



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter - March 2015

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Social News from Marian

CHRISTMAS DRINKS

This took place on Sunday 14th December. After a slow start a pleasant morning was had by all who attended. The Ted Goodall trophy was won by Julie Connolly, a clear winner as her plot came top each time we did a plot inspection. She was not present to receive the trophy but Marian was able to hand it to her a few weeks later. We ran a raffle for St Christopher's Hospice which raised £145. Thank you to all who helped to make the morning a success by donating food for the buffet and prizes for the raffle.



COACH TRIP

This has been booked for Wednesday 10th June. We are going to the RHS flag ship garden in the SE - Wisley. We are using the same coach company as last year but will have an air conditioned coach this time! Those who sweltered in the heat on last year's trip will, I am sure, appreciate this. I have decided that we will stay at Wisley for the whole day. There is so much to see there, that I see no point in trying to fit another garden into the day. Booking forms will be at the shop or you can email me for a copy from the middle of March. There are only 48 seats on this coach and I need to let Wisley know how many are coming on the trip by the beginning of May so do not leave it too long to book your seat(s). For those of you who have never been to Wisley their web site is very informative. It is a garden that has great appeal at all times of the year but should be particularly lovely in June. My email: mariansanderson1@wwallotments.org.uk



KEEPING TRACK

During the winter we always get reports of missing bins, watering cans etc. This usually happens after windy weather. We also have these items appearing on other plots and no one knows to whom they belong. If you mark these items (including the bin lid) with your plot number, in paint or waterproof ink, they can be returned to the correct plot. It is surprising how far the plastic bins will roll with the wind behind them.

THE END OF AN ERA

John Scarnell, our longest serving plot holder, passed away suddenly just before Christmas. He had not been able to work his plot very much of late without the help of his family so was mainly seen on a Sunday morning when he would sit and tell his daughters what to do! He was known by many as "the old chap" with the even older dogs as he was to be seen slowly walking to his plot, dogs trailing along behind, with a bucket of scraps for the compost heap. He was a believer in "no dig" and the plot always looked a little unkempt but it was one of the most productive plots around and he always put my puny carrots to shame.

The mantle of longest serving plot holder has now moved on. I took my plot on in 1978 but I know that there are a few others who came before that. If you think it could be you let one of the Committee know as we like to keep a record of long serving members.

Marian



Notes from the Trading Shed

Spring seems to be getting closer. We've had the BAFTAS, the Oscars and the mornings and evenings are changing as the months go on. Bulbs are pushing up out of the ground and getting ready to bloom, trees and bushes are beginning to bud and the sun feels warm if you're out of the biting wind.

Anyhow, enough "hyperbolic" musings, what's happening in the Trading Shed

Our new selection of seeds for this year is now on display and well worth a look. All Country Value packets are priced at 70p instead of 89p and Johnson's Seeds are individually priced with a great reduction from recommended prices, come and have a look and compare us with any garden centre. If you're quick, we have few packets of last year's seeds priced at 20p.

Potato orders are now in and most have been collected. However, we do have some stock to sell at £1 per kilo if you forgot to order. I saw an advert in the press this weekend for 1.5 kilos of Cara and King Edward for £4.75. Our price is **only £1 a kilo**. Plus, we have friendly people in the shed every Sunday trying to offer the best service we can. Our Spring planting onions and shallots are selling fast. We have Stuttgart Giant, Red Baron and Sturon onion sets and Golden Gourmet Shallots on sale.

We do still have an offer on reduced peat compost, 3 bags for **£14.50** instead of £5.30 each. Our normal Clover multi-purpose compost is still at last year's price, **£5.40 for 75 litres**.

We would like to increase the number of Garden Members and would ask you to canvas your friends and neighbours and tell them what benefits a Garden Member has - use of our Trading Shed for the stuff we sell there and being able to place orders from Fothergill's at a great discount at the end of the year. We are in the process of putting our Garden Members onto a database so they will receive our regular News Letters and emails. **Lots of benefits for only £2 a year!**

Keith

Topical Tips from Paul

A few tips for the next few weeks.....

Potatoes - it's nearly time to get your 'Earlies' into their trenches. There are various suggestions about what you can add to the trench. I had a bit of an experiment last year and tried separately adding leaf mould and shredded paper to some rows, also watering the roots through gutter downpipes - with no noticeable effect!! But I may try adding Comfrey leaves this year as these can prevent disease and encourage strong growth. One mistake I did make though, was adding chicken manure pellets to some trenches, not realising that they make the soil more alkaline and this caused a little bit more scab than usual. You might find it useful to protect early plantings with fleece to encourage growth and protect from frost - you can buy it a good price in the Trading Shed.

Onions - good quality sets are available in the Trading Shed. If you are growing them this year, remember that the onion leaf miner can cause havoc by laying eggs at the base of the stem, then the hatched young 'mine' through the leaves increasing the risk of disease. The pest is around from April-May and October-November. There is no effective insecticide and it is best to use micromesh as a barrier. To give your onion sets a flying start you could start them indoors in modules and then move them to a greenhouse when the stems are about 2-3 cm high, planting them out when they are 10-15 cm high.



Carrots and Parsnips - best not to sow carrots too early as germination will be poor, also don't sow into soil which has been recently enriched with manure or is too stony or they may fork. Try digging out a V-shaped trench about 5-7 cm wide at the top and back fill with sieved soil. Then sow thinly along this trench, water and cover with cloche if you have them. Sadly, I found out last year that slugs eat carrot seedlings! Also, to be sure of avoiding the carrot fly, you need to protect the plants with micromesh. With parsnips, hold on sowing until April - use a metal pipe to make a cone shaped hole, back fill with sieved soil and sow four seeds above the 'cone'. It is important to thin carrot and parsnip seedlings to the recommended distance apart. For an early crop, sow four seeds into compost held in a toilet roll tube. Plant out the 'rolls' under cover in loose soil as soon as the seedlings emerge, making sure you don't break the tap root.

Peas - successful sowings of seeds can be started off in pieces of guttering and slid into rows. If possible, use solid supports (e.g. twigs/cuttings) rather than netting as peas don't like being blown around too much.

Indoor sowing - this works well with some crops but make sure you get your timing right so that you have the right external conditions when you harden off and plant outside. Right now, you could try alpine strawberry, broad beans (modules), cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce and parsley.

Celery - not so widely grown on the WWAA site but a fairly straightforward crop now that the self-blanching varieties are available. It's important to keep the plants grouped in blocks and well-watered. Celery freezes well for use in soups and stews.

Green manure - needs to be dug in just below the soil surface 3-4 weeks before you sow seeds as decaying green matter can inhibit germination.

Tread carefully - there is a lot of digging going on. Once you have dug the soil, try not to compact it by walking on it but instead operate off floorboards or decking boards.

Insecticides - if you choose to use insecticides, you will find it much cheaper to buy the concentrates rather than the ready-made sprays.

French dwarf marigolds - sow indoors towards the end of the month. They brighten the allotment, attract pollinating insects, release beneficial chemicals into the soil and deter aphids - try planting them near your beans and tomato plants.

Happy plotting!

From the Secretary's desk

Hi all,

Here are some 2015 dates for your diaries:



- Plot inspections: Tuesday 7th April, Monday 8th June, Monday 5th October
- Open day 9th August,
- AGM 18th November
- Christmas drinks 13th December

Thanks to Paul Cole, one of our resident Bee Keepers on plot A17, who has PAT tested all our electrical equipment. Luckily there were only a few items, that I think were older than me, that failed!

As you come into the site you will see that what was plot A1 has now been planted out with 5 fruit trees and the area has been sown with grass seed that has now started to grow.

We will be supporting two local events this year:

- Wots On - Sunday 18th April. We will have a stall at this WW Rotary Club event that will be from 9.30am - 1.00pm at St Frances Church Hall in Ravenswood Avenue.
- WW Village Day at Blake's Park - 4th May. I don't have the timings yet but we will again have a stall at this event. This year we will have a seed planting children's activity.

If you would like to help at either event please let me know by email or by leaving a message in the shop.

Matt