



# WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter - December 2014

[www.wwallotments.org.uk](http://www.wwallotments.org.uk)

Social News from Marian

## CHRISTMAS DRINKS

This will take place on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December at the Trading Shed between 10.30 am and 1.00pm. Do come along and meet other plot holders at our seasonal get-together. The bar is free but we do ask you to donate a plate of food for the buffet. We also organise a raffle, the proceeds of which go to St Christopher's Hospice. If you are able to provide a prize for the raffle we would be very grateful.

We will also announce the winner of the Ted Goodall Cup at this event so if you have been entered into this competition, do come along. The winner could be YOU.

We look forward to seeing you on 14<sup>th</sup> December.



**SEASONAL REMINDER** Most of us are putting our plots to bed for the winter. Can you please ensure you secure things that might blow off your plot if the weather gets windy. We often find items e.g. compost lids on other plots. If the compost bins are empty they are often blown onto other plots. We have had reports of damage done on adjacent plots by wayward items. Marking your bins with your plot number will also make it easier for us to return any lost bins.

## A BLAST FROM THE PAST

The recent AGM made me think back to when I first joined the site. I took tenancy of B13 in 1978. I was one of very few women on the site at that time. It was more like a gentleman's club with most plot holders being retired. Mugs of tea were taken each day at 11am after a large triangle was struck loudly by John Parfitt. This resulted in a mass exodus from plots as everyone downed tools to sit and chat around the table opposite my plot. Occasionally I was offered a mug of tea too. The toilet facilities on the site, at that time, were very basic and very much geared to the men. As I have said, women were the exemption rather than the rule at the site. The facilities consisted of a small wooden hut. Inside there was a length of piping sunk into the ground at a height suitable for the average man! As you can imagine this did not help any female 'caught short' at the plot. When it became clear that the number of women plot holders was going to increase the facilities were updated to what we have today.

**Marian**

## Notes from the Trading Shed



It's that time again when the gardening year comes to an end, the plots are prepared to withstand the winter and our thoughts turn to the New Year ahead.

In the Trading Shed, we have lots of black ground cover to help control weeds and keep the ground in good condition over winter. It also helps the soil warm up in the spring sunshine.

Our Fothergill seed orders are being collated ready to be sent off and we should receive the completed orders in February. We are currently looking and deciding which seeds to stock in the Trading Shed, we will stock Country Value again and some Johnson's seeds as we had encouraging sales this last year.

Seed potato pre-orders have been good this year - we've added to our order and we have a few main crop still available.

Did you know that Bordeaux Mixture will be unavailable next year? We do have some left in stock at the moment.

I read recently that because it contains silica, a wash made up of Horse Tail boiled in water and used frequently can help protect against blight and mould. I'm not sure that I believe it though and we certainly won't be selling the stuff in the Shed!!

**The Trading Shed will be closed after Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December until it re-opens on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> January (weather permitting . . . .)**

All of us who work in the Trading Shed wish all of our customers a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

See you at the Christmas drinks . . . . .

**Keith**

### Topical Tips from Paul

#### **Using household carpet on your plot - or not!**

For some members, having enough time to keep their plots under control can be a real challenge. No sooner are areas dug than it seems weeds start to flourish again. It is tempting to try to slow weed growth by covering areas of the plot. This approach can work well and we would recommend the woven plastic sheeting which is sold in our Trading Hut - this will allow moisture and air to get to the ground whilst effectively blocking out light. I was talking to a member on Sunday - he was taking over a plot upon which the previous tenant had used a large amount of household carpet to cover the plot. When carpet becomes sodden and dirty, its weight is massively increased, making it very difficult to move or dispose of - he was really struggling with the removal of this carpet. So please try to avoid its use if you can and stick to lightweight materials.

#### **Don't give up on your onions!**

Are members growing fewer onions these days? It certainly seems that way from the sale of winter onion sets this year. Many of us had a poor yield of onions last year, possibly due to the very wet winter and probably due to the onion leaf miner. With brown onions costing as little as 69p a kilo, onions may not be the most financially rewarding of crops but there remains a flavour difference between those you grow and those you buy. Of course, red onions are more expensive to buy - last year I planted some red onion sets in early May (after the leaf miner season) and had a reasonable crop, admittedly of moderate size - but they have lasted well and taste great.

## **Planning for next year**

Now is the time of year to plan out your plot, remembering to practice crop rotation. A four year cycle would be: potatoes (1) roots (2) peas/beans (3) brassicas (4). You can dot other crops in around these, e.g. lettuce, sweet corn, courgettes and cucumbers. It is worth drawing out a scale plan as this will give you a better idea of the number of plants which can be accommodated. Raising crops too close together will both decrease yields and increase the chance of fungal disease. Also think about where you can plant a fast crop between the slower growers and where you might raise a second summer crop as the previous one dies away.

## **Digging for victory**

There are different schools of thought regarding the extent to which we need to dig plots. If you have a pernicious weed which has an underground root system, then you will need to dig it all out, thoroughly removing the roots - this, for example, is the only way to get mares tail under control. Green manure will also need to be dug in. The RHS suggests that "The best time to dig is from October through December, when the soil is free of frost and can be left to overwinter. From mid-winter until early spring, the ground is frequently wet or frozen and difficult to work with. Heavy soil must never be dug when it's wet as this can damage the soil structure and lead to poor aeration and drainage". Also, digging heavy soil is a sure recipe for back problems. If you would like to read about 'No-dig gardening' have a look at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/howtogrow/fruitandvegetables/10568420/No-dig-gardening-a-better-way-to-grow-vegetables.html>

I have found a tool known as the 'garden claw' very useful indeed for aerating the top layer of soil and removing weeds, for example, as shown at <http://www.ebay.co.uk/bhp/garden-claw>

## **Keeping your hands clean, soft even**

My wife regularly tells me that my hands and finger nails are dirty - my answer is that I am at one with the soil and so it's an inevitable consequence of bringing home the harvest. This answer doesn't impress, so I am expecting numerous pairs of gardening gloves for Christmas!! Imagine my joy, then when I found cleansers which are the most effective I have come across for cleaning and hydrating skin. My best-ever hand cleansers contain Argan oil, long used in Morocco for cleansing the skin. You can buy Argan oil soap at a price but a real snip can be found in Savers which stocks 'Kingsley House Argan Oil Cream' - £1 for a huge tub. As a hand lotion it was pretty poor but it can also be used as a cleanser and it works really well for me!

## **Some little things to do before Christmas**

There is still time to plant cane fruits, fruit bushes and trees and rhubarb. Fruit trees and bushes can be pruned, focussing on diseased and damaged growth. Use sharp tools. The pruned twigs and sticks can also be used for 'pea sticks' next year.

If you are growing sprouts, remove the yellowing leaves as they naturally die off to avoid any fungal disease affecting your sprouts. Don't take off the tops then the sprouts will carry on cropping well into the New Year.

You can still plant garlic.

Happy plotting!



From the Secretary's desk

We had a very successful and entertaining AGM on the 25<sup>th</sup> November. There were lively discussions and debates, reports from various Committee Officers, and the two proposals from the Committee were accepted and voted through. This means there will be no further concessions from 2016 although those currently receiving a concession will continue to do so.

The 2015 rental and agreement applications were handed out, those not collected have been posted out. A change from previous years is that we are unable to accept any payments without forms. A new and very important question has been added that requires completion on all forms: Next of Kin.

Brian, Julia, Jeff and Ken have stood down from the Committee. Liz O'Sullivan has re-joined and will help Keith in running the Trading Shed. Alex Ross has also joined the Committee. We now have only 10 Committee members instead of the 12 we looked for, we will have to see how this affects the running of the site during 2015.

Have a great Christmas.

**Matt**

