



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter - September 2017

From our Chairman

Our unpredictable summer weather behaved itself for long enough to ensure we had another very successful BBQ. Over 70 people seemed to enjoy the cooking efforts of Paul and myself and indeed of Dave our Vegetarian chef. Many thanks to all of you who helped on the day and during the build-up. St. Christopher's Hospice is again the beneficiary of your generosity with the raffle.



Our next event is the Open Day on **Sunday September 3rd**. There will be a few new attractions this year. Our local fire crew and engine will be on site for a chat and I'm sure if you ask nicely! even a sit inside the wagon. There will also be a display from our local gym club on the central car park area. There will of course be the usual produce stalls. All donations and help to set up will be gratefully appreciated.

We had a strong entry for the BALGF awards this year after an absence of some years. As I write we await the results, but thanks to those plot holders for their efforts

We recently applied to the Woodland Trust for a package of tree and hedge saplings to use on site, predominantly to screen the new car park area and proposed eco toilet site. I'm delighted to say that our application was successful and we should expect delivery before the winter. Before you ask - there is no cost involved!

See you at the Open Day

Barry



Notes from the Trading Shed

Our growing year is coming to an end as Autumn begins very soon. When you have cleared your plot we have lots of black plastic covering which will let water through but prevent weeds taking over. In the Spring, the covering can be lifted leaving you a much easier job of preparing the soil for the next growing cycle.

There is an interesting alternative. We will be selling bags of Phacelia - a Green Manure. The idea is that once your ground is clear, you sow this and before it flowers next Spring, you chop it down and dig it in to improve your soil. The plants will cover bare soil and help to



smother weeds. The roots prevent soil erosion. Once the plant is dug into the soil while still green, valuable nutrients will return to the soil and the structure of the soil improved.

When you do need the land for cropping you chop down the Phacelia foliage and leave it to wilt. Then the plants are dug into the top 10" of soil to be then left for 2 weeks or more before sowing or planting.

Our bags of seed will be 100g for £1.00, enough to cover half a plot. The seed should remain viable for 1 -2 years.

We will shortly be stocking garlic yellow onions and broad beans for Autumn planting.

We have trialled a bulb catalogue this Autumn. If you are thinking of ordering please let us have your order by the end of August detailing what you want, page number and stock ordering number. We are adding 5% to cover our expenses and will take money once you collect your bulbs. If this is successful, we will do it again next year.

Our stock of Johnson's seed has now been returned but we do still have a small range of Country Value seeds on sale at 80p a packet. You will notice fewer seed next year as our returns rate of 49% is too high. There will be fewer flower seeds available.

We shall shortly be able to take your orders for next year's seed potatoes. Our available range is listed:

FIRST EARLIES

Maris Bard	High yielding, good for cooking
Pentland Javelin	Good boiler, eelworm and scab resistance
Rocket	Perfect for boiling, salads and chipping

SECOND EARLY

Kestrel	Blue eyes, good disease resistance, roasts and fries well
Vivaldi	High yields, mature crop keeps well (we've been asked a few times for this)



SALADS

Charlotte

Reliable, high yielding, good flavour

Nicola

Excellent flavour, good for salads and boiling

MAIN CROP

Cara

Red-eyed tough guy with high yields, disease resistance (our most popular)

Desiree

Popular red, vigorous high yielder, drought resistance

Maris Piper

Good yield and flavour, good chipper

Sarpo Mira

High resistance to foliar blight, good boiler

You'll be able to order in kilos.

Hope you're enjoying harvesting and eating the results of your efforts this year.

Keith & Liz

Can you believe this????



Interesting photo supplied by Brian McLaren who reports 'All credit to double-jointed Derek Hall who managed to get his arm through and, almost standing on his head, put the key in'.

Any amusing/interesting photos, tales from the site etc would be very welcome for the Newsletter. Please send them to: editor@wwallotments.org.uk

Topical Tips from Paul

Tomato blight Just back from holiday and I noticed some signs of blight on my tomatoes. Needed to act rapidly and removed the offending foliage and fruit. I sprayed the plants with aspirin (see below) mixed with a little washing up liquid - this helps the spray adhere to the leaves and stems. Use 500mg aspirin per gallon of water. A few days later I sprayed them with the copper fertiliser available from the shop. If you don't want to spray your plants remove almost all the foliage. Last year I took off many fully formed fruits and ripened them indoors - they tasted fine. It is suggested that you place them in a drawer with a banana as this emits the ethene gas they need to ripen fast. I just place mine in trays under a bed!

Ref: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/trouble-in-the-vegetable-patch-break-out-the-aspirin-it-nips-pesky-blight-in-the-bud-9349916.html>

Potatoes I am just digging up my potatoes and am quite pleased with the quality of the tubers. Last year I left the maincrop until late September and found a fair number them affected with scab, wireworm holes and spraing, even though the leaves had been healthy throughout the season. Spraing causes little brown streaks and cavities in the flesh. It is caused by the tobacco rattle virus and is more prevalent in certain potato varieties. It is also made worse by overwatering and weeds such as chickweed and shepherd's purse growing nearby. This year I have made more effort to weed around the potatoes and, by harvesting them a little earlier, I hope to see improved tuber quality in the main crop. We shall see. I have heard from Keith that the Trading Shed will be offering Vivaldi potato seed tubers next year - I doubt you will find a better tasting 'baker'. It's a limited offer so you will need to get your order in quickly.

Ref: <http://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/groups/cell-and-molecular-sciences/virus-research/host-pathogen-interactions/spraing-trv>

Green manure When the potatoes come out I am left with beds of soil - what to do? Plant with over-wintering crops, cover with plastic or horse manure (in due course). For me it's an opportunity to enrich the soil with nutrients and improve its structure using green manure. It is totally natural; it provides excellent ground cover and keeps down weeds. It's so easy to use and needs no attention. Once this year's crop is removed just rake the soil over and sow the seed broadcast at a rate of about 1 gram per square metre - it doesn't matter if you go over! A variety of green manures can be bought at garden centres. I use phacelia because it is not a brassica (can be club root problems) and it digs in so easily. If you sow in September it will grow to about 45cm by March when you can dig it in two weeks before you use the ground. Note that you must not let it set seed, a pity as the flowers are rather beautiful and attract bees! You will see a substantial improvement in the crop you harvest from that area next season. The cost of green manure at garden centres is a bit of a 'rip-off'. The good news is that Keith has ordered 5 kg of phacelia seeds which will be sold at a price several times less than that in garden centres. The seeds keep from one year to the next. Why not give it a try?

Ref: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/howtogrow/9200394/Sow-a-patch-and-replenish-your-plot.html>

Raspberries The sooner you remove the canes which produced fruit this year, the more the canes for next year will develop. I found that weeding around the stems and putting down some weed control fabric seemed to increase yields, perhaps by helping to retain moisture in the soil. For the first time, I also made an effort to feed the plants through the season.

Salads It's far from too late to sow lettuce, salad leaves and rocket. These will grow well into the winter months if you provide some cloche cover. My over-wintering favourite is the lettuce variety 'Winter Density' it is incredibly hardy and has an excellent taste. You might also consider trying Perpetual Spinach.

Onions and garlic If you plant onion sets over winter, consider covering them with Enviromesh which is available from the Trading Hut. Not only will it keep out the allium leaf miner (around September/November and March/April), it also provides a microenvironment in which plants seem to grow faster. It will not be long before the Association's seed catalogues are available - if you have not had great success with onions can I suggest you have a go with banana shallots - I use the variety Zebrune - sow as seeds indoors in mid-February and transplant out when they are about 15 cm tall. They grow as big as some onions, seem to crop more reliably and taste wonderful!

So many courgettes or are they marrows? I love a slightly spicy butternut squash soup. But always feel as though I could make better use of that vegetable, for example roasted or in stews and curries. So, I replaced the butternut squash in my soup recipe with courgettes/marrows. It works brilliantly. The recipe is given below. It will make 6 starter sized portions of soup, or can be used as a base for a tagine and it freezes very well.

Paul's Moroccan Marrow Soup

Peel and remove pips from the marrows to give 800g flesh which should be chopped. Add this to a pot which contains a good glug of olive oil. Add all chopped: 400g of carrots, 2 sticks of celery, 4-6 bulbs of garlic (you could also add an onion if you wish). Add 3 bay leaves and 2 heaped teaspoons of cumin seeds. Cover the pot and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Next add 2 level tablespoons of tomato puree and cook with no lid for about 10 minutes, stirring regularly - you want the tomatoes to catch slightly to give a fried tomato taste - the mixture will darken from red to light brown. Then add 1 heaped teaspoon each of: ground cumin, ground coriander and paprika plus 1 heaped tablespoon of fresh basil (or a heaped teaspoon of dried basil). Cook for another five minutes adding a little water if necessary. Then add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of sugar, a 400g tin of tomatoes (or your fresh tomatoes), 2 good handfuls of red lentils, 2 vegetable stock cubes and just enough boiled water to cover the mixture. Put the lid on and simmer for 1 hour. Let the pot cool a little then use a hand-blender to give a thick, smooth consistency (don't worry about the odd lump and dilute with a little vegetable stock if you want a runnier soup). Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper. Use what you want and freeze the rest according to your desired portion size (it will about 6 starter size bowls). A great way to use up marrows and a healthy option too! Hope you enjoy it!



Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



Hasn't the summer flown by, do you feel the same? The weeds have been having a wonderful time on my plot and seem to be growing much more vigorously than most of my crops. Walking around the site I can see that I am not the only plot holder in this situation. I am going to make a big weeding & tidying effort before the plot inspection in October!

'Farmer' Brian again

supervised visits from pre-school children and also the children from a West Wickham Scout Group. Brian showed them all the different types of vegetables and fruit growing and, where possible, let them have a taste. He also showed them the bees and even a slow worm, which fascinated them. When the weather was good they usually finished their visit with a picnic on the large grass area.

Brian will be taking a step back next year and Pennie & Barry will be taking on this valuable role so a big 'Thank you Brian' from all of us.



We had a knife sharpener on site one Sunday in July. We had a good response on the day and so far the feedback I have received has been very positive. I plan to arrange this again during the spring, if anyone has a preferred month please let me know.

On a less positive note, we have had a few incidences of crops suddenly disappearing from allotments! The Committee has taken this very seriously and thinks that we have been able to stop this happening.

Thank you to all plot holders who entered the BALGF competition this year. I entered the whole site but have not had any feedback so far.

The competition Awards Reception is being held at 7.00pm on Thursday 28th September 2017 at Crofton Main hall, Crofton Road, Orpington BR6 8PR. There will be a talk by Chris O'Donoghue, 'From pottery to potting shed', plus a Finger Buffet Supper & bar.

Tickets are £7.50 per head and are available until 21st September from Mrs Simmer, 106 Newstead Avenue BR6 9RN. Tel: 07984 895965.

Regards

Viv