



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter - December 2015

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Social News

CHRISTMAS DRINKS



Our annual get-together will take place in our cosy and festively decorated Trading Shed on Sunday 13th December between 11.30 and 1.30pm. The bar will be free and will include Julia's, now famous, mulled wine. We would be grateful for donations of food for the buffet. We will run a raffle, the proceeds of which will be sent to St Christopher's Hospice. Items to put in the raffle can be brought on the day or left in the Trading Shed on a Sunday when the shop is open.

This is an opportunity to meet up with other plot holders in a convivial atmosphere and start to get into the Christmas spirit. We will be announcing the winner of the Ted Goodall trophy for the best kept new plot during the morning so if you have been entered for this award do come along. The cup could be going home with you!

Topical Tips from Paul

For many of us, looking through the seed catalogues and dreaming of that perfect crop really helps the cold winter months pass by. But like me you may have a big box of seeds from last year - so should I use these or buy afresh? Seed packets are marked with a 'use by' date but this does not always prove to be a good guide - for example, whilst melon and cucumber seeds will keep for up to ten years, parsnips probably are best bought fresh each year. Information about seed life and saving your own seed can be found at <http://www.realseeds.co.uk/seedlife.html>.

Talking of seeds, I was in the Trading Hut shop yesterday and a fine array of seeds was being laid out by Liz and Keith. A few caught my eye - Chioggia Beetroot, an Italian variety, has concentric white and pink rings - it is also known as 'candy' beetroot. It is reliable, the flavour is superb and the best plus - it does not produce the purple stain of traditional varieties.



Principe Borghese tomatoes, again Italian, are the variety used to make sun-dried tomatoes. They have an excellent flavour, good texture to eat but perhaps are better for making fresh tomato pasta sauce; they also fight back well against blight. I'm just going on line to order some banana shallot seeds. Banana shallots are a cross between a shallot and an onion and can produce quite large bulbs. For me, they are more flavoursome than brown onions and seem to survive better against the odds! Look out for Zebrune and Figaro varieties.



2016 has been officially declared as the Year of the Cosmos! There are some beautiful varieties in the shop - great for cut flowers and brilliant for attracting pollination insects.

Companion planting is worth considering. Most people know to grow marigolds near tomatoes to deter aphids and onions near carrots to deter carrot fly. But there are so many other options as you can see in this table: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_companion_plants.

One of my daughters-in-law is Finnish and she told me that her uncle has just planted some grape vines in Finland. I was surprised that grapes would survive the Finnish climate but a new variety called Zilga seems to do the business! Here is a link: <http://www.yougarden.com/item-p-340026/pair-grapevines-1l-supaga-and-zilga>. Graham Reavell, who hosted our wine-tasting evening in the summer, also highly recommends Riesling varieties which are bred to withstand Bavarian winters. Graham has kindly done some research and also would recommend the following varieties: Gewürztraminer (white), Blaufraenkish and Dornfelder (red). You might struggle to find these specialist vines. The Victoriana Nursery carries a wide range of grape vines: https://www.victoriananursery.co.uk/Grape_Vines/

Crop rotation, spacing and composting

Crop rotation means not growing the same vegetables in the same place each year. If you do, crop yield will suffer and diseases will be more prevalent. 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. You will also come across a few old wives' tales, like growing onions where cucumbers and courgettes were last year! When you plan your plot, also allow enough space for plants to develop - it's a false economy to cramp them and it encourages disease. Take, for example, the often seen sight of Brussels Sprouts no more than a foot apart, producing miniature sprouts!

A member chatted with me yesterday, bemoaning the fact that she put mare's tail in her compost bin (on someone's advice!) and it has infested the contents.

Best not to compost pernicious weeds or any diseased material. Here is some info: http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics/techniques/soil_makecompost1.shtml

Looking for a nice Christmas present?

Fed up with socks, cruet sets and photo frames? Why not ask your loved ones to buy you something from the WWAA shop? I was really impressed by the range of products that are being stocked. Without question there are some bargains there. For me, the highlights are the various gardening fabrics, e.g. netting, fleece, and insect mesh. You will not find these cheaper! The insect mesh is simply the best for protecting carrots and ensuring a heavy crop - it seems to create a micro climate and offer a degree of frost protection. Not to mention the soil enrichment products - I have not found a better all-purpose compost than Clover - quality at a reasonable price.

Happy plotting!

PS Re. the Raffle at the Christmas Drinks for St Christopher's Hospice I'm short on prizes at the moment - so any donations please at the Shed or email wwallotmentlet@hotmail.com and I'll collect.

Notes from the Trading Shed



Can you believe it? It's nearly December and the Christmas Season looms.

In the Trading Shed, we've just put out a display of seeds for next year. Our range covers vegetables and flowers. Like last year, we have a range of Country Value seeds which are the same price as last year and only 70p per packet. Plus Johnson's seeds which are priced individually. These too are being sold at a good discount just check them out!

Whilst our range is pretty extensive, it isn't quite the same as picking your way through a seed catalogue looking for the unusual and the interesting. We have used Fothergill seeds for that and our orders are being collated and sent off to Fothergill's as I write this.

(Well, actually, they're waiting for me to finish this before I set to work on them.)

I know that Paul has mentioned looking in the Trading Shed for Christmas ideas so I would suggest that you come and look round. A few choice packets of seeds, a seed tray or two and a bag of compost could be the ideal present for someone.

Our potato orders are going well and we have plenty of stock to sell. If you are a new plot holder, do remember that spuds are brilliant at helping to clear a plot and their strong growth can inhibit some weeds. Once again, our most popular variety is Cara. This seems to perform really well on our site. All our seed potatoes are 90p a kilo and represent tremendous value for money.

We've sold out of autumn planting onions and garlic but will have spring planting varieties in the New Year. Plus we have onion seed on sale too. Look out for seed to grow banana shallots, the professional chef's shallot of choice.

There are only two Sundays left before Christmas to visit us, the shop is closed on the 13th December for the Christmas Drinks get-together and will be closed from then until January 10th 2016.

All that remains is to wish you all A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Keith

From the Secretary's desk

We had a great AGM on the 18th November. There were lively discussions and debates, reports from various Committee Officers, and the proposal from the Committee was voted through unanimously. It was well attended and the bar in the Bowls Club was well used and appreciated.



Marian Sanderson has stood down from the Committee - I guess commuting from Rustington, where she moved to earlier in November, was just a tad too far for her to keep enjoying her plot. We have invited Marian to the Christmas Drinks to say goodbye and she hopes to be there.

On behalf of us all I would like to warmly thank Marian for her many years serving on the Committee and for her work and support during her time as Chairperson - she was excellent in this role and will be a hard act to follow. Marian also organised the Open Days and the summer coach trips which were enjoyed by many. We send her our very best wishes.

Other changes to the Committee agreed at the AGM are: I will take on the position of Chairperson; Viv Milnes who joined us earlier in the year is now Secretary; Barry Humphreys, who also joined us earlier in the year, is now our Minutes Secretary.

We have for a few years been considering other toilet solutions for the site and Claire, Liz, and now Barry, have this year been looking into what is available including grants and different types of toilets, especially ECO toilets that have no water. It may be that 2016 is the year when we get new toilets!

If you would like to be part of the decision process and become involved in this project, please let Viv Milnes know at the usual Secretary Email address: wwallotmentsec@hotmail.co.uk.

Have a great Christmas.

Matt

