



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter – March 2019

From our Chairman

Great to see the site so busy in February as the unseasonably warm weather provides the perfect opportunity to get things in order. The debate seems to be plant or don't plant bearing in mind what happened this time last year.

We've recently had several tons of ready-mix concrete delivered to repair the road by the Eco toilets and we can now press ahead and finish the transformation of that area.

Our greenhouse should be installed in the next couple of weeks with the fruits of that work available for sale in the Trading Shed later in the year.

Finally, Congratulations to Lyn and Peter Eustace on winning the Ted Goodall Cup. This is their second win having won the cup for their first plot in 2017.

Cheers

Barry



Notes from the Trading Shed

*Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king,
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:
Cuckoo, jug jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo*
Thomas Nashe

Well, the weather is really spring-like as I write this, over 18C outside although the morning was cold and frosty; a great incentive to begin working on the plot in earnest. Those weeds just love the heat and seem impervious to the cold.



We have almost sold out of seed potatoes and I wish we'd ordered a few more. If you have missed out, please remember to pre-order your requirements in October/November. We always have a choice and are really well-priced compared to garden centres and catalogues. We still have some orders awaiting collection.

Our range of vegetable seeds is selling well too. We sell "Country Value" for 80p a packet and "Johnson's Seed" at a discount of 40%. Do come and have a look at our range. We also have spring planting onion sets and shallots on sale at good prices. As well as seeds, we have a range of composts and seed trays plus canes and stakes.

Did you know that this is the last year when you'll be able to buy slug pellets containing Metaldehyde? We will not be ordering anymore and plan to sell out of the stocks we have. We will have organic alternatives on sale. Metaldehyde is considered to be a risk to birds and mammals and a threat to water supplies when used in agriculture - DEFRA.

I was reading something this week about the long term use of plastics. Again, our Government has suggested that by 2042 we could be plastic free. We have been asked about what could replace the black plastic groundcover that we currently sell and lots of us use. There are organic replacements but they will only last for a few months before disintegrating. They seem to be either paper based or corn starch based. The paper based ones seem to work for about 3 - 4 months and the cornstarch could be used over-winter before being consigned to the compost heap. Of course, one could use any old cardboard which works quite well. Do not try using old carpet though as this is full of chemicals that can be harmful.

If you are interested in this, please talk to Liz or me and we might consider stocking something. If you look up organic mulches on the Internet there is a lot of information.

Lastly, we seem to have lost a lot of Garden Members who only pay £2.00 each year to use our Trading shed and save lots of money. Could you please recommend it to your friends and families. Thanks.

Here's to a good growing season.

Keith & Liz

Topical Tips from Paul

Potatoes

Potatoes are best planted in warm, not too wet, soil to which some well-rotted compost has been added and maybe some bone meal or high phosphorus fertiliser. Don't be completely taken in by the recent hot weather. The soil is warming up but there is a very real risk of frost so watch out as your potatoes break through the soil. When the shoots appear, they need to be protected from frost usually by earthing up. Waiting a couple of weeks past the earliest planting dates may not hold up your crops. Last year I had some great results from Cara tubers which had chitted in the dark producing tentacles almost a foot long and these were planted out in late-April. I tried watering these through plastic bottles buried in the earthed-up mound between plants. This seemed to work well too. Here's an interesting read on potato growing:

<https://www.love2learnallotmenting.co.uk/how-to-grow-potatoes>

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 out the seeds, otherwise the roots will wrap round each other as they grow. For an early crop of carrots or parsnips, sow four 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. Finally, don't forget to buy your Eskimo carrot seeds for sowing at the end of June and you will have carrots right through the winter.

Parsnips

Just two comments on this: 1) Always sow new seed as stored seed loses its virility very rapidly, 2) Sow half a dozen seeds at each station keeping the plants about 15 cm apart in rows 30 cm apart. Gladiator F1 should produce a substantial and tasty crop.

Celeriac

Last year I grew celeriac for the first time having been encouraged by some outstanding specimens I saw the year before on the plot opposite the toilets! It's a relatively straightforward crop and the flavour of this root vegetable is delicious whether in soups or mashed with plenty of butter. It's a very healthy vegetable (before the butter is added!) heavy cropping too and a 1 metre square will produce ample produce. Here's some info:

<https://www.nutrition-and-you.com/celeriac.html>

Onions and shallots

If you are going to grow onions, then make sure you cover your crops with insect mesh (available from our shop) if you want to be surer of a good yield. This will 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, see photo, they 'mine' through the leaves increasing the risk of disease. The pest can destroy the crop and a good yield is unlikely without mesh protection. As a variation, you might want to try Zebrune banana shallots. These are nearly as big as onions, have a superb flavour and keep extremely well.



Damping off - brassicas

Quite often you hear people expressing disappointment that the brassica seedlings which they sowed at home started off so well and then just keeled over. This is probably due to dampening off - some info: <https://www.allotment-garden.org/gardening-information/start-seeds-indoors/>

We are encouraged to keep our propagators covered to keep moisture in but I'm not sure this a great idea. Also, I wonder how well brassicas appreciate being potted on. I have found it best to sow a couple of seeds every 5cm or so in a deep seed tray, then added additional compost so that the plants are about 15 cm tall before I harden them off and plant out. You might also want to sow brassica seeds outside in seed bed of fine soil and cover with a cloche. Here's some info on brassicas from what looks like a pretty handy site: <https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/brassica-information/>

French dwarf marigolds and Irish Eyes!

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. We are hoping to be able to sell some marigold plants this year from our newly acquired greenhouse.

If you like cut flowers, have a go at Irish Eyes dwarf sunflowers. Beautiful and prolific.

Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



As Keith has mentioned, the restrictions on the use of metaldehyde will come into force in Spring 2020 and below is the Press Release about this.

On a merrier note, while we think of ingenious ways to beat the slug population in the future, we hope a wine tasting event we are planning in June or July will take our minds off the problem for a while. Update to follow.

Regards

Viv

Press release

Restrictions on the use of metaldehyde to protect wildlife

Ban on the outdoor use of metaldehyde introduced to protect wildlife

Published 19 December 2018

From:

[Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#), [Health and Safety Executive](#), and [The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP](#)



Field

A ban on the outdoor use of metaldehyde, a pesticide used to control slugs in a range of crops and in gardens, is to be introduced across Great Britain from Spring 2020, the Environment Secretary announced today (19 December).

The decision to prohibit the use of metaldehyde, except in permanent greenhouses, follows advice from the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that metaldehyde poses an unacceptable risk to birds and mammals.

Slugs can cause significant damage to plants and crops, particularly potatoes, cereals and oil seed rape. However, there are other ways to mitigate their impact through soil preparation. For example, sowing the seed deeper into the soil may prevent the slugs from reaching them. There are also alternative pesticides containing ferric phosphate which provide effective control of slugs and snails without carrying the same risks to wildlife.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

I recognise that significant effort has been put into encouraging growers and gardeners to use this pesticide responsibly by the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group. However, the advice is clear that the risks to wildlife are simply too great – and we must all play our part in helping to protect the environment.

I encourage companies and growers to look at the alternatives, such as ferric phosphate, which is authorised and does not carry similar risks.

The outdoor use of metaldehyde will be phased out over 18 months to give growers time to adjust to other methods of slug control. It will be legal to sell metaldehyde products for outdoor use for the next six months, with use of the products then allowed for a further 12 months.

The new restrictions on metaldehyde will also reduce the possibility of the pesticide contaminating drinking water sources. Although this was not a factor in the advice from ECP and HSE, the restrictions will help water companies continue to meet our robust drinking water standards.

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