



# West Wickham Allotments Ltd

[www.wwallotments.org.uk](http://www.wwallotments.org.uk)

**Newsletter – June 2020**

From our Chairman

I have not been able to get to the allotments since lockdown for various reasons, but I have been watching the emails.

I was disappointed to see that some of our members were forgetting to put their money in the honesty box when taking the plants that have been left out for Sale. If you are one of those I would ask you to put your money in the box now. Better late than never.

There appears to be a crack of light at the end of the lockdown tunnel so keep up with your digging and I hope to see you soon.

**Tony**

Notes from the Trading Shed

*In lovely harmony the wood has put on its green mantle,  
And summer is on its throne, playing its string-music;  
The willow, whose harp hung silent when it was withered in  
winter,  
Now gives forth its melody - Hush! Listen!  
The world I alive.*

Thomas Telynog Evans 1840-1865



Well, as I write this it's the evening before we re-open the Trading Shed for the first time since Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March - 8 weeks ago. On that day everyone was talking about the forthcoming restrictions and people bought stuff like multi-purpose compost and bird seed in bulk. Not quite toilet rolls but . . . .

We actually sold out of both but we have recently had a delivery so we're ready to trade, albeit in a different way. Thanks, by the way to the guys that helped with the delivery, all socially distant and gloved etc.

We still have stocks of some seed packets (better late than never maybe) and other essentials like tomato feed.

For the time being we ask you to bear with us; we will not let you into the Shed itself but will serve you at the entrance and we will then fetch your requests. It will be strange but I'm sure we will work it out. We are hoping that as restrictions are lifted, we can then revert to our usual operation but do ask for your patience and good humour in the meantime.

On the plus side of all this, our site has never looked so good. We have some cracking looking plots and lots of crops coming on well despite the recent frosts.

*Trading shed news extra    Trading shed news extra    Trading shed news extra*

We opened again after 7 weeks of closure last Sunday (24<sup>th</sup> May). We were as busy as expected and would like to say 'thank you' to those who came to us for being so patient and for queuing in a "Socially distancing" way. Thanks too are due to Viv, Alex and Jeanne who helped with directions etc.

We took a record amount of money, well over £700 -this in 2 hours is quite something.

We had to limit sales of multi-purpose compost to one per customer as there is a shortage nationally. We have ordered more compost but do not know when it will be available again. We will probably sell out this coming Sunday.

## **Keith**

### Topical Tips from Paul

#### **Tomatoes**

Few crops taste so good as tomatoes eaten straight off the plant. So versatile too, as a staple ingredient in many sauces, soups and stews. Tomatoes freeze well and retain their fresh flavour. There are numerous varieties to choose from - heirloom, F1 hybrid, cherry, plum, beefsteak, red, yellow, brown and green . . . .

Generally speaking, tomato growing is quite straightforward but here are a few tips.

- Make sure that you know whether the variety you are growing is determinate (bush, often no support needed, allow sideshoots to grow) or indeterminate (cordon, grow up canes, pinch out the side shoots)
- As with other veg plants, overcrowding will decrease crop yields and increase the chance of fungal disease e.g. late blight. You can maximize airflow by planting in rows not in blocks. Plants need to be 45 cm apart. Try 'planting' a plastic pot next to the tomato so that you can water into this to ensure water reaches the roots.
- If you take a second stem off a cherry tomato plant and support with a cane, you will substantially increase your crop.
- Planting marigolds among the tomato plants seems to boost yield and ward off aphids and fungal disease.
- Remove lower leaves as the plants grow.
- The copper trace mixture sold in the Shop is highly effective in preventing late blight. *Spray the leaves every three weeks on a cloudy day. If you see a black patch on the stem, make up concentrated slurry of copper mixture and paint in on to the black patch.*

- *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>*
- [If your plant is a bit 'leggy', bury the stem leaving just the top frond and two other leaves above the ground. The plant will put out roots from the buried 'branches' and it will be stronger for it.](#)
- Don't over water - keeping the plants thirsty will improve flavour (though yields may be slightly lower).

We are just finishing off the tomatoes which were skinned and froze last year. The flavour these add to cooked dishes is amazing, even in comparison with the best tinned tomatoes.

### **Carrots**

With luck, your carrots have germinated and are growing well. Remember you need to thin them to about 4-5cm apart or they may start to grow in spirals around each other. Straight after thinning, I apply a water/garlic mix in between rows to ward off the carrot fly. If you do not take steps to ward off this pest, your crop can be ruined. I cover with enviromesh (available from the Trading Shed) and have never had a problem, plus this creates a micro-climate in which the carrots seem to develop extremely rapidly. For superb carrots which can be pulled right through the winter sow 'Eskimo' in late June. Also available from the Trading Shed.

Here are some tips on avoiding carrot fly.

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/10-ways-to-avoid-carrot-root-fly/>

### **Bamboo canes can be dangerous**

I bumped into Ron the other day (social distance style) and he was sporting a big white bandage on his finger. He said that he had been pushing a bamboo cane into the ground and it had shattered with the jagged sections going into his hand.

Although it was well washed, fragments of the cane remained necessitating visits to Princess Royal and St Thomas' Hospitals. All is well now.

I mused on how Ron does jobs around our site at lightning pace. Maybe he should slow down, wear gloves when handling the canes, I thought? Maybe carry out a risk assessment!! But we have all had near misses.

Then about ten days ago, I caught my foot on one of the short canes I use to mark out seed rows, tripped and ended up in the onion bed. Fortunately, the onions were OK but I had a serious graze and bruising on my leg because of landing on some bricks. The leg's just healing now, thankfully. So ..... I'd say take care when you use bamboo canes!



### **Sweetcorn**

Not much tastes better than home grown sweetcorn and what an easy crop to grow, assuming you get the seeds to germinate. It is not too late to sow some seeds for a late summer crop - try soaking this may improve germination rates - or just sow extra seed. Plant them out in blocks, 45cm apart, in a little dip in the ground so that water gets right to the roots. I have always staked the plants with 120cm canes (carefully!) - last year I didn't and arrived one day to see that the last few plants had been flattened and every sweetcorn had been eaten - apparently, badgers had been round for a meal. So, staking the plants prevents wind damage and will irritate the badgers!

### **Green Manure**

As your beds get freed up, you may wish to consider sowing green manure which will improve the texture of the soil and increase the nutrient content. Various varieties are available - I use Phacelia Tanacetifolia which we sell in the Shop. It grows very rapidly and its easy to incorporate into the soil. This year I cut down the plants and left these on the ground for six weeks or so before digging them in - I was amazed at how this reduced the number of annual weeds coming through. It will over winter as well. The flowers are very pretty but you should not let them seed if you are using the crop for green manure. Here's some info on Green manures <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=373>

### **Peppers**

Don't leave a single pepper to get larger and larger on your plant as this will suppress the ripening of subsequent fruit. Keep picking regularly.

### **New Potatoes for Christmas**

Ever thought of digging up your own new potatoes during the festive season. Here's how you can: <https://www.growveg.co.uk/guides/grow-potatoes-for-a-christmas-crop/>

### **Fruit bushes**

Time to make sure you fruit bushes and trees and protected from birds or you could lose a lot of your crop. Also, you may need to support over-laden branches. Our shop sells a wide variety of netting which you will not find at a better price in garden centres.

### **Strawberry runners**

Try propagating your own strawberry plants and save money. Here's how:

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/how-to-propagate-strawberries-from-runners/>

### **What to sow now?**

Carrots, cabbages, kohlrabi, beetroot, sprouting broccoli, radishes, lettuces, French beans, pak choi, pumpkin.

Happy plotting!

**Paul**

From the Secretary's desk



I have to let you know that the site toilets are closed on the instruction of the National Allotment Association. I will let everyone know as soon as things change. Sorry for the inconvenience . . . . .!

I thought that this poem was very apt at the present time.

### **My Allotment Narnia**

Through the gate and into another world  
Leaving my cares on the outside  
Breathing in the air of my sanctuary  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

Hands deep in the soil  
The rich smell filling my mind  
Feeling the cold earth between my fingers  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

Talking to the chickens  
Stroking their soft feathers  
Listening to their curious chirps  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

Gently planting new crops  
Watering them in to the ground  
Whispering soft words of encouragement  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

Digging over a plot of land  
Pulling out weeds to start a clean slate  
Leaning on my spade for a rest  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

Drinking homemade wine around a campfire  
A warm glow spreading across my cheeks  
Listening to songs in the night  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

My joy, my deep breath My allotment,  
my other world  
A place that waits for me no matter what happens  
That's where you'll find me,  
When life feels hard to bear

Fran Slimon 2014

Interesting emails from Brian Maclaren . . . . .

This could be the news that all the follicly challenged want and who are also plagued with horse tail on their plots.

Rub it on their pates!

Seems it is good for nails too, so if weeding bare handed there's a double benefit !!



This amazing insect about 3cm long emerged from where I was digging on my plot - it flexed its wings and flew off.

Stag beetle?

**Re Memories of the Site - Brian Maclaren sent me the following some time ago but I have not had space in the Newsletters to include it before but it did make me smile. This has been the Brian Maclaren Newsletter! - Ed.**

It's the men I remember when I first joined. John Parfitt was the Trading Secretary and the mainstay of the site. His wife died when he was about 50 and from then on he devoted all of his time to improving the site and in retirement was there every day as was Ted Goodall. John Parfitt constructed the old loos that were flushed by a Heath Robinson device via a stirrup pump. After he died attempts were made to find where the flushed water went but were unsuccessful . . .

A real tit-bit that demonstrates how peoples' contributions are soon forgotten as they get old was about John Troke. He, again, was an influential figure with a plot for many, many years. His ability to keep his plot to the required standard as he aged meant he was given his marching orders after a plot inspection. A group of us petitioned for him to be reinstated on the grounds that if it hadn't been for his efforts years ago the Council would have closed the site. He was soon back among his weeds.

Ted was similarly treated as he became ill in his late 70's. Two committee members took it upon themselves to strim his plot. One was overheard to say "The trouble with these old farts is they don't know when to give up". Undeterred Ted just carried on.

*(Note from Brian - This all predates any existing committee members. I think we have a much more sensible and sensitive team now.)*

Working in the shop on Sundays was a real health hazard when Harry, an old Yorkshire man, made the tea or coffee. I don't think the cups were ever washed properly as they were lined with the sediment of years so it didn't matter whether you had tea or coffee - it tasted just the same. It was in the days when women were in short supply on the site and it was only when Marion Sanderson and other ladies took more interest that hygiene improved.

The accounts in the shop were run by a very diligent Alan Howard, a long serving Treasurer.

A penny short was real drama - he always said that in his banking days no-one went home until it was found.

I suppose there are many newcomers who have no knowledge of others like Brian Rochester who took over from John Parfitt in maintaining the site. He and Alan Green did a great job for ten or more years. I used to joke that he had shares in some corrugated iron firm as he used so much of it. Also fond memories of Bill Stenlake who was Trading Secretary after John.