



TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

16th Newsletter - Spring (April) 08

Well, Spring is here but with the Easter weather & last weekend's snow, I'm not quite sure! For me, this time of year always seems to be a panic – should I sow, should I wait? Do I put my potatoes in or leave them a while longer in the tray? I've sown some pea & sweetcorn seeds in trays but already they're getting leggy – although it's too cold to plant out, they might have to take their chance & I'll plan for another sowing a little later.

According to Monty Don, (sorry, he's probably going to get quoted quite a lot as the months go by) late is always better than early as the vegetables will generally catch up. (His article said *'The soil temperature needs to be a constant 5 or 6°C for hardy crops, which is the same temperature that lawn grass needs to grow. Meanwhile, cover the ground with cloches or lay out black plastic for about 2 weeks & keep sowings covered with cloches once germination occurs'*)

Once we get into May there is always too much to do and not enough hours to fit it all in – only one thing is sure, the weeds grow much quicker! Thank heaven the clocks moved forward last month and we're already benefiting from the longer, lighter evenings ☺

Traditionally early potatoes are planted on Good Friday – however, it was way too early and cold this year - with the interim snow, mine are still chitting slowly in the garden shed. I'm waiting for the weather to warm up and hope they don't spurt too fast!

Recently I heard on the radio that the old saying 'ne'er plant out 'til May is out' apparently refers not to the actual month but to the May tree blossom. Many local gardeners have told me they've always left planting out the majority of vegetables until after the last May Bank Holiday with minimum risk of frost – although in my short spell of having an allotment, I've been caught out in June!

UPCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

ASTON CLINTON SPRING SHOW

Saturday 12th April – starting @ 2pm in the Twitchell Lane School premises : Admission £1.

COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING – 14th April, 8pm @ Victoria Hall

Earlier than last year – I expect the winner & runners up of the 'Best Kept Allotment 2008' award have been notified – but we don't know the results so go along on Monday or we will announce them in the next newsletter.

Judging for the 'Most Improved Allotment' award will continue to be made by Council officials.

TRING IN TRANSITION

This is a recently launched 'green' initiative headed, I believe, by Cllr John Allen and his wife, Veronica. The stated objective is *'We aim to encourage and enable our community to make the transition away from dependence on non-renewable energy to a safe and sustainable future'*.

For those interested, please visit the web site www.tringintransition.org.uk. The group plan to hold a series of films on sustainability – the first having been held on 7th & 9th April & you may have seen the announcements on the notice boards. The group also has a number of films to borrow, free of charge.

TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

Apologies the March social event did not take off – it was a good idea but with such short notice, we were unable to find a suitable and affordable venue, so the committee decided to focus instead on June.

SATURDAY 7 JUNE – CHURCH SQUARE, TRING

As advertised in the winter issue, this will be our first chance to increase our funds. The following will be more than welcome: Plants/seedlings/plugs of all types (vegetables/ flowers (annuals/perennials)/ herbs/ shrubs/ bulbs & house plants etc. It may be a bit too early for crops but if you have a glut of anything and can spare some, they would be much appreciated. We are also hoping to sell any cut flowers; and garden miscellanea if received.

Members of the committee are willing to collect any donations beforehand – this can be done any time during the day on 6th June or evenings between 6-8pm from 3rd to 5th June. Please leave a message for me on 07984 198523 with your name, time & date if you would like a donation collected.

Donations can also be made on the day from 08.30 onward in Church Square. Please label all plants with the name but don't worry about pricing – our expert and chief Sales Manager, Mary Lynn will take care of that task 😊.

I'm slowly building up the recipes in the Allotment Recipe Book and plan to try &

get a number printed for sale in June. If anyone has any special tried & tested recipes of their own (the focus is using what can be grown) please do pass them on.

If you are able to help on the stall during the morning, do let one of us know – the more hands the merrier and it makes planning/setting & clearing up easier!

OPEN DAY – NATIONAL ALLOTMENTS WEEK: 11-15TH AUGUST 08

NSALG have announced the above – Tring Allotments will hold our Open Day on Sunday 10th August from 1-4pm. Our colleagues @ Sunnyside Allotments in Berkhamsted will be holding their Open Day on Sunday 17th August.

We are hoping that, once more, Claire White will have her bee tent on site – this was extremely popular last year. The Association will run produce/tea tables and try to organise numerous activities targeted at the younger generation.

More details in the Summer Issue – meanwhile, the committee would welcome help on the day from anyone who is willing & able – just contact one of us if you are interested

PHOTOGRAPH COMPETITION 2008

Entry form and guidelines are now posted on our web site and a copy is also included with this issue. We have received our first entries and sincerely hope many others will take part. Entry is free and online voting should be available soon – please check out the web site for updates www.tringallotments.org.uk **Remember - cut off date is 31st August 2008.**

Also check the web site to check on things you can be doing now on your plot.

As a complete beginner myself, I don't feel comfortable or qualified to give growing advice and tips are abundant in the many magazines

& books. In this issue, I wanted to do something different and decided to pass on a few garden related items I've read about since the last issue and which might be of interest:

HISTORY OF RHUBARB

The name is a corruption of Rheum rhabarbarum which roughly means 'a rheum from the barbarians'. In fact, as a plant rhubarb is much older than that & was first recorded in China in 2700BC & for centuries was imported for medicinal use as a purgative: although in a *small* dose, the powdered roots could be used to stimulate appetite and cure dysentery

No mention of rhubarb being eaten for pleasure until 1778 in France & with access to cheap sugar from the West Indies, it soon made a palatable dish in Britain. Forcing happened by mistake when in 1817, rhubarb crowns in a Chelsea Physic Garden were covered over after a ditch was cleared. Later, Mrs Beeton's 'Book of Household Management' promoted the many recipes & the rest is history, as they say ☺

Rhubarb dos & don'ts.

Don't cut stalks – instead grip each stalk low down near its base, twist & pull so they tear off. Cutting lets in crown rot

Always plant twice as many crowns as you need because you should never take more than half the stalks on any one plant. The remaining half will develop full-sized leaves and feed the roots for next year's crops. (Although on my plot I found even when I removed all the stalks, when I covered all crowns with a delivery of manure, they grow at a formidable rate!)

The oxalic acid in rhubarb leaves is a safe control agent for aphids, particularly on roses. Cut 1lb(460g) rhubarb leaves, place in an old saucepan with 2pts (1.1litres) water & boil for half an hour, topping up as necessary. When cool, add 1 dspn soap flakes, dissolved in ½ pint (275ml) of

warm water, stir thorough & use as a diluted spray.

SOME SUPER FOODS FOR THE BRAIN

Green leafy vegetables (such as spinach, kale, lettuce & spring greens) – eating three or more portions a day has been shown to slow mental decline by up to 40% (*I think I may need to try this!*)

Strawberries – are rich in fisetin, a flavonoid shown to improve memory. Also help excrete uric acid from the body – this acid contributes to the pain of arthritis & gout

The antioxidant properties of quercetin found in apples & onions is thought to help stave off Alzheimer's by protecting the brain's cell membranes

Apples also stimulate bowel activity & contain the mineral boron which helps prevent calcium loss & protects bones.

Blackberries are rich in vitamin E which aids circulation.

Blackcurrants: A rich source of gamma linolic acid and contain loads of vitamin C. If you suffer from PMS, eat loads of blackcurrants or take blackcurrant oil (available from Holland & Barrett)

Pectin: found especially in many berry fruits - lowers cholesterol.

Pumpkin seeds – a good source of amino acid tyrosine, vital for concentration, alertness & motivation

Cruciferous vegetables – broccoli cauliflower & sprouts are some of the top vegetables for reducing the risk of stroke

Athlete's foot: garlic has strong anti-fungal properties. Apply crushed garlic to the clean, dry foot before going to bed (I recommend wearing cotton socks &

maybe this one is best for the single person ☺)

In the next issue, I will try and research methods & recommendations for pruning and taking cuttings.

D.I.Y.

A light-box is a simple structure that collects and projects light onto seedlings.

Start with a large cardboard box, cut off the top and front faces, and trim the sides diagonally from top rear to front bottom corners. Line the internal faces with silver foil. It is then worth placing an empty foil tray in the base to stop water leaking.

Place the light box near a window & put seedling pots in the tray.

This was an idea from the Daily Mail but in his book, Geoff Hamilton's cheaper option was to paint the inside of the box white using normal emulsion. He claims to have used these light boxes to great effect and his sons continue the practice today – the objective behind it being it saves having to continually turn trays.

SLUGS & SNAILS

At home, my pot containing Hosta plants is still looking clear of slugs and snails – although I have to admit, there have been no new shoots appearing as yet, so I hope by spreading lavender seeds on the top last year I haven't killed off the plant!

With the weathermen forecasting another damp & humid summer, I'm continuing this experiment to see if lavender can be used as an effective deterrent. I have, therefore, shred and saved all my lavender clippings this month to use on the allotment and will be buying lavender oil to use in a diluted spray – progress report (if any) in the next issue ...

Another tip for controlling slugs and snails from Chris Beardsley is to grow Artemisia

or wormwood. Harvest 200g of foliage, add 500ml of water then simmer for 30 minutes. Allow the solution to cool and then strain. Add a tsp of soap, then spray the soil or container of plants – worth a try.

CATERPILLARS, APHIDS & WHITEFLY

Again from Chris B: grow horseradish (or ask for a piece of root from your neighbour) Add a 50mm long piece of horseradish root to 2 pints of water. Add a tsp of ground cayenne pepper and a handful of scented pelargonium leaves. Boil for 30 minutes: allow to cool for an hour, then strain & spray.

WILD FLOWER AREA – DUCKMORE LANE

The first working party date was Easter Saturday and a snowy morning. As expected, no-one was mad enough to turn up so I spent just over an hour digging out all the thistles before beating a hasty retreat home for a much needed hot milky coffee ☺ As it rained more or less constantly the following week, Sat 29th was also cancelled (just as well, because it poured around 10.30!). Together with Brian & Barbara Kazer, we finally got on the site during the morning of Saturday 5th April.

We made very good headway and cleared quite a sizeable chunk of ground – I found out how difficult it is to remove a carpet of buttercups! Barbara planted out many of the plug plants she has been growing on her allotment – seed of which has all been obtained from Flowers Farms who, amongst other things, are a supplier and advisor/promoter of wild flower growing.

This week I've managed to find a supply, and deliver on site, a number of various shaped flat logs. To allow ongoing maintenance without trampling on fragile plants and closer viewing of the different species, we will be using these to create a meandering raised path.

The following still need to be completed:

- Weed the remaining area & plant out the rest of the plugs
- Lay the pathway & clear the remaining rubbish previously dumped on the site
- Build up the bank under the hedge/trees with the displaced top soil now on plot 55. This will enable us to under-plant the hedge with wild daffodil, English bluebell & primroses.

I gave out wild flower seeds at last year's AGM – if anyone who took these has successfully grown some plug plants, could they please let me know so we can collect? Barbara tells me they should really start going in now so the seed can distribute itself in situ during the summer.

Unfortunately I failed miserably with my own perennial wild flowers – although a few of the corn annuals have sprouted in the wild flower area itself. If necessary, we will try and buy a few plugs during the year to be grown on @ home and then planted out in spring 2009.

With the lighter nights I will try to fit in some of the above work during the evenings but should anyone wish to help, the following dates will be designated 'working parties'- all meeting from 10.30am & finishing by 1pm.

Saturday 19th April
Saturday 10th May
Saturday 14th June

Otherwise, if you're passing when someone is working in the area and would care to join in – please do ☺

Tring Town Council – Allotments & Environment Committee

Our thanks to the Council for the provision of a skip during the weekend commencing 14th March - I understand this was filled

very quickly. Unfortunately, someone must have been too late and, finding the skip full, dumped carpet & glass frames in the Duckmore Lane car park area.

For Health & Safety reasons I sent a request to the Clerk's office asking if this could be cleared. However, nothing had been done by last Saturday so I would recommend anyone with children should take extra care around the glass.

As previously reported, Councillors at the January joint Allotments & Environment meeting agreed not to ban fruit trees but allow dwarf rootstocks. At the meeting on 7th April I was unable to get the Minutes amended to reflect a maximum height of 2.44m (8') – this remains, therefore @ 1.8m (5'9").

The latter height is recommended when growing fruit trees as espaliers, cordons or fan trained - to anyone planting new stock, therefore, I recommend these methods. If pruned correctly, growing this way should produce good harvests but have minimum impact on shade or the amount of ground used.

I also reported at the Council meeting that I had discovered information on the ARI site which seemed to be contra to advice received from the council re planning permission in respect of the compost toilet.

Having received written confirmation from Dacorum that this is likely to be the case if the Allotments Association undertake construction work, the Committee members are now seeking clarification of the situation. This will be reviewed at the September meeting.

Meanwhile, Cllrs Berdinner & Ransley had separately visited both sites & gave positive reports. Both are planning to visit the sites together on Sunday 13th April so please do spare them some time and pass

on any suggestions you have for the allotments.

Tip from Monty Don to avoid problems with codling moth caterpillars on your apples. Use a pheromone trap in the spring to trap the moths before they lay their eggs and use corrugated cardboard tree bands in July which will attract the cocoons for over wintering, but which can then be destroyed before they pupate.

As recommended by Monty Don, I've also under-planted my apple espaliers with garlic as this is supposed to help control saw fly – we'll see ☺.

I believe I've read elsewhere that grease bands on the trunks of fruit trees should be used at this time of year but I can't remember what pest these control!

Contributions are invited for the remaining newsletters and I would remind you of the cut off dates:

Summer issue- by 25th June 2008

Autumn issue - by 19th September 08

Quotes of the month :

'Inspired by a neighbour who'd rented a plot for years, I hired an allotment 12 months ago and it's been brilliant. I've found new friends, spent time in the fresh air and there really is nothing that can compare with home-grown vegetables and salad for freshness and taste'. *Found in the 'Allotment' magazine*

'The single most important ingredient in a garden is actually love. Love of plants, love of place, love of nature, love of the process of caring for a patch of land. This cannot be faked. It is the magic ingredient and there is not a keen gardener out there who does not know exactly what I mean'
Monty Don, Daily Mail

Editor: Lynda Hobley. Please contact me with any queries via our web site.