



REEP

Religions & Environment
Education Projects

Gardening at Le Foyer in Marrakech

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Some of you may know that I volunteer for REEP, a small trust with 30 years' experience creating education projects and events to educate young people about the ways that different cultures respond to and interact with the environment. They specialise in cross-cultural work, using a variety of media and practical activities to inspire collaboration and mutual development.

Over the last decade REEP projects have been focused on promoting cultural and horticultural exchange between Morocco, England and Spain. The National Trust has supported a number of these by inviting some of its gardeners to get involved. I first volunteered for REEP in 2014 when I joined National Trust gardeners from 2 other properties to develop three school gardens in Morocco! I have stayed involved with REEP over the past 6 years and have helped with many projects.

Our recent project garden at Le Foyer de Jeune Filles in Marrakech. REEP's Foyer garden project takes place in Marrakesh, based in a Soroptimist-founded boarding house that provides access to education for girls from the countryside. We are helping the girls to green their grounds whilst teaching them gardening skills and basic English. In return, we get to learn about gardening in hot and dry climate and to speak a few words of Arabic too!

Over the last 18 months six teams of volunteer gardeners from Britain have worked with the girls to develop a vegetable garden, a recreational space and a plant nursery area. I've been part of two of these teams. As well as teaching the girls how to garden, we always run lots of art and craft activities as these are a great way to engage the girls!

Most mornings (all mornings) would start with a hotel breakfast consisting of Moroccan pancakes, coffee (nous nous) and a catch up with the team. Then it's off to the Foyer in taxis, about a 20mins ride. Once arrived we

would carry on with the build of the vegetable garden and organise some craft fun with the girls.

The vegetable garden sits in a spare corner of the boarding house grounds. The soil is a sandy, stony, concrete mix - almost completely useless for veg growing! So, the only real option was to build raised beds. The shapes of the beds are inspired by Berber symbols. These were designed by the girls in March 2019 when myself and Tanya Upton (Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens) ran a design workshop with them.

Building the raised beds was started by a team of gardeners from Hever Castle in May last year but they were scuppered by the weather (who knew that 42°C was too hot to lay block!).

With seven of us in the most recent trip, we managed to build the rest of the beds, render them with concrete and fill them with 14 tons of soil - all by hand! I must say that February trip was extremely successful - as Andrew Darragh (NT Fenton House) put it, we were 'The Dream Team'.

We have left the girls with some sustainable raised beds and some wonderful decorative pieces for their recreation space – a perfect environment for them to continue learning gardening, English and crafts in weekly sessions run by our Moroccan friend, liaison and retired English professor, Fatima Bouabdelli.

As with every project, there is always more we can do and lots to maintain, so I look forward to another trip in the future to see how well the garden is doing and to add to future projects in the area. Now where's my Nous Nous.....?

