

Pledge your fruit and veg for unique celebration of local food

Local gardeners are being asked to donate a little of what's growing in their vegetable plots or allotments to the Reading Town Meal. The celebration of local sustainable food will see over 1,000 people enjoy a taste of home-grown fresh fruit and vegetables on 3 October. And all those pledging to contribute ingredients to the Reading Town Meal will be entered in a special prize draw for the chance to win either a meal for two or a relaxing salon treatment, donated by Reading College.

Reading's third Town Meal will be served up free alongside a packed programme of live music, grow-your-own information, fun activities, community stalls and a tempting market place from local food producers.

In the run up to the day, volunteers will be gathering the fruit and vegetables contributed by growers and producers across the town from their balconies, gardens and allotments, and then delivering the harvest to Reading College. There, the College's catering students will be ready to turn the town's harvest into a three course menu and then serve it to the public to enjoy in beautiful Forbury Gardens in Reading town centre.

Organisers are asking growers to let them know now what they can donate – pledges can be made at the Town Meal website www.readingtowntmeal.org.uk or by emailing growers@readingtowntmeal.org.uk

Everyone who responds by 20 September will be entered into the prize draw, with the winner able to choose from either a voucher for a meal for two at Reading College's The Kitchen restaurant or for a health and beauty treatment at The Salon.

Local allotment holder Christine Christy has donated to previous Town Meals: "For the last town meal, people were very generous and we collected a whole van full of vegetables from Bulmershe allotments – and the meal was delicious."

Beth Scott a volunteer who is co-ordinating the collection of produce for the event says "Some growers plant a special crop or an extra row for the meal, while other people pledge the surplus from whatever fruit or veg is growing well in their garden. Whether it's just a little or a lot, it's a great feeling to know that your produce is part of Reading's Town Meal, plus this year there's the added bonus of the chance to win a fabulous treat if you pledge by 20 September!"

Notes for Editors:

1. Pictures show some of the produce enjoyed at previous Reading Town Meals. For further information or pictures contact Julie Roberts tel: 07934 716689.
2. Each of the previous Reading Town Meals held in 2011 and 2013 have served over 1,000 people with a free hot lunch cooked from tasty local ingredients grown locally, and filled Forbury Gardens with stalls and activities all celebrating local, sustainable food. A short film of the first Reading Town Meal can be seen here <https://vimeo.com/36269113>
3. Reading Town Meal 2015 is funded with generous support from the Big Lottery Fund and Reading Climate Change Partnership, as well as donations from local people and companies.
4. The Town Meal Steering Group is organising this event and comprises: Food4Families (a BIG lottery funded project managed by Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC)), Reading College, Reading Food Growing Network, Reading Borough Council Culture & Sport Services, True Food Community Cooperative, Transition Town Reading, Reading

Voluntary Action and other volunteer members. Reading Borough Council is also supporting the event through logistical advice and support.

5. Food4Families aims to work with communities across Greater Reading to increase the amount of food grown locally and sustainably and has created 20 community gardens across Reading where people learn how to grow their own food under the guidance of professional tutors.
6. RISC is the biggest Development Education Centre in the UK, working with schools and community groups to build understanding of sustainable development and promote social justice.
7. Reading Food Growing Network aims to promote and expand locally grown food through sharing knowledge, information and ideas alongside advice and support to local growers
8. Reading College Hospitality, Travel & Tourism department are contributing their expertise and use of kitchen facilities where their catering students will prepare and cook the Town Meal, which they will then serve in Forbury Gardens.
9. Transition Town Reading is a local group of the UK network that aims to promote resilient local economies and co-ordinate the transition of our community to one that is less reliant on fossil fuels; has a smaller carbon footprint and reduces the impact of climate change.
10. True Food Community Cooperative is a social enterprise, owned and run by its members, that enables its members and others to buy affordable organic food and other produce and supports local food production.
11. Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) promotes strength within Reading's voluntary and community sector. RVA's Development worker, Community Involvement, Rachel Goater works to increase the number of people who are active in communities around Reading by improving communication and ensuring people know how and where they can get involved in social groups, community events, sports, volunteering and democracy.

ENDS