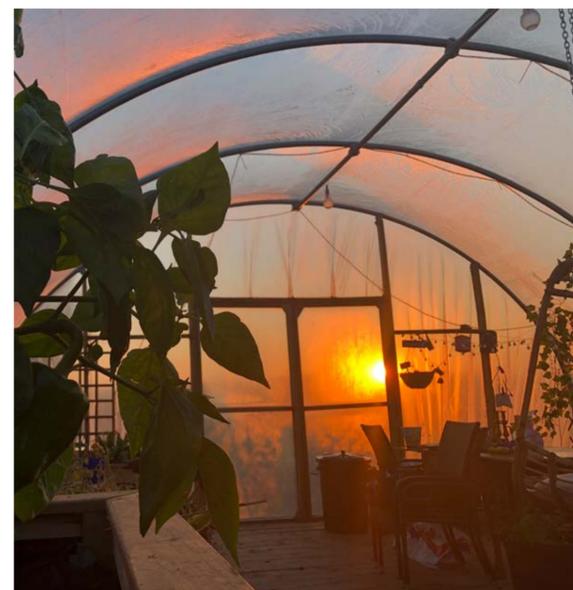




# New Entrant to the Agri-food Sector - The Gourmet Gardener

## Tara Kate Linnane

In this National Rural Network guest blog, Horticulturalist Tara Kate Linnane, who was runner up in this year's RTÉ Super Garden Competition, outlines her educational and professional background in the agri-food sector to date. She also provides us with an insight into her passion for growing fruit and vegetables at home, and how a weekly column she writes for the Anglo Celt newspaper called 'The Gourmet Gardener' has provided her with an ideal platform to recently set up a permaculture and sustainable living business called The Foodscape Design Co., that has a particular focus on designing gardens using edible plants. Tara also highlights the therapeutic benefits of such horticultural activities.



As a nation we are going through tough times. Times that are quite uncertain for some and lonely for others. However, every challenging situation provides an opportunity. I feel that these unprecedented times have given me the chance to explore my passion for sustainable living and begin to build a business around it.

My education in horticulture began in the School of Agriculture and Food Science at University College Dublin (UCD), where I studied a Hons BSc degree in Horticulture, Landscape and Sports Turf Management. It was there that an interest for sustainability was sparked, and in particular sustainable practices in small businesses. This led me to study a MSc in Marketing with a focus on Corporate Social Responsibility in the Agri-food industry. My journey continued, meandering through various aspects of horticulture from working in crop production with Breffni Mushrooms, to landscaping and eventually building the confidence to share my knowledge and passion through a weekly column I write for the Anglo Celt newspaper called 'The Gourmet Gardener'. This column is not only an outlet for my passion, but also a source of encouragement to readers to grow your own food at home and the benefits of doing so.

The feedback from the local community has been so rewarding particularly through lockdown as many turned to their own gardens for comfort. The Gourmet Gardener weekly column follows my own journey of growing fruit and vegetables at home in a polytunnel. I believe that this is something that everyone can do a little more of, even on a small balcony or patio. This naturally complimented my interest in design, and so, I embarked on building a business called The Foodscape Design Co., that focusses on designing gardens using edible plants. The concept is inspired by permaculture and sustainable living, and I believe that the principles can be successfully adapted to suit domestic gardens. The business is in its infancy stage, and I am working to develop it. I believe that as the nation looks towards spending more time at home, the importance of health and wellbeing will become magnified. Creating edible gardens can provide physical, physiological and ecological benefits, helping to pave the way for a more sustainable lifestyle. This approach to garden design benefits not just the environment but our own health and can be easily achieved whether you have space for an orchard or a small courtyard.





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Through my research I have identified that confidence and previous experience are aspects that hold people back from growing their own seasonal food at home. Providing guidance and helping to build knowledge on how to get started are key objectives of my new business venture. I believe that this testing time will draw people back to nature and back to a simpler way of living with sustainability at the core. We need to educate each other on the advantages of growing our own food and the enormous benefits of letting children see how fresh food is grown.



Growing vegetables is fun. Yes, it requires work, but it comes with enormous rewards – food is fresh, tastes better than produce which has been deep chilled or flown halfway across the world, and you have complete control over what goes in the soil to feed your crops. If you want, you can keep your fruit and vegetables pesticide-free. While sustainability is a grounding factor, the benefits of growing your own vegetables are not solely focused on it. In fact, there have been numerous studies linking the benefits of gardening to mental health. I know the positive impact myself, getting out into the garden is almost like a therapy session, and during this time of isolation we could all do with some therapy. This passion for growing and knowledge sharing is what is leading me on my new path, and I am excited and intrigued to see where it brings me.

