



WEST WICKHAM ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter – June 2019

From our Chairman

A busy few months has seen the area around the eco-loos completely transformed and now featuring a wildlife pond complete with newts and tadpoles, a sensory area with lavender planting and further extensive planting across the area. We will shortly be moving a large bench into the newly created seating area - a great addition to the site.

The greenhouse is now installed and our plot holders are already benefitting from the plants it's producing - more about that from Keith and Paul. Also a great addition to the site.

We have recently undertaken an extensive bio diversity audit and that will be available to read in full on our website.



Great to see the mowing team doing their thing and together with some very enthusiastic new plot holders the site is looking in terrific shape.

Cheers

Barry



Notes from the Trading Shed

Summer is now here finally and the site is looking good and productive.

Did you find any plants to buy on a Sunday recently? We have had a lot of success with a good range of plants raised by Paul and plenty raised and given to us by plot holders.

Many thanks to all and especial thanks to Ron and Dave who excavated loads of heavy soil and then rebuilt a greenhouse that was donated to the site.

We are interested to know what you feel about this new venture and what plants you would be interested in seeing and having available in the future.

There is also a need for people to step forward and perhaps help by checking on whether the plants in the greenhouse need watering. Any offers ?

It seems that tomato plants have been the most popular along with strips of lettuce and tagetes.

There will be more plants to come in the next few weeks, do come and have a look.

I have been asked about peat-free compost. Some of you will remember that the last time we tried this a few years ago we ended up having to reduce it to clear. Is it time now to reconsider? Do let us have your thoughts.

The use of plastics is a constant in the press and you may have seen the move by Malaysia to send back many tons of plastic back to the UK and to other countries. The message is simple, use less. This is a possible problem for us as all our composts come in plastic sacks which we do give away for re-use.

In our last newsletter, we mentioned trying to use ground cover that wasn't plastic and asked for your views. Sadly, it appears that you don't have any views as no-one has come and spoken to us.

If we invested in a ground cover that was compostable, would any of you use it? Please tell us.

Paper based cover only lasts a matter of a few months but the maize based should last for a winter season. They both can be put into the compost when they begin to disintegrate.

Don't forget we won't have any more metaldehyde based slug pellets once we sell out and we hope that the organic range will increase.

We have bought a new netting to protect crops from butterflies. It is 4m wide and very reasonably priced.

We will have the spring bulb catalogues later this summer; the feedback from our customers has been very positive and encouraging.

Keith & Liz

Topical Tips from Paul

Maximising the effectiveness of watering

We have had precious little rain in West Wickham so far this year, coming on the back of a fairly dry winter. It's likely that water supplies will be stretched this summer, so we need to make sure that we are effective in watering our crops and plants. It's important to localise the application around the plants that we want to foster. So, watering with a rose in place, though slower than without, will mimic a shower and the water will hit the target at a rate which will allow greater absorption. Without the rose, there is the possibility of runoff into areas which do not need water, and this may encourage weed growth. I've noticed the use of moats and trenches around plants which localise the impact of the watering. For some time now, I've used halved plastic water bottles to act as a reservoir for water near tomato plants and this year I have done the same thing in the mounds that earth up my potatoes. I'm hoping that the water will better reach down into the roots. It is also good practice to incorporate organic material into the soil to improve its structure and make it better at maintaining its water content. Likewise, mulches can prevent evaporation - try well-rotted down leaf mould or weed control fabric and don't bother about removing weeds after hoeing. Be careful about overwatering - one large can should provide enough water for 1 square metre of ground

Epsom Salts. If leaves start to develop yellow tips/patches, you might find an application of Epsom salts helps. Available from the Trading Hut at a very reasonable price.

Tomatoes and feeding established plants

One advantage of this lovely weather is that we should get great crop of tomatoes. Some tips to maximise your yield: (i) plant marigolds between tomatoes as they deter blackfly and may have a fungicidal effect, (ii) remove lower leaves as the plants grow, especially if there is any sign of blight (don't compost), (iii) water at the roots, trying not to splash soil on lower leaves and (iv) if you are not an organic gardener spray with a copper based fertiliser available from the Trading Shed. I also sprayed my tomatoes with aspirin! See: <http://www.jameswong.co.uk/tomatoes/4588088979>

Some time ago I visited a tomato grower in Almeria where they were being produced in huge climate-controlled polytunnels. I found plants growing up to 4 metres high with numerous trusses of fruit. A closer inspection showed that the grower had four stems off each plant. So, I always support two stems for each cherry tomato plant and four stems for the bush tomato plants. Remember to feed your tomato plants once per week once the first truss has formed. There are organic feeds around, for example seaweed concentrate. Phostrogen and Miracle Gro are very effective - the former contains magnesium and no boron, the latter boron but no magnesium. Magnesium is needed to make chlorophyll and photosynthesis - a deficiency will cause leaves to turn yellow, maybe red, purple or orange, before dying. Boron deficiency will inhibit the development of a plants' structural integrity - it can affect brassicas in particular - cabbages, Brussels Sprouts, cauliflower broccoli, swedes and turnips.

Planting distances

If you plant out your crops too closely, there is the possibility of lower yields as the plants fight each other for nutrients and physically block each other's growth. Add to this the reduced airflow causing potential diseases means that it is best to stick to the recommended growing distances. If you need to thin seedlings do this as soon as practical so that the seedlings do not get 'leggy'. You can compact the soil round the remaining seedlings if necessary (particularly important with brassicas). I always water well after thinning or transplanting. When you thin out your carrots, do so in the evening when the carrot flies are not around (and it's best to use insect mesh to protect carrots).

This is a very useful website, not just on planting distances but for much, much more!

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/vegetables/vgen/plant-spacing-chart.htm>

Eskimo carrots

I know many of you have tried these. Sow the seed in the ground in late June and you will have a superb crop of tasty carrots to take you through the winter. They are frost resistant and have strong stems so they can be pulled even when the ground is hard. If you can't find Eskimo seeds or want a cheaper product, try Autumn King - I'm not sure if these will taste as good as Eskimo, though.

Sweetcorn

Nothing tastes better than home grown Sweetcorn and it is one of the most trouble-free crops, Remember that you may need to stake the plants as they develop (4ft cane). If a bird or mouse starts nibbling the ends of your cobs, just cut the bottom off a two-litre plastic milk bottle, take the lid off and place it over the cob.

Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



Dates for your Diary:

Working Party Dates

Monday 17th June
Monday 21st October

Plot inspections

Monday 3rd June.
Monday 7th October

Wine Tasting Event in aid of St Christopher's Sunday 7th July

B-B-Q Sunday 14th July

Allotment Open Day Sunday 18th August

AGM 2019 Thursday 21st November

Christmas Drinks Sunday 15th December

And now for something totally different

GET TO KNOW YOUR SLUGS

There are many different types of slugs that can cause havoc on our plots eating holes in leaves, stems, flowers tubers and bulbs. Soon pesticide slug killers will be banned so perhaps this is the time to learn the difference between the 'good' and 'bad' ones.

Common Slugs



Scientific name: Various species, most common are species in the Milacidae, *Deroceras* and *Arion* spp.

Plants affected: Many ornamental plants and vegetables in gardens and greenhouses

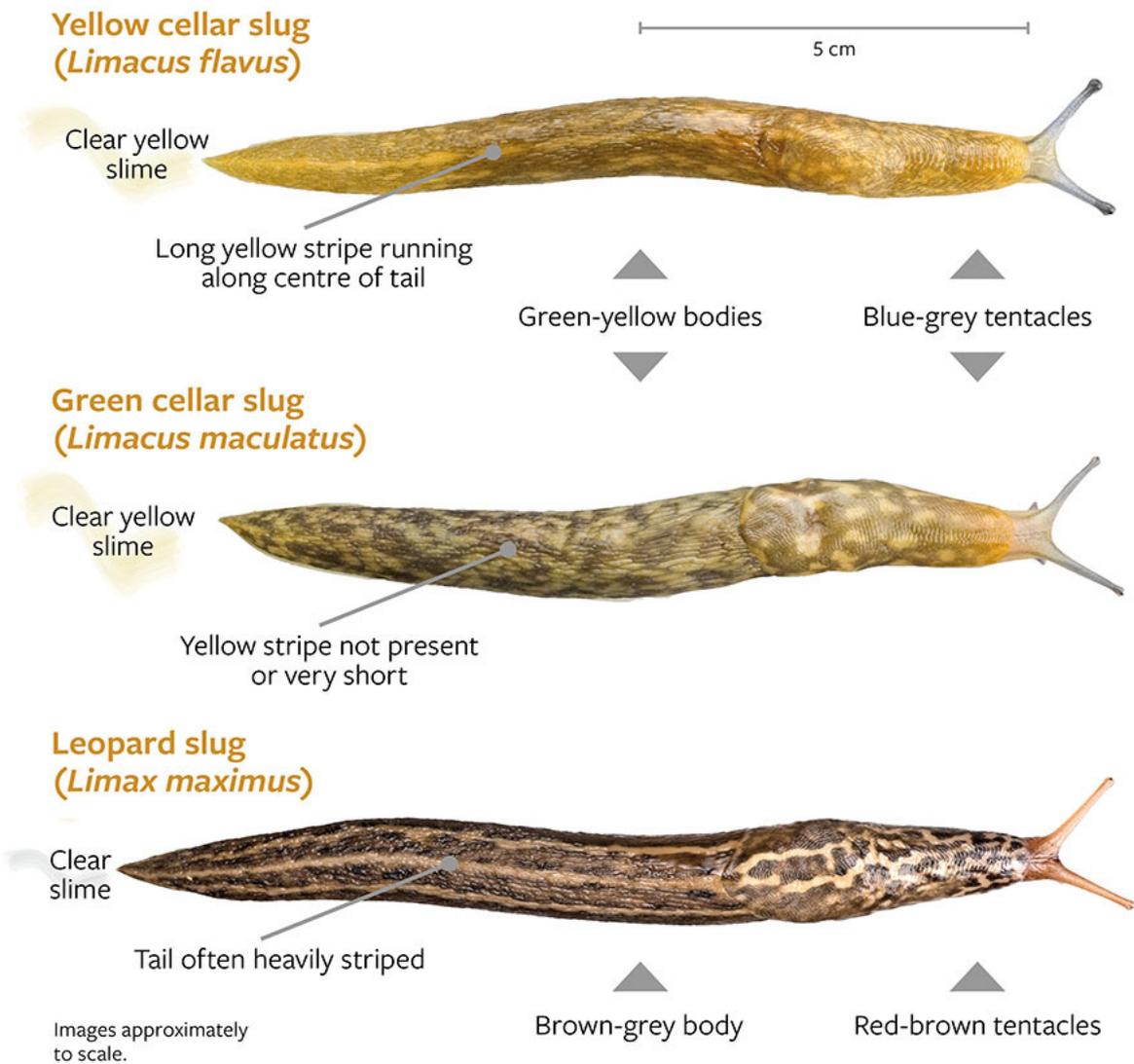
Main symptoms: Holes in leaves, stems, flowers and potato tubers; seedlings can be killed

Most active: Year round

Cellar Slugs

The Yellow Cellar Slug (*Limacus flavus*) was first recorded in the UK in 1884. In the 1970's a second similar looking species was recognised, first in Ireland then spreading quickly throughout the UK, the Green Cellar Slug (*Limacus maculatus*). Since then, records of the Yellow Slug have declined sharply.

Both these slug species are known to be detritivores, feeding on decaying plant material in gardens. They are not considered plant pests as they do not feed on live plant material.



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Find more information at www.rhs.org.uk/slugsurvey.

Regards

Viv