



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter - December 2018

From our Chairman

Well another year draws to a close and it proved quite a challenge to many of us given the extreme weather events we endured.

One victim to the weather was our Open Day which fell foul to a lack of produce. However, we do intend to hold an Open Day in August 2019 during National Allotment Week. It was agreed at the AGM that in future our Open Day will take place every other year but with every effort being made to make it a substantial event.

2018 has seen some major improvements around the site not least our two new Eco Loos which were part of the agreed investment programme. We will continue to invest in the site in 2019 as agreed at the recent AGM.

One area where we need to improve is volunteering around the place. My thanks go to our enthusiastic but small band of volunteers who struggle to cope with mowing and working parties throughout the year. If each member was able to commit to just one of those events each year then the burden would be lifted from the current volunteers to the benefit of the whole allotment. Not an unreasonable request I feel!

Finally our year will close with Christmas Drinks on Sunday December 16th; I look forward to seeing you there over Mulled Wine and our extraordinary raffle.

All the best

Barry



Notes from the Trading Shed



Thank you all for your custom during this year of interesting weather.

Liz and I and all the Trading Shed team wish you all a

VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

We close on December 9th and will re-open on 6th January.

SEE YOU ON 6TH JANUARY

Keith & Liz

Topical Tips from Paul

Digging, soil structure and enrichment

The weather is not very encouraging but it's worth remembering digging the soil when waterlogged or in frosty conditions does not greatly benefit the soil. Or you back for that matter! Crops will be bigger and healthier if the soil is enriched. And there are many ways to do this - here is a link <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=865> . There is a body of opinion which favours a 'no dig' approach to soil preparation. This means that the lower soil structure is not disturbed. Instead, the soil is regenerated by adding large quantities of organic material as described here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egp-PUzxA3g> . I have found a tool known as the 'garden claw' very useful indeed for aerating the top layer of soil and removing annual weeds, for example, as shown at <http://www.ebay.co.uk/bhp/garden-claw> . Whether you dig or not, try not to step on your soil so it remains aerated and not compacted. Work off scaffold boards/planks or keep the width of your bed to no more than six feet so you can reach from a path. (One exception to this, though, is when you plant out brassicas - they like the soil round them to be very firm).

Onions and shallots

It won't be long until we start off our onions whether as sets or seed. My best results have come from plants grown under the enviromesh netting sold in the Trading Shed. This prevents the allium leaf miner creating mayhem and also creates a microclimate which encourages growth. Bonus, Ailsa Craig and Marco have done well. I am most pleased though a banana shallot called Zebrune. The shallots are onion sized, keep superbly and have a lovely flavour.

Runner and French beans

I found last year to be a poor one for runner beans with a lot of blackfly about and then the dry weather. Maybe it was the variety I grew. In this respect I have heard that Firestorm, a self-pollinating and drought resistant variety, and Equator are also marketed as able to cope with drought. It also appeared to me that people who put out the beans later in the season got a much better crop. Strangely enough, I was awash with beans - not runners but French beans - from two sowings in late April (indoors) and late June (direct sown). The variety is called Ferrari and they grow fast! They are also resistant to many diseases, hold well on the plant without turning stringy and taste fabulous. I have frozen them without the need to blanch and they cook well. Most significant though was the size of the crop - I realised after a while it was more time effective just to pull up a whole plant because the beans remain completely edible even when they grow a little large. Each plant gave about 4 servings. We have just ordered ten packets of these seeds for the Trading Shed and they are offered at a price well below that in the garden centre - first come, first served.

It's always worth experimenting

In past years, about April, some of the potatoes I have stored become a bit soft and throw out side shoots. Usually I knock these off and the potatoes store a bit longer. This year I found I had half a dozen Cara tubers left which you could say were chitted - the shoots were as much as one foot long! Instead of throwing them away I planted them in a trench as usual, just to see what would happen. The potatoes grew and produced a mass of foliage requiring a decent watering in the dry weather. I was concerned about the water just running off the mounds so decided to insert 2 litre water bottles (bottoms cut off) into the mounds between the plants. I watered straight into the bottles and the water rapidly disappeared. The plants carried on growing strongly and flowered twice. But would there be any tubers? When I dug them up, they potatoes were very large, especially in comparison to those which did not get this treatment. I'm not sure if it was the extreme chitting or the watering but I'll certainly be adopting this approach next year.

Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



Thank you to the 41 members that came and supported the committee at the WWAA AGM. Also a very large thank you to the Bowls Club for, yet again, letting us hold the meeting in their building.

The dates for next year's working parties and Open Day will be sent out early in the New Year.

On a completely different note, I came across a remedy for mare's tail in a very old (10 years) *Amateur Gardening* magazine that I discovered in my loft. Spray the mare's tail with vinegar first as this destroys the waxy barrier on the outside of the weed and follow up with a weed killer such as Round Up or a lawn weed killer. The vinegar enables the weed killer to get into the stem and be carried to the root system. It may be worth a try.

Looking forward to seeing you at the Christmas drinks on Sunday.

Regards

Viv

