



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter - December 2016

From our Chairman

Hi all

I am writing this on a glorious sunny November morning, no - hold on, it's now pouring with rain, no - sunny again!

We are going into the New Year in a healthy position. The site is in a very good condition due to all the work put into it - not only by the Site Team, who have done a fantastic job throughout the year, but also due to working party days and other works carried out.



We had a great AGM on Thursday evening; we welcome Helen Corro to the Committee but say goodbye and many thanks to Claire. I'm sure, and hope, that we will see Claire throughout the year, especially at the summer BBQ.

The Bowls Club is a great venue and we are very lucky that they allow us to use it for our AGM.

Phil explained our finances in a way that I think some of us actually understood and we learnt how it all works with the finances separated between us, the Association, and the running costs of the site itself. Alex talked about the research underway regarding improved toilet facilities with an update to follow in the New Year. Liz, Paul and Viv updated us on the Trading Hut, Lettings/Members and BALGF. Brian said next year will be his last looking after all our young visitors, which he has been doing for many years, and for which we thank him.



We are now looking forward to our Christmas drinks on Sunday the 11th December at 11.30am at the hut and then new challenges and successes in 2017.

Merry Christmas to you all

Matt

Notes from the Trading Shed

As the year draws to a close, we "close down" our plots for the winter. In the shed we have lots of black plastic groundcover to protect your soil. This lets water through but stops weeds germinating. When you take the covering off in the spring your ground will be ready to dig over. You will also find that any perennial weeds may have roots nearer the surface so you'll be able to deal with them more easily.



We have recently added fat balls for birds to our range and they have begun to sell well. If you do feed birds you'll have noticed that they are feeding well every day now as they prepare for the cold weather to come. Our most popular bird seed is sunflower hearts that all birds seem to relish.

We will soon have stock of seeds in the shed, both Johnson's and Country Value. They will be discounted.

If you ordered from the Fothergill Seed Catalogue, I expect them to here in January. Our total order was valued at just over £1,200 which will give us a good discount.

Our last Trading Sunday will be **Sunday 4th December** as we will be having Christmas drinks on Sunday 11th.

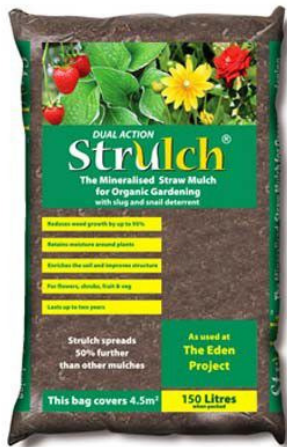
We will open again on **Sunday 8th January**

'MERRY CHRISTMAS' FROM THE TRADING SHED TEAM



Topical Tips from Paul

Some tips and observations for the next few weeks.....



Strewth it's Strulch!

Maybe it's just me but I find there is quite a lot of work involved in growing strawberries - keeping the bed weeded and the fruit off the ground, watering regularly and deterring slugs. I tried growing plants in gutters this year - not a great success! Now I'm considering using 'Strulch' next year. This was developed at Leeds University in 2004. Apparently it's light and easy to use this mineralised straw mulch which reduces weed growth by up to 95% and retains moisture around plants. It deters slugs and snails, it breaks down over two years and it improves soil structure. I might

try some next year - not cheap at about £3 to cover a square metre of soil but may work well on the strawberry bed. Here's a link www.strulch.co.uk.

Digging, soil structure and enrichment

It is worth noting that digging your plot in very wet or frosty conditions will not benefit the soil structure. There are many ways to improve your soil's structure and supply enrichment - here is a link <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=865>. 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>

Onions - seeds or sets?

It is an often discussed point - whether to grow onions from seeds or sets? Well, perhaps try a bit of both. If you can supply a little heat, onion seeds can be sown early in the New Year and by mid-March they will be ready to be hardened off and planted outside. Two varieties which worked well for me last year were Bonus and Arthur. At the same time, I also planted some banana shallots which store better than onions and have a stronger flavour - Zebrune and Figaro are good varieties to try. In Mid-March I also planted out some red onion sets which I got from the Trading Shed and these came out well too. As you'll know from earlier posts, I am an advocate of covering with insect mesh (from the Trading Shed) to combat the onion leaf miner which is flying around from March to June and September to November - the larvae can decimate the crop. The mesh also seems to create a microclimate which promotes better growth and, perhaps I imagined it, but there were fewer weeds in my onion beds.

Crop rotation and disease resistance

It is very important to rotate your crops to avoid a build-up of pests and diseases building up. Here is a link. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=124> . Also, be sure to remove spent and decaying crops from the soil - consider burning diseased material or taking it to the dump. Some diseases are very impossible to eradicate - for example, white rot on the base of onions can live in the soil for up to 8 years. Sometimes it pays to grow disease resistant varieties, for example, if you have found club root on your brassicas perhaps try: Kilaton cabbage, Clapton cauliflower and Cronos Brussels Sprouts. By all accounts a great year for tomatoes with less blight around and a long cropping season - again blight resistant varieties can ensure this is a regular success!

Planning for next year

On these winter evenings, it can be very relaxing to think ahead and plan for next year's campaign! Firstly, bear in mind crop rotation when assigning crop varieties to beds. It's worth drawing out a scale plan of your plot as this will give you a better idea of the number of plants which can be accommodated. Don't put crops too close together as yields may be reduced and diseases become more prevalent. Plan for succession, particularly for crops which run to seed quickly (e.g. salad leaves, rocket and fennel) and practice successional sowing to ensure supply does not outstrip demand - there is nothing worse than having a glut and not being able to use all your crops. There are only so many courgettes you can give to friends

Some little things to do before Christmas

- There's still time to plant cane fruits, fruit bushes and trees and rhubarb. Some fruit trees and bushes can be pruned <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=90> , focussing on diseased and damaged growth. Use sharp tools. The pruned twigs and sticks can also be used for 'pea sticks' next year.
- Start collecting fallen leaves now. Place them in black bin liners, maybe with some compost accelerator, and in 6 months' time you should have some excellent leaf mould to dig in with June plantings.
- 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, maybe starting it off indoors in those degradable pots.
- Check through your seeds and throw out any that are past their use- by times, see <http://www.realseeds.co.uk/seedlife.html>

Happy plotting!

Paul





From the Secretary's Desk

Thank you to all the plot holders who attended the AGM on 24th November. There were lively discussions and debates, reports from various Committee Officers. It was well attended and the bar in the Bowls Club was well used and appreciated. Thank you to those who kept our voices well lubricated.

I recently attended a BALGF meeting where we were advised that there has been a change to the way Bromley will be managing the hedgerows along roads and pathways. There has been much concern recently about the reduction in wildlife throughout the UK, highlighted by the media following the recent, 'State of Nature Report'. To try to help, Bromley's contractors have agreed to stop spraying hedge bases with pesticides and refrain from mowing close to hedges, leaving a 0.5 m margin **except**:

- Along sightlines
- Where hedgerows are immediately adjacent to footpaths
- Around formal flower beds

This will increase the value of hedgerows for wildlife including pollinators and some of the predators which help control garden pests. Animals which will benefit include:

- Hedgehogs and toads, whose numbers have declined significantly and both feed on insects in hedge bases and hibernate within them
- Birds which need thick hedgerows to nest in and rely on grubs to feed their young
- Bats which hunt for small insects flying above hedges at night
- Pollinators such as bees, hoverflies (whose larvae eat aphids) and moths attracted by hedgerow flowers
- The many butterflies whose caterpillars feed on long grass in the hedge base

All allotments have been asked to try and create environments to support wildlife and biodiversity. I was in the happy position to say that our allotments already are supporting the wildlife by having bees and flowers on our allotments as well as plentiful vegetables.

For more information about Bromley's hedgerows and how to maintain them see Bromley Biodiversity Plan pages 26-30 and Appendix E, Best Practice Guidance for Land Managers: Hedgerows: Pages 120-121. Both are available at

http://www.bromley.gov.uk/downloads/file/2185/bromley_biodiversity_plan_2015_-_2020

Appendix E is also downloadable as a separate document at

http://www.bromley.gov.uk/downloads/file/2472/appendix_e_land_managers_guidelines

A short document about hedgerow management and wildlife can be found at <http://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Hedgerow-guide-web-version.pdf> or see the RSPB or Wildlife Trusts' websites

Have a great Christmas

Viv

