasels and seed heads can also be beautiful home decorations all year round.

nothing tastes better
than food & celebration!



Y is for Yummy

It really is quite simple, grow things you like eating, otherwise your time and effort will go to waste, just because you see others growing big long lines of runner beans, it doesn't make sense to grow them if you don't enjoy them. It's also important is to grow things that you love and that are quite expensive in the shops, for instance asparagus, rocket, mixed lettuce leaves, artichokes and herbs.

Z is for Zero Waste

After reading through this booklet you will have realised that we don't believe in waste as it is simply a resource waiting to be re-used. The thrifty gardener should adopt a zero waste policy for their household, as most things which are no longer fit for purpose may often have a another life in them in the garden.

We're sure you can be creative and have thrifty fun too!!





Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens:

Is a registered charity which supports, represents and promotes community-managed farms, gardens, allotments and other green spaces, creating opportunities for local communities to grow.

It works with community groups to help empower local people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to build better communities (often in deprived areas) and to make a positive impact on their surrounding environment. The organisation is also the national face of the community farm and garden movement, promoting its work and raising its profile with decision-makers, funders, the public and the media. www.farmgarden.org.uk



Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change:



Seeks to transform disadvantaged neighbourhoods by working with residents and partners to provide life opportunities and advocacy for long-term change. The organisation is founded on the belief that the most genuine way to help people is to provide high quality and accessible services right in the heart of the community; helping people to break free from the bonds of poverty and empowering them to 'do it for themselves'.



The organisation was established in 2001 and is one of Cornwall's largest voluntary sector organisations. Services that the organisation delivers include community learning and outreach, health improvement, youth development services and community development. www.cn4c.org.uk



If you have a thrifty tip, please post in on:

www.facebook.com/GrowingFoodandComposting



Cornwall
Neighbourhoods
for Change

LOTTERY FUNDED

Local
Food

