



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wallotments.org.uk

Newsletter - March 2018

From our Chairman



Writing these notes in the teeth of "The Beast from the East" working on the plot seems a far cry. However, it's a great opportunity to plan what to grow this year and to take the opportunity to visit the Trading Shed and discover the huge range of products available in this Aladdin's Cave.

Do remember that Keith and Liz can order most things that aren't in stock. We had a great example this week of a Garden Member who wanted some specialist equipment for seedlings which was duly ordered. The member revealed that he would normally pay in excess of £20 a unit. From the Trading Shed just £7.50!! It's worth asking to have a look through the catalogue.

Now all the plot renewals are complete we have some vacancies. There are some really good plots available so please tell a friend.

We are awaiting final quotes before the new eco toilet project gets underway.

Lastly an early warning note: first plot inspection of the year is April 9th

All the best

Barry



Notes from the Trading Shed

Spring is now on its way although, looking out of the window as I write this, you'd be forgiven for thinking we're still deep in mid-winter.

Seed potatoes are now available in the shed and if you ordered any, they are awaiting collection.
When you collect, do please keep them frost free.

We also have "Golden Gourmet" shallots for sale and will have a few spring planting onions soon.



We do a good trade in locally sourced honey but our usual suppliers have now run out. Does anyone have any contacts with a local beekeeper who might like to sell honey through us? Please let Liz or Keith know.

Recently, we've had a few people order through our supplier after looking through the Trade Catalogue we use. Please ask to see this any Sunday if you're interested. We can supply almost anything to do with Horticulture depending on the quantities involved.

Paul has written about a Carrot called "Eskimo" in his notes. We are selling packets of seed for this and, so far, sales are encouraging. We can order more if required. These carrots can be sown late in the season and will mature and stay in the ground until needed. I can vouch for the taste too - Delicious!

Here's hoping that the weather improves soon and we can start our gardening year in earnest.

Keith & Liz

Topical Tips from Paul

The wonders of fresh carrots

Few grow-your-own vegetables taste better than freshly picked carrots. Once established, carrot plants need very little attention and, with our recent milder winters, they can be dug up when they are needed from June through to March. There is a need for some preparation, though. The crop can be devastated by the carrot fly which lays its eggs around seedlings in two cohorts - March/April and September/October. When the larvae hatch they eat their way through the carrots leaving tell-tale brown lesions. I always cover my carrots with Enviromesh, from sowing to harvest. This is available from the Trading Shed at a remarkably low price - it should last at least ten years. Not only will it keep out carrot fly but it seems to create a microclimate in which the carrots grow on very strongly. If you buy a 3m x 2m length you should be able to grow the equivalent of a 10m row of carrots under cover.

Some people are fortunate to escape carrot fly, often obscuring the smell of the carrots by growing onions nearby. If you are growing without cover, it would be wise to grow carrot fly resistant varieties like Resistafly and Flyaway.

Two other varieties I can strongly recommend are: Yellowstone - the unusual yellow colour is a talking point and it tastes great; Eskimo - I sow this variety in late June and pick good sized carrots from October through to March, leaving them in the ground as they frost resistant and have strong stems making them easy to pull. We are stocking Eskimo seeds in the Trading Shed at a ridiculously low price - but limited stock.

Eskimo Carrots dug on 2nd February 2018



Ground preparation is very important with carrots. Try digging a V-shaped trench about 25 cm deep and backfilling this with soil from which the largest stones have been removed. Don't compact the soil and best not to add compost (rich soil can cause the carrots to fork). Then sow the carrot seeds in groups of 3 or 4 seeds every 5 cm - this should improve germination rates and make thinning easier. Rows should be 15-20 cm apart. Bear in mind that slugs and snails will eat new carrot shoots, so you will need to protect them. When the seedlings are 12-15 cm high, they need to be thinned to improve yield and prevent the carrots winding themselves round each other. Regular feeding will improve yields.

I use a similar technique when sowing parsnip seeds but don't cover the crop with mesh - I sow in groups of 5 seeds every 15 cm along rows 30 cm apart. I use fresh seed every year.

Onions

Onion seeds can be started off indoors then hardened off for planting out when they are about 12-15 cm high. They will look rather sad - falling over even when planted out - but they will recover and, in my experience, will be less likely to bolt than sets. If you are growing sets, then don't be hasty to plant them out as wet, chilly weather can cause them to bolt (set seed). Sets planted as late as mid-April still have enough time to produce decent sized onions. I noticed that Poundland is selling huge bags of sets for (yes) £1. Obviously these are unlikely to be of high quality from a reputable supplier - they may not come to much unlike those sold in our Trading Shed. Onion beds need to be regularly weeded without disturbing the roots too much (quite a challenge!). They also respond very well to feeding - you may wish to add Growmore to the soil before you plant out your seedlings or sets. Growing onions is a labour of love! Here is some more info:

<https://www.quickcrop.co.uk/learning/plant/onion>

Potatoes

Our seed potatoes have now arrived at the Trading Shed. As well as being from a certified supplier, they are excellent value for money. Growers often 'chit' the tubers by leaving them exposed to the light before planting them about 15 cm deep in soil which has been supplemented by organic material and a sprinkling of Growmore or bespoke potato fertiliser. Chicken pellet manure is best avoided as it makes the soil alkaline and this increases the risk of scab. 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. A new variety we have this year is Vivaldi - a Sainsbury's Taste the Difference potato recommended for baking. Some info on potato growing: <https://www.wyevallegardencentres.co.uk/cms/tips-and-advice/growing-projects/grow-your-own/veg-fruit-and-herbs/potatoes/>

Salad leaves

Many people are great fans of 'cut and come again' salad leaves. There is a huge range available: green, red, oriental mix, lamb's lettuce, rocket and so on. Bearing in mind the cost of supermarket products and their relatively short sell-by dates, having tasty fresh salad leaves available from April through to November can be quite a money saver. These also grow very well at home in containers. Last year I sowed some Little Gem seeds indoors in October and planted these about 12 cm apart in 60 cm long troughs (about 9 plants) in the greenhouse. They have grown well and proved resistant to the cold. I have been taking the outer leaves off the plants making a crispy salad and treating the Little Gems like 'cut and come again' leaves - I'll be interested to see how they develop. If you sow seeds outdoors, it's a good idea to cover early sowings with a cloche. For something different: Franchi Misticanza Quattro Stagioni, Fothergill Mustard Oriental Colour & Bite and Fothergill Watercress Aqua (surprisingly easy to grow in pots at home).

Peas

Many of you will know that peas can be started off in pieces of guttering, perhaps 60cm 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 10cm deep - plant two 'gutters' alongside each other sideways. You should support peas with twigs or netting. You can enjoy a crop until August if you sow successionally from March onwards. But keep a close eye on the pea pods as they develop because they can easily get too large, lose flavour/tenderness and decrease yields. Some advice:

<http://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to-grow-plants/how-to-grow-peas/>

Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



The annual Christmas get together took place on Sunday 14th December. It was very well attended and a pleasant morning was had by all. We ran a raffle for St Christopher's Hospice which raised £184.00. The winner of the Ted Goodall Cup was announced - Congratulations to Peter Eustace, Plot G11.

Thanks to all who helped to make the morning a success by donating food for the buffet and prizes for the raffle.

During the winter we always get reports of missing bins, watering cans etc. This usually happens after windy weather. We also have these items appearing on other plots and no one knows to whom they belong. If you mark these items (including the bin lid) with your plot number, in paint or waterproof ink, they can be returned to the correct plot. It is surprising how far the plastic bins will roll with the wind behind them!



Here are some 2018 dates for your diaries:

- Plot inspections: Mondays 9th April, 4th June and 8th October
- BBQ 15th July
- Open day 19th August

As you come into the site you will see that what was plot A1 has now been planted out with bulbs around the fruit trees, please refrain from parking on that area.

Regards

Viv

From Plot holder Brian McLaren

Banter is probably more of a man thing and we are all probably used to the remark from someone looking at your plot "I'm surprised you haven't had a letter" (from the plot inspectors).

I overheard a couple of more original ones recently:

A plot holder was standing on some steps repairing the frame and netting that covered his plot. A second plot holder watching him at work said admiringly "That's a nice pair of steps" The other man replied "You can borrow them afterwards" The second plot holder, looking puzzled as he didn't have frame over his plot - "Why?"

The plot holder with the steps said "Well, you'll need them to tackle the weeds on your plot - they're that high!!!"

One plot holder to another "Of course I don't know much about gardening"

His 'friend' replied "Well, that's pretty obvious from the state of your plot!!!"

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