



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter - March 2017

From our Chairman

Hi all

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter with hopefully lots of ideas and suggestions from Paul, information about the shop from Keith and an update of what has been going on from Viv. Here are all the planned dates for this year, we need all the help we can get on the working parties and if you would like to get involved with any events please let Viv know.

Happy Allotmenting!

Matt

Working Party Monday March 27th

Plot inspections Tuesday April 18th
Committee Meeting Saturday April 22nd

Working Party Monday June 19th
Plot inspection Monday June 19th
Committee Meeting Saturday June 24th

B-B-Q Sunday July 30th

Committee Meeting Saturday August 12th

Open Day Sunday Sept 3rd

Working Party Monday October 23rd
Plot inspections Monday October 23rd
Committee Meeting Saturday October 28th

AGM Thursday November 23rd

Committee Meeting Saturday December 9th
Christmas Drinks Sunday December 17th



Notes from the Trading Shed



At last, it looks like we've turned a corner and Spring is here. You'll find the Trading Shed is full of seeds, seed potatoes, spring planting onions and shallots, all hoping to tempt you and get your allotments and gardens off to a good start.

We also sell Spring and Summer lawn feed as well as Weed, Feed and Moss Control.

During the last two to three weeks, we have sold a lot of our multi-purpose compost and we'll have more coming into stock during the next week or so. This is by far our bestseller and the quality is really good. You may notice that we don't stock either reduced peat or peat-free compost. The reason for this is very simple, it didn't sell in sufficient quantity and we ended up reducing it to clear. If there is enough demand in the future, we'll consider stocking it again.

If anyone wants perhaps a small amount of either reduced peat, peat-free or indeed, 100% peat, please talk to Liz or me as we can order in small amounts and tell you prices etc. We are very happy to do this.

Among our next delivery will be canes and the green plastic coated stakes we introduced last year. We would welcome any feedback on how the green stakes have survived the winter.

Last year, we started to sell Tendamesh, which is a close-woven netting designed to protect crops against pests, the makers suggest that it means no insecticides are required. There will be plenty more available.

Bordeaux mixture is no longer available but we do have an alternative that will help in the fight against blight. It is also copper based.

If you look at our seed collections, you'll notice we have lots of companion planting options. Most of the flower seeds we sell are beneficial to insects and, of course, brighten up the plots too. Please also look at our prices - we do not sell any seed at its recommended retail price.



Can we ask you to spread the word to your friends and relatives about what we offer as we would like more Garden Members. For the tiny price of £2.00, a Garden Member can visit the shop on Sundays and begin to save money. When compared to Garden Centres we stack up well.

Here's hoping for a good Spring and a great year for all our plot holders.

Keith and Liz

Topical Tips from Paul

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

Potatoes

As the temperature rise, we should think about plant our first early potatoes into ground which, ideally, has had some well-rotted compost added and maybe some bone meal or high phosphorus fertiliser. Don't rush to plant in cold, wet soil as this can encourage problems later. When the shoots appear, they need to be protected from frost usually by earthing up. It is tempting not to weed between rows but certain weeds (notably chickweed, fat hen, groundsel and mayweed) can be a store for nematodes which can cause discoloration of the tubers. Here's an interesting read on potato growing: <https://www.love2learnalotmenting.co.uk/how-to-grow-potatoes>

Onions

Onions can be a tricky crop to grow, requiring a rich soil and regular weeding. Although the variation in our spring weather can cause onion sets to bolt, they do provide a straightforward method of cultivation. Last year, I had some success with onions grown from seed, notably Bonus and Arthur, started off indoors. The 10 cm high seedlings looked very flimsy when I planted them out, after hardening off, but they recovered and cropped quite well. But note that the plants were covered with insect mesh (available in the Trading Shed) to keep away the onion leaf miner which lays eggs at the base of the stem in April-May and October-November. When the maggots hatch out, they 'mine' through the leaves increasing the risk of disease. The pest can destroy the crop and a good yield is highly unlikely without mesh protection.

Celery

Not everyone's favourite but an essential ingredient for soups, stews and pasta dishes, celery is not as difficult to grow as some people say. Choose a self-blanching variety such as Golden Self Blanching and start off indoors, then pricking out the very small seedlings into grow modules, 24 to a tray. Carry on the seedlings indoors and don't worry if they look a bit feeble. After hardening off, plant out in mid-May, arranging the plants in a block and with a raised border of soil. Celery loves water so just fill up the 'moat' you have created with water every few days, add some plant food, occasionally weed and you will succeed. The celery can be harvested in the Autumn (though some varieties can withstand frost), chopped into 10 cm chunks and frozen for use if cooking throughout the winter. Some of my plants have survived the winter - so I am interested to see if I will get a second crop! You might also consider growing Chinese cutting celery which can be used just like a herb. Here's some info:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/celery>

Carrots and Parsnips

For best shaped carrots, it is best to dig out a V-shaped trench about 15 cm deep and 7 cm wide at the top and back fill with sieved soil. Then, in mid-March sow thinly along this trench, water and cover with cloche if you have them. Note that slugs find carrot shoots very tasty! To be sure of avoiding carrot fly damage, you need to cover with insect mesh. It's a similar approach with parsnips (no mesh needed) but use a metal pipe to make cone shaped holes every 15 cm along the line, back fill with sieved soil and sow four seeds above each 'cone' in mid-April. Make sure you thin the seeds out, otherwise the roots will wrap round each other as they grow. For an early crop of carrots or parsnips, sow 4 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, and thin to one plant per station soon after they are established.

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. Outdoor sowings often fail - but keep the mice happy! It is essential that the roots of peas are kept moist during growth.

Swede

If you like it, there is not much to beat the flavour of homegrown swede. Helinor or Invitation (Club Root resistant) are recommended varieties. Remember that Swedes are brassicas so they will need to be protected from pigeons. For the best chance of a decent crop sow in early May. Sow the seeds on land which has full light. Seedlings germinate quickly and when they are about 5 cm high, it is important to thin them out to about 12 cm apart - if you do not thin then, the plants will become spindly and you won't get a crop. Thin again later when you remove small roots, to the eventual distance apart of 24 cm. I have found that rose fertiliser works brilliantly on swedes - make sure it contains boron, an essential trace element. Other than that, just weed and water.

Club Root on brassicas

If you have had a problem with club root, then try the following resistant varieties: Kilaton cabbage, Clapton cauliflower, Cronus sprouts. Here's some info on Club Root:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=128#nav-gardens>



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 - planting them near tomato plants can be very effective. In fact, try dotting them all round the plot as they deter aphids - I'm going to see if they will keep whitefly off my brassicas this year!

Happy plotting!

Paul

Social News from Barry

We have a pretty busy calendar this year but unfortunately due to low numbers we've been unable to add a coach trip this summer. However, please let us know if there are any venues or events that you fancy visiting in 2018 and we will see how much interest we get.

Barry

From the Secretary's Desk



Spring is just around the corner promising blossoms and new life so we must all get working on our plots again. With this in mind I would like to remind you that the first plot inspection of the year will be April 18th - please make it easy for the plot inspectors by having your edges tidy and cut back and your plots in good order. Some plots are looking a little uncared for with the weeds already setting seed. Please cover and/or weed kill the parts of your plot that are in disorder. If you have any issues please let us know in advance at wwallotmentsec@hotmail.co.uk.

The Committee is going to enter the site for the Balgf competitions this year. In the past West Wickham Allotment has won the best site cup and many individual awards. Wouldn't it be nice if we could do this again this year? Please let me know your interest. I will display the individual classes for plot holders on the notice board in the trading shed.

The working party on Monday 27th March will be aiming to convert an empty plot by the entrance into a grass parking area. This will give the plot holders with plots around Hawes Lane a place to park nearby without compromising the exit road. Help is urgently needed from plot holders to complete this.

WWAA donated £191.50 to St Christopher's Hospice from the Christmas raffle, thank you for your kind donations. The monies raised from donated tools that are left at the trading shed are also donated to St Christopher's.

Viv

