

# GARDENS



**EUGENE HIGGINS**  
IN THE GARDEN

**H**ugh Howey's book *Wool* is a dystopian tale of the future in which mankind is struggling to survive in a giant dome. Everyone is kept fed by what they grow in their confined space... as food is cultivated using only nutrients and water.

I was reminded of this excellent sci-fi novel on a visit to the GrowDome project, the stunning 21st-century greenhouse built on once-derelict land near Fatima Mansions in Dublin.

It's absolutely spectacular, more what you'd expect in Manhattan or London than the inner suburbs of Dublin.

The creators are Jamie Roche and Niall O'Brien, along with Grow Dome designers Ivan Rynn and Eoin O'Neill.

The GrowDome Project was launched with two main objectives: to use an empty urban site for intensive 'smart' food production and small-scale job creation.

I can't describe the wonder I felt when I walked around the corner from the Luas stop to see before me this thing of beauty, an oasis of fruit and vegetable production slap bang in the middle of their community. The dream, says Jamie, was to create a structure that would be capable of producing the equivalent of 1,000 lettuces a week.

The fact that we did it on derelict ground is very satisfying and that the dome doubles up as a hub for community activities. It is even more satisfying that we will produce a serious output of real organic food for the community in a city centre site.

**F**lanagan's Fields Community Garden is sited between Reuben Street and the New Herberton Development in Dublin 8. Its development by the local community as a garden began in 2010. It takes its name from the Flanagans, wealthy landowners who gave out leases for market gardens in the 19th and early 20th century.

'We pitched our idea with a presentation at the residents' AGM - and it was overwhelmingly received in a positive light,' explains Niall.

In fact, it has become a well known landmark in the area and there has not been a single act of vandalism to the GeoDome or surrounding gardens.

The gardens are run by the likes of volunteer Dougal Hazel. He explains: 'It took a year and a lot of hard work to get it running, removing the tarmac. We have patches in the garden that are made available to the public who can grow vegetables and flowers on them for a token €5 a year. They are similar to an allotment scheme. There is a communal area garden as well that contains vegetables, herbs, edible flowers, pumpkins and a berry bed.

'Day of the Potato' on St Patrick's Day kickstarts the season annually when all the new season potatoes get planted.

Funding has come from many

sources such as Dublin Bus, local businesses and residents. Dublin City Council and the local residents' association, BOTP, have been incredibly supportive. 'Right from the start, they assisted us in every way possible resulting in a real sense of pride amongst the local residents,' says Dougal.

It's a hive activity. The gardens

are being worked on, the first strawberries were available to taste and sweet and delicious they were. Says Niall: 'We want to bring this to larger cities in a way that builds on and supports local community efforts and to produce a low-cost project that could be replicated in schools to show how easy it is produce and deliver food pro-

duction, water management and energy conservation all under one roof. Tomatoes, sweet corn, basil and micro greens plus broccoli, coriander and wheatgrass are all grown here and we want to experiment with other potential suitable Vegetables and Herbs.'

Hydroponics as a method of growing fruit, veg or herbs is not

something I'm a big fan of to date. While the yields are impressive, taste appears to be sacrificed in a big way. Jamie begs to differ.

'The greater the range of nutrients, the better they will grow, taste, look and smell, regardless of whether you grow them in soil or in water.'

The 11m geodesic dome design is really efficient and can catch up to 100,000 litres of water a year. Rainwater is better for landscape plants and gardens because it is not chlorinated and, of course, is a better utilisation of a precious natural resource. Jamie and the team wanted to make the project as green as possible.

The cost for materials has been somewhere around €6,000. The highest temperature achieved so far this year has been around the 37C mark with windows closed and 25C on a sunny day with doors open.

'We did a lot of research on green technologies and, essentially, cherry picked the best ideas we could find from around the globe and packaged them in a unique community-based setting - and we're pretty excited with the results.'



**FUTURE FOOD:** The Flanagans Fields GrowDome



**PROJECT:** There are allotments outside the dome while, inside, they take a scientific approach



## Sample the Dome at Christ Church



**CRAFTY:** Volunteers at the GrowDome

As it's the season of garden shows, the GrowDome Project will have an exhibition at the Dublin Garden Festival, which is in its second year and is open this weekend.

It sounds like a very promising show. It opened on Friday and runs until today, Sunday, June 21, at Christ Church Cathedral.

The theme of this year's festival is fairy tales and the cathedral will be adorned with floral installations so

that it will be transformed to create a stunning display of contemporary and traditional floral designs, under the lead of artistic director and award-winning floral artist Christopher White.

A special Evensong will be held today at 5pm as part of the Garden Festival.

Visitors will get the chance to explore the cathedral in all its floral splendour while listening to beautiful choral music performed by the voices of the Cathedral Choir.