



This picture was taken at a community garden where researchers at Cardiff Metropolitan University have been investigating the benefits of gardening activity for physical and psychological health in later life. The Growing a Healthy Older Population in Wales (GHOP) project has found that allotments and community gardens are nurturing environments not only for plants but for humans too. Over the course of a four-month prospective study, Jemma Hawkins, the research officer on the project, and her colleagues Debbie Clayton and Jenny Mercer found improvements in participants' health and well-being on measures of body mass index, hand-grip strength, perceived stress levels and self-esteem that were not observed in a wait-list control group.

Harvest the benefits when growing older

Photo by Nigel Pugh.
'Big picture' ideas? E-mail jon.sutton@bps.org.uk.

This sample of older gardeners also kept diaries that informed follow-up interviews exploring their experiences of being a newcomer to allotment gardening. Findings indicated that, even during the first couple of years, keeping an allotment can have significant benefits. For example, participants discussed the importance of regular social interaction at the site, and the sense of achievement and

satisfaction that arises from their activity. This has several parallels with the research team's previous findings (published in the June 2013 issue of *Ecopsychology*) that both engaging in gardening activities and being in such a natural environment have the potential to reduce stress and enhance healthy ageing.

For further information on the GHOP project go to www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/ghop.