



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wallotments.org.uk

Newsletter - June 2018

From our Chairman

It seems that each newsletter follows closely behind a major weather event, last time it was the Beast from The East and this one after the spectacular pyrotechnics and rainfall that hit Greater London!

You may well have noticed that stage one of the eco toilet project is now complete with the toilets themselves due for delivery in mid June. There will be some further landscaping and planting to come with the area becoming something of a feature for the site as a whole.

We have also taken delivery of a new ride-on mower which makes short work of the edges and parking areas.



We are quickly approaching our annual BBQ (July 15th) so I urge you to get your tickets as numbers are limited. We will also unveil our new BBQ and marquee!!

June will see the continuation of Brian Rochester's good work with 3 school visits to the site.

Sadly, I have to end with the news of the passing of John Cowan the legendary bee keeper and plot holder of many years standing. Our sympathies go to Dorothea and the family.

All the best

Barry



Notes from the Trading Shed

We had an interesting day today (Sunday 27th May). Paul grew from seed various tomato and courgette plants which we sold to plot holders and made over £35 for the Allotment Society. We sold out within the hour and are filled with enthusiasm to repeat this again next year. We'd like your feedback though. Is this a good idea? What else do you think we should treat like this?



Our seeds have sold really well this year so we will be ordering more of some lines next year, especially butternut squash, courgettes and beetroot. Our cutting back on flower seeds seems to have worked.

The most popular lines currently are canes, especially 8 foot ones and our multi-purpose compost. We will shortly receive our third pallet of 60 so far this year and I can tell you that's a lot of heavy bags to manhandle.

We have started selling Barbeque tickets (July 15th) from the shed. These will sell quickly, there only be 72 tickets to sell - Adults £7.50 and Children £5. Please bring your own drinks and glasses - the food will be plentiful and, of course, lovely!!

Does anyone know of a local honey producer from whom we could possibly get supplies? I should be able to get more Surrey honey in the autumn but we could certainly use some now. If you can help, please come and see me in the Shed.

Keith & Liz

Topical Tips from Paul

Tomatoes

We often hear from members who have problems with outdoor tomatoes grown on their plots. The main issue is late blight (*Phytophthora infestans*) which seemingly can descend almost overnight in late-July and August. You may already be growing blight resistant varieties,

See <http://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/features/fruit-veg/blight-resistant-tomato-varieties/4626.html>.



If not, try these tips:

- (i) Be vigilant. Look at your neighbours' plots. If they are growing tomatoes, and they get blight, then yours will be more at risk. You will need to inspect your tomatoes at least twice a week so that you can act quickly if blight turns up.
- (ii) Plant the tomatoes 45cm apart in soil not used for potatoes or tomatoes last year. Single or double rows if possible to maximise air-flow. Avoid blocks of plants. At the base of each plant place half a 2 litre table water bottle. When watering the plants don't wet the leaves, water into the half-bottle. Avoid getting soil on the leaves.
- (iii) Plant French dwarf marigolds between tomatoes as they deter blackfly and may have a fungicidal effect.
- (iv) Remove lower leaves as the plants grow, especially if there is any sign of blight or disease (don't compost).
- (v) If you are not an organic gardener spray with a copper mixture (see <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/pdfs/fungicides-for-home-gardeners>). About every three weeks - you spray this over the leaves on a cloudy day. If you see a black patch on the stem, make up a concentrated slurry of copper mixture and paint in on to the black patch.
- (vi) In between spraying with the copper mixture, I spray with a solution of dispersible aspirin. Here's some info: <http://www.jameswong.co.uk/tomatoes/4588088979>



This seems to work for me. Hope it does for you too. Finally on tomatoes, last year I took two stems off each plant, still picking out the subsequent side shoots (this refers to indeterminate - the most common - varieties. I got nearly double the yield. Don't forget to feed once a week (e.g. with Phostrogen).

Brassicas

These are not always the easiest crops to grow. Remember that they need to be well spaced, at least 60cm apart. The ground should preferably be treated with some lime before the plants go out. You also need to make the ground round the plants very firm. Brussels Sprouts plants can be supported by canes as they can topple over in strong winds (likewise Sweetcorn). Covering with netting is essential - otherwise pigeons will eat all but the stem - or cabbage white butterflies will lay eggs which develop into caterpillars that will devastate your developing crops. Then there are the slugs

After all this, there is the risk of club root <http://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/brassica-information/clubroot-resistant-brassicas/>

Seems like hard work but freshly cut cabbage, cauliflower and sprouts are a real delight.

PS. Swede is a brassica - adopt a similar approach.

Rhubarb leaves

I am experimenting this year with the use of rhubarb leaves as a mulch. The leaves of rhubarb can grow quite large which makes it easy to just lay them down as mulch between plants. They do a nice job of temporarily blocking weeds. They do decompose quickly and will need to be replaced. And like composting them, it is perfectly safe to use them in the garden (from learningandyearning.com). Apparently the oxalic acid in the leaves breaks down quite quickly in the decomposition process. Or you can just compost them www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/vegetables/rhubarb/can-compost-rhubarb-leaves.htm

Carrots

Hopefully your carrots have germinated and are growing well. Remember to thin them to about 4-5cm apart. Also, to be sure of avoiding carrot fly, cover with Enviromesh (available from the Trading Shed). For superb carrots which can be pulled right through the winter sow 'Eskimo' in late June. Also available from the Trading Shed.

Thank you for your support

I was amazed by the interest in the Italian tomato and courgette plants which were sold at the Shed on Sunday 27 May. I had visions of not being able to pass them on but we were sold out within half an hour. So maybe a few more next year and add some Sweetcorn perhaps. I hope that they grow well this year!

Happy Plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



The BALGF COMPETITION will be coming up soon. Last year we entered many single plots which were highly recommended and one achieved a bronze award. Our whole site won the Spencer May Cup. It would be so lovely if we could continue with such do so well again this year. Please let me know if you are happy for me to enter your plot.

BALGF COMPETITION - Key Dates

Close of Entries Midnight Sunday 1st July

Judging 10th to 17th July

Reception and Presentation of Cups Thursday 11th October

PLOT CATEGORIES:

Norman Overton Memorial Trophy

Awarded to a plot of any size cultivated by women. These will be judged on crop quality, planting schemes, harvesting and succession planning.

Peter Woods Cottage Garden Cup

Awarded to the plot holder growing a mix of flowers and vegetables which may be mixed in any area. Judged on range and vigour of plants, design and co-ordination of colour, shape and texture and the overall integration of the two elements.

Douglass Cup

Awarded to a traditional plot including vegetables, fruit and herbs. Judged on layout of plot, planting schemes, harvesting and succession planning, compost facilities, tidiness, recycling and general good husbandry

Jean Brooks Memorial Cup

Awarded to the best half plot. This will be judged on layout of plot, planting schemes, harvesting and succession planning.

Peter Tomlin Memorial Cup

Awarded to a plot of any size cultivated by one or more plot holders in their first four years of allotment gardening. Judges would like to see a tidy working plot with clear evidence of harvesting, succession planning and composting. The design need not be the traditional format.

Regards

Viv

From Plot holder Neil Munro

Using root trainers in suburbia.

Having been brought up with a 2 acre garden in the West of Scotland and living in Bromley for the past 35 years I have made it my mission to get the most out of the tiny garden which suburbia has inflicted upon me. To this end I am always on the lookout for more efficient ways and means of increasing production and root trainers are a significant tool in my armoury.

I have been using root trainers for eight years now. Having used my original set of three units now each year during this period on a number of times each season I feel I have had very good value from them. As they are of use at a number of levels I will list the important points here.

- They allow seeds to be started off early. So I have well developed plants ready to plant out when the weather/soil is warmer.
- They pack 32 plants into the same footprint of less than a dozen 3" pots, so more shelf space in the greenhouse is made available.
- Since they hinge open, there is less chance of damage to the plants when transplanting.
- With the deeper root trainers they are especially good for plants which send roots deep down, such as sweet peas.

I often use them for a number of crops during the year. For instance, starting off with broad beans, followed with peas, then sweet corn.

The root trainers come with a clear plastic cover. More often than not, I use this as a tray to water from below!

Since they pack a large number of plants close together I can fit more plants under my LED grow lights in the house where I give them up to 11 hours of light in late Winter and when the plants are ready to go to the allotment I do not have to use a massive tray to ferry them down the road.

Finally - the technical bit. Because there is a gap between the bottom of the root trainers and the surface they stand on, the roots wither and die when they reach the bottom of the cell. This 'air pruning' is useful, because they will develop roots further up, creating a denser root ball to support the plant once set out in its final place.

The only downside I have found now is that they are starting to deteriorate after all this use, so I have now purchased a new set through the kind people at the WWAA trading shed.

Neil Munro

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