



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter - March 2016

www.wwallotments.org.uk

From our Chairman

Hi all

This is always an exciting time of year as we all look forward to planning our plots for the year. For those who are new to our site - 'Welcome'

You will have seen from our Secretary's recent email that we are having a working party on **Monday 14th March** to tidy up our site. Please let Viv know if you can make it - the more helpers the merrier to help start the year with our site in a good condition.

The first plot inspection is on the 4th April, please be kind to the plot inspectors by not giving them any reason to linger around your plot due to its condition, unless it is to admire it!

Matt

Topical Tips from Paul

Some tips for the next few weeks

The wonders of insect mesh - onions, carrots and leeks

Planting onion sets is very therapeutic! Just 12cm apart, rows 20cm apart, soon they will be sprouting. They look healthy as they grow but . . . for some of us, by late June they wilt away. The reason is often the allium leaf miner, a fly about 8mm long and brown in colour which lays its eggs at the base of the plant. The eggs hatch into larvae about 6mm long which tunnel into the onion stems and gorge themselves for a few weeks! There are two generations, one in March-April and the other in October-November. Chemical control is not available to gardeners so the only sure way of protecting your onions is to cover them with insect mesh. It is also very important to clear away rotting onion stems as the larvae can over-winter. Insect mesh will also keep away carrot fly which can completely devastate the crop. Another benefit I have found is that the mesh creates a beneficial microclimate in which the plants grow strongly and healthily. Insect mesh lasts up to ten years and is available in the Shop at a knock-down price! Unfortunately the mesh won't stop rust on leeks and garlic and in fact will make it worse! It is important to keep these plants well-spaced with good air flow. Rust won't destroy the crops but it will reduce the yield. Here's some more info from the RHS:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=214>

New stock in the Shop...

The cost of bamboo canes can build up over the years, particularly if you do not have a dry area to store them over the winter. I noticed that Keith and Liz have found some green plastic 'canes' which have a reinforced metal inner strip and are available in various lengths. These are not only long-lasting but great value compared to garden centre prices - the 180cm pole is ideal for tomatoes and costs just £1.15p. Also new in the shop are some trowels which are very tough, highly tactile and extraordinary value at £1.50. Just a couple of new ideas alongside the seeds, chemicals and composts!

Potatoes Early potatoes can be planted in mid/late March depending on how cold the soil has been - main crop follows about 2/3 weeks later. I have found that a sprinkling the soils with Growmore and covering the area with fleece promotes rapid growth. Don't forget to cover over the tips with soil as the leaves come through the surface or they may be damaged by frost. Some RHS advice:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=716>

Parsley and Basil If you make pasta, then these two herbs are essential and are really expensive to buy! Last year was the first time I had really good yields because I did not transplant seedlings. Instead I started a number of seeds off indoors in 10cm pots and when the growth was strong (about 15cm high) planted the entire pot contents out about 20cm apart, at first under cover.

Lettuce It is worth starting some 'hearting' lettuces off indoors and some lettuce leaves in plastic trays or wooden boxes (about 10cm deep). If you sow outdoors, it's a good idea to cover the seeds with a cloche. Two 'hearting' lettuces which are reliable, tasty and slow to bolt are Winter Density (very resistant to the cold) and 'Little Gem'.

Peas These can be started off in pieces of guttering, perhaps 2ft long. Keep them off ground level to keep mice at bay. When the pea plants are about 3cm high, you can slide them into a trench about 3-4in deep - plant two 'gutters' alongside each other to give 2ft of row. Support the plants as necessary. Succession sowing every 2 weeks should provide a crop into late summer. For mange tout, you may want to try one of the 6ft varieties (e.g. Golden Sweet) which are heavy croppers. Don't worry too much if your pea leaves are nibbled by the pea weevil - the plants will recover. Some RHS advice: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/peas>

Strawberries and soft fruit Talking of guttering, I am experimenting with growing strawberries in 180cm long gutters using the excellent Clover compost available from the Shop, with 8 plants to a strip. The idea is that strawberries being shallow rooters will be happy enough as long as I keep them well-watered, and I won't have so much trouble from slugs or weeds. Having weeded my fruit beds on numerous occasions, I have finally made the effort to cover the area with the weed control fabric available in the Shop - but one warning - make sure you do not have networks of bindweed or mares tail under the soil before you cover it!

Parsnips A few weeks to go before sowing these but if your seed is not this year's then the germination rate will be poor. You can also try sowing parsnip and carrot seeds indoors in toilet roll tubes (say 4 to a tube). Plant out when they have first leaves fully developed and before the tap root comes through the bottom, thinning to one plant per tube.

Happy plotting!



Notes from the Trading Shed

It's that time of year again when the days start growing longer and we can feel that Spring is nearer. It is still pretty cold at night though and we haven't seen the last of the Winter.

In the Trading Shed, our seeds are selling well and most people have collected their individual seed orders. The interest and excitement these orders have generated has been interesting to see.

All the potato orders have now been sorted, made up and await collection. We do have some spares to sell at £1.00 per kilo. Once again our best seller was Cara, way out ahead of Charlotte. Have you noticed the prices per kilo in the seed catalogues and in newspaper adverts?

We now have Spring planting onion sets and shallots on sale. Our offerings are Red Baron, Stuttgarter Giant and Turbo and our shallot is the old favourite Golden Gourmet. Initial sales have been brisk which is encouraging.

Last Sunday, we started selling bird seed and we were pleased with the response. We have sunflower hearts and Niger seed on offer and our prices are keen. If there is a good take up and demand we can easily expand the range.

Another new venture is garden spades and forks. Again, we only have a very small amount to try so watch this space. Talking about garden implements, if you have any old tools you no longer use, we can try and sell them and any money we take will go straight to St Christopher's Hospice.



Finally, the new mesh that we have been waiting for has arrived. It's called "Tendermesh" and is seen as an alternative to using insecticides.

As always, if you feel we are lacking in our ranges, please tell us.

Keith and Liz

StChristopher's

As members of WW Allotments Association you may or may not be aware that your Committee, on your behalf, has been making regular and quite substantial donations to St Christopher's Hospice. This has been going on, from memory, for at least 25 years and in all probability a lot longer and totals overall a figure in excess of £12,000.

In these circumstances, and bearing in mind your generosity, I thought you might like to know a little more about the Hospice, how it operates and how your money is used.

The Hospice was founded in 1967 at Lawrie Park Road, Sydenham by Dame Cicely Saunders, OM DBE FRCS FRCP - to radically change the experience of dying people and those close to them. It serves a diverse population of 1.5 million people in the London Boroughs of Bromley, Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark; from Ladywell in the East to Streatham in the West and Waterloo in the North to Kenley in the South.

In this country, through the work at St Christopher's, we lead the world in providing palliative care for the terminally ill. For this we must be extremely grateful and very proud.

The service is not exclusive to people with cancer but also those suffering heart conditions, organ failure, dementia and other degenerative illnesses. It has a budget in excess of £19million of which the NHS contributes about one third. The rest comes from donations by way of personal gifts and legacies. The Hospice has 48 in-patient beds on four wards. Palliative care is also provided by their very skilled staff to people living at home and also in the Out Patient clinics. During 2014/15 the Hospice offered support to over 2,500 new patients, an average of 650 were cared for each month involving 14,000 visits including 600 in the evenings, overnight or at the weekends. It costs approximately £450 a day to look after an Inpatient at the Hospice and this is free of charge.

Hopefully this provides a simplistic overview of how the Hospice operates. Overall it is not a sad place but one that is vibrant, professional and always trying to provide a service to the patients and their families that they require in their time of need.

Finally, as you can imagine, the Hospice receives many letters thanking them for their help. I feel I can do no better than to set out an extract from one of many:

"Your came to know Dad as a proud and strong man and I am grateful to you all for always treating him with respect and for preserving his dignity. It has been an absolute privilege to come to understand the work that you do. Your kindness and the love you have shown to my Dad, myself and my family has made this distressing time all the more bearable"

Please keep up your generosity; I can assure you it is gratefully accepted. If anyone would like to help in acting as a volunteer please talk to me - I am only too willing to help.

Yours sincerely

Brian Sells

(St Christopher's Hospice Volunteer)

From the Secretary's Desk

Hi everyone

When you read this hopefully the sun will be shining and everyone will have a spring in their step. With that in mind here are some dates for your dairies:-



1) Working Party Dates- 11th March, 26th June & 1st October. Please let me know if you can come along for a few hours to help tidy overrun parts of our allotments. Tea & biscuits provided.

2) Plot Inspections will be 4th April, 6th June & 3rd October 2016

If you are having any problems please contact the Committee so that we can see if there is help available.

3) BBQ - Sunday 17th July

4) Allotment Open Day - Sunday 21st August. As well as the usual produce stalls & cake stall, there will be a vegetable search competition for children and a scarecrow competition for plot holders.

5) AGM - Thursday 24th November

Thanks again to Paul Cole who has kindly PAC tested all our electrical equipment again this year.

At the time of writing this we have a few vacant allotments. If you would like an extra plot or know someone who would like a plot please advise them to contact myself or Paul Rispoli - (wwallotmentlet@hotmail.com)

Viv

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## **A Fundraising item**

West Wickham & Hayes Fundraising Committee in aid of Cancer Research UK  
is holding a Race Night at

St Francis of Assisi Church Hall, Ravenswood Avenue, West Wickham BR4 0PW

**On Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2016 7pm - 10.30pm Tickets £5.00 each**

Details from Mary Jones 020 8650 5171