



TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

17th Newsletter - Summer (July) 08

Having got caught out by the mid May frosts I should have taken my own advice in the last newsletter and planted later!

Every year I wish my vegetables were as prolific and grow as strong as the weeds and grasses on my plot ☺ The heavy rain over both Bank Holidays and the subsequent heat kept me away from the plot more than usual and nature is fighting back in a big way! My last foray of 8+ hours left me with back problems and a further 3 weekends out of action! I publicly apologise to my neighbours and thank them for their patience! As hiring a strimmer is expensive I think this is going to have to be an autumn investment if I'm to have a chance of keeping on top of things in future.

BEST KEPT ALLOTMENT 2008 COMPETITION WINNERS

With so many plots being cultivated, this competition is getting tougher year by year – the following winners were announced at the annual Town Council meeting held in April:

- 1st – Plot 40**
- 2nd - Plot 59
- 3rd - Plot 25
- 4th – Plot 23

Our congratulations to all winners who are an inspiration to everyone. Meanwhile, judging for the 'Most Improved Allotment' award will continue to be made by Council officials and the winner(s) announced in September.

TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

SAT 7TH JUNE

Thanks to the fabulous support of the committee, those of you who came along/helped/donated and the heroic efforts of our Super Saleswoman, Mary Lynn, I'm pleased to announce we did better than ever and raised a further **£236** towards our funds.

Ten sample copies of the allotment recipe leaflet were on sale but the public interest leaned more towards our produce. As the printing costs outweigh the sales viability, this is another idea that will probably hit the bin!

2008 NATIONAL ALLOTMENTS WEEK: (11-17TH AUGUST) : SUNDAY 10TH AUGUST – OPEN DAY @ DUCKMORE LANE FROM 1-4PM

As announced in the Spring newsletter, Tring Allotments Association will celebrate this week by holding our Open Day as above and our colleagues @ Sunnyside Allotments in Berkhamsted will be holding theirs on Sunday 17th August.

One again, Claire Waite will have her bee tent on site. This was extremely popular last year, so a good time to stock up with local honey and see how an active hive works ☺ Bees are facing increased threats to their survival from growing pollution/climate change so we need to do all we can to protect and help this invaluable insects & the allotment flora makes a great contribution ☺

The planned activities for children will include a Treasure Hunt, vegetable painting and growing ideas – committee members are working on these as I write ☺. To widen awareness of their aims and objectives, we have also offered this afternoon as an opportunity for the Tring in Transition team to set up a general information table

Due to holidays, the Committee are in need of extra hands to help man our refreshment and produce stalls. If anyone can help us set up /during 1-4pm /clear up *please* do contact one of us.

Meanwhile, we are looking for donations of excess produce, flowers and garden miscellanea. For those of you who might be interested, in June we received a donation of 1 year's gardening magazines and these will be available on the book stall ☺

ON THE DAY

We will follow the same format as 2007 and anyone who wishes to sell their excess produce from their plot to members of the public is welcome to do so.

The 'walk-round' route will once again be signposted and we would ask plot holders to try and ensure there are no hazards around their allotments. For health & safety reasons the Duckmore Lane car park will be used as the main activity area and, that Sunday, cars will not have access from 10.00-17.30. Advance Notice signs will be placed on the gate and your cooperation would be much appreciated – this is our main opportunity to promote allotments to a wider audience.

WED 1ST OCTOBER – AGM 7.30PM : RED CROSS HALL

We are still searching for a new Treasurer to take over from Linda in October. Please ask friends, colleagues & neighbours if any feel they could spare time to help in this capacity. It needn't be

too onerous & could be a small book-keeping exercise - without taking part in committee meetings/activities.

The Final Photos in our competition will be on view – your votes will count and the winners announced before the end of the evening. Once more we will be serving refreshments after completing the normal AGM business and hope to have our local NSALG rep on hand to answer any questions you may have on allotments generally or the work of the National organisation.

Please note, the later AGM means anyone requiring Kings Seeds should let me know so I can get a new catalogue to them. Orders will be collected at the AGM so please contact me ASAP if you would like to receive a copy – all orders will be submitted to Kings 9-10 October.

Anyone unable to attend the AGM but wishing to place an order should return the order forms + payment to me before **8th October.**

Buying discounted seeds via the national association's arrangements with Kings means great savings. Whilst the local garden centres often have half price offers towards the end of the season, these can still work out to be dearer, or you get less seed for your money. If you've never given Kings a try, please do so as their quality is high and the office generally despatches in good time – the Association also gains a small commission for orders submitted early.

SAT 8TH NOVEMBER – CHURCH SQUARE TRING, 9-12AM

Our final fund raising effort for 2008 – we would welcome all donations of shrubs/ excess daffodil-tulip bulbs (in *good condition please*) / vegetables/ chutneys/ jams/ cakes/ wines or other autumn produce. Help on the day would be much appreciated so please contact a committee

member if you can assist in any way – you will no doubt need to wrap up warm!

UPCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

IAIN RENNIE OPEN GARDENS 2008 SUNDAY 13TH JULY

The open garden scheme has been running since early May will end later this month. If you've not already done so, please do pick up a leaflet from the Hospice shop for details and support this wonderful organisation.

There will be six Tring gardens open from 2-6pm – including that of our own Mary Lynn. Those open on 13th are:

- 1) Sandra Moorhouse, 38 Park Road
- 2) Mary Lynn Moxon, Kozy Corner,
26B Charles St
- 3) Mary Marwood, East Lodge, Park Rd
- 4) Ken Coleman, 16 Home Farm, Park Rd
- 5) Margaret Wilson, 8 Plaiters Close
- 6) Jackie Page, Tanglewood Nursery Gardens.

PEPPER CONCERT – 13TH JULY

Berkhamsted Collegiate School: Treasurer, Linda Donaldson's son is performing in this show so asked me to publicize the event. I believe a few tickets are still available – www.peppershow.com.

ASTON CLINTON SUMMER SHOW

Saturday 16th August – starting @ 2pm in the Twitchell Lane School premises: Admission £1 and well worth a visit.

APPLE DAY – WITH MARTIN HICKS

Saturday 15th October @ Martin's plot in Cow Lane - further details in the winter newsletter and at the AGM.

JULY AND NOVEMBER : TRING IN TRANSITION

Watch the notice boards & announcements in the town – this initiative is due to have its public launch in the form of a 'Fair' in

Victoria Hall on 8th November from 10am-4pm.

Unfortunately this issue has missed the Supporter Meetings held on 1st and 3rd July @ St Martha's Church, Park Road but the second showing of their July film '*The End of Suburbia*' will be shown **17th July (8pm)** – same venue. Interested? Why not visit www.tringintransition.org.uk.

PHOTOGRAPH COMPETITION 2008

The first entries are now available to view on the web site under 'Forum' but we would like to see more! Entries to Sue & those with the most votes will be deemed winners. As above, finalists will be shown at our AGM **Cut off date is 31st August 2008.**

Do visit our web site where you will find lots of information on things you can be doing on your plot, seasonal recipes and links to many other useful gardening/allotment related sites and much more...

www.tringallotments.org.uk

For those of you who listen to Terry Walton's allotment spot on Jeremy Vine's BBC Radio Two Friday programme, there are a host of other tips and footage of his plot in the Rhonda BBC Radio 2 web site: [www.bbc.co.uk/radio2 /Jeremy Vine/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/Jeremy_Vine/) Terry is inspirational and his excitement and enthusiasm for allotments just oozes from the radio ☺

RISK AVERTION

I've recently had an email reporting a small arson attack on one of the Duckmore Lane plots. This fortunately caused no damage but was started by using old bits of uncleared wood inherited from the previous tenant.

Recently, the same person had another fire experience but this turned out to be caused by strong winds fanning a dormant & dampened bonfire of cut grass straw.

Some of the hot straw was blown into the owner's wooden pallet compost bin which was subsequently burned out – together with the garden tools stored in it. The evening this happened wasn't windy and the bonfire dampened and smothered – but the weather changed unexpectedly and the consequences could not have been foreseen.

I've been asked to warn everyone not to leave their allotment when fires are still a possible hazard and if possible, fully dampen down or extinguish to prevent a similar incident.

Continuing the 'Plant History' in spring letter:

GOOSEBERRIES

Gooseberries may not be glamorous nor have they come back into fashion like rhubarb but many people still find them delicious. Personally I've always found gooseberries to be too sour but last year I discovered the red variety and now have a small bush on my plot - they are so sweet you can eat them straight from the bush (☺).

Originating from North Africa and the Caucasus region of west Asia, their presence in England was first recorded in 1275 when Edward I's fruitier ordered some to plant at the Tower of London. When the English climate became much colder in the late Middle Ages and put paid to the country's vineyards, gooseberry juice was used as a replacement for vinegar. By the mid-16th century, gooseberries were widespread and used for wines, sauces and tarts.

Although most cottage gardens would have a gooseberry bush, there was little commercial growing until the 18th and 19th centuries because the tax levied on sugar (*without which gooseberries were regarded as too tart*) made them too expensive.

There were, however, gooseberry growing competitions and by 1815, there were more than 120 different gooseberry shows! In 1852, the winning gooseberry at a Staffordshire show weighed more than 59g (*as much as a small apple*). The gooseberry growing obsession led to breeders creating up to 2,000 varieties, most of which have now been lost. With the end of the sugar taxes in 1876, gooseberry growing increased, peaking just before World War 1. (*courtesy of Monty Don's article in Daily Mail's 'Weekend' magazine*)

Gooseberry Meringue Tart

Bake blind a 23cm/9" dessert pastry flan case, then reduce the heat to gas mark 1/140°C (130°C in a fan oven). Melt 50g/2oz butter with 125g/4oz soft brown sugar, add 500g/1lb2oz green gooseberries and cook till they burst. Cool, then spoon into flan case. Cover with meringue made by whisking 2 egg whites to soft peaks, then whisking again with 125g/4oz caster sugar and tsp cornflour. Bake on the centre shelf for 40mins until meringue is cooked & top is light brown.

POTATOES

Did you know the UN decreed 2008 as the International Year of the Potato?

Sir Joseph Banks, director of Kew Gardens in the late 18th Century declared that on **27th July 1586**, having returned from the New World, Walter Raleigh served a plate of boiled potatoes to Queen Elizabeth I. Although most certainly untrue (because potatoes originate from South America not North), it is now believed Raleigh actually served sweet potatoes which had been known in Europe since Columbus' voyage in 1492.

The original potatoes were almost black and very knobbly – the popular belief that eating would cause leprosy deterred all but the very brave and it took until the mid 18th century before the potato was

accepted as regular vegetable - it's popularity has grown ever since. According to the British Potato Council, we in the UK now consume an annual average of 94 kilos of potatoes per person

The UK is the world's 11th potato producing country but China is the biggest - a third of the world's potatoes are now harvested in China and India.

Potatoes are ranked as the world's 4th most important food crop after maize, wheat and rice. *(Like many of you, I've already enjoyed my first newly dug potatoes, cooked in mint and served in melted butter .. mmmmmmmmmmm ☺)*

SOME MORE FOOD INFORMATION

Cabbage: Decidedly unglamorous and, if you're susceptible, plays havoc with your digestion, but cabbage contains phytochemical compounds that reduce the risks of several cancers. Eating it regularly can improve the immune system, purify the blood and see off viruses. White and red cabbages contain lots of antioxidants.

However, if you have a slow metabolism, don't eat it daily because the brassica family is thyroid-suppressing and your thyroid regulates your metabolic rate. *(Jayne Clarke, Daily Mail)*

Carrots

This vegetable is packed with antioxidant beta-carotene which the body uses to make vitamin A – an essential nutrient in the body's armoury against colds & flu. Just 1 or 2 medium-sized carrots per day is all you need to help keep up your cold defences ☺

Broad Beans

Rich in fibre, B vitamins (particularly folate a natural folic acid) and a little iron, these vegetables are good for preventing heart disease and aid growth. *(this year I was very late planting but by doing so I*

seem to have avoided the invasion of black fly! (up to now that is!)

Garlic

Cold prevention & anti bacterial benefits were mentioned in the last newsletter. As raw garlic can be harsh on the stomach, another option is to leave crushed garlic for at least 10 minutes before cooking. This allows time for some equally beneficial, but heat stable garlic compounds to have formed. You can also infuse a couple of crushed cloves in olive oil and use as a tasty dressing.

PRUNING

In the Spring newsletter I promised to cover a little on this subject but there are numerous books and loads of web sites you can visit for pruning advice.

The BBC web site offers numerous garden information sections – use the following link & then go to whichever area you need to know about – this covers all types of fruit as well as garden shrubs/ trees & flowers.

www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics/techniques/pruning_prunefruittrees1.shtml

I've downloaded some of the advice & if you would like me to email/deliver a hard copy of the document, please drop me a line: l.hobley@yahoo.co.uk or phone

Capel Manor is a well known local agricultural training college and a delight to visit – the following web site can offer valuable tips.

www.videojug.com/film/how-to-prune-apple-trees-between-autumn-and-spring

Tom Cole from Capel Manor College in London shows you how to **prune** apple **trees** between late Autumn and early Spring. A great video on ...

Capel Manor is open daily, all year round and this month marks their 40th anniversary. Only 40 mins from Tring, (along the M25 & Enfield exit), I would thoroughly recommend a visit – if only to

see the layout of their long narrow Victorian garden and the fruit that can be produced using the single cordon method – it's quite inspirational if you haven't got much space ☺ However, the various gardens and show houses make this a very full day out.

Another gem down the road from Capel Manor is Crews Hill. This amalgamation of centres covers every aspect of gardening (including floristry & crafts) and is not to be missed by keen gardeners. A small warning however, a visit can end up being very expensive because, as I discovered, there are too many bargains that can't be resisted!

SLUGS & SNAILS – my ongoing Lavender experiment

This has been a mixed success. The lavender seeds definitely work once the snails/slugs make contact – they seem not to survive as the seeds dry them up.

However, this has meant my Hosta plant is far more 'lush' than previously and has grown twice the previous size – enabling snails to 'parachute' in from neighbouring plants/trees or stretch from the side of the tub & get on the leaves – **avoiding the lavender!** The result is I still have eaten leaves and during the recent periods of heavy rain, I've had to go out morning & night to remove snails that have settled around the side of the pot or dropped into the centre!

Given the lavender seeds have been on the soil since last September though, they are still working remarkably well. This year I will harvest the seed in autumn but not use as a mulch until next spring. I will also probably move to the stronger hostas disliked by snails ☺

The fresh shredded lavender foliage also worked on the allotment in protecting my initial planting of runner beans and I

suffered no slug damage. However, I lost this first batch to the May frost and the dried lavender was too light and blew away with the strong winds so I had to resort to pellets again☺.

However, with the heavy rain the pellets also failed and were eaten together with the second crop of beans! At the time of writing, my third bean planting is doing quite well but with this week's further heavy rain, I'm wondering what I will find at the weekend! Growing in a semi organic way is proving not to be an easy route!

PS: According to Monty Don, red lettuces and cabbages are less likely to be eaten by slugs than green ones – will try to remember this when ordering 2009 seeds!

CATERPILLARS, APHIDS & WHITE FLY

A tip for black & white fly (from Terry Walton's BBC's web page) is to always under-plant with marigold. Since doing this in his greenhouse, he claims never to have had problems with these insects when growing tomatoes.. (*I think because all the flies are attracted on to the marigold flowers*)

The same is said to apply to nasturtiums grown on the allotment in a different area to the brassicas – the flowers attract the white butterflies & leaves provide an alternative food for their caterpillars – thus saving your greens for another day (or the pigeons if not netted ☺)

I've been trying another natural treatment for these annoying insects by using a spray of boiled rhubarb leaves (*something I have in plentiful supply!*) mixed with a spoonful of washing powder. It seems to work but I've been using the solution diluted with water 50:50 and don't over-use because it could harm ladybirds.. *Tip found in 'The New Complete Book of Self Sufficiency' by John Seymour.*

Another of John Seymour's rhubarb remedies is to add a small cube of rhubarb when planting out cabbage seedlings – this apparently deters cabbage root fly/slugs. I've used it this year and its effectiveness is still being monitored. Currently I've had some plants attacked by slugs/snails but can't measure the cabbage root fly attacks until later. *Strangely enough, those seedlings planted amongst the separate rhubarb/chard/spinach patch are much stronger at the moment than those in my 'all brassica' area!*

WILD FLOWER AREA – DUCKMORE LANE

This area is gradually improving, despite not being able to see many of the flowers recently because of the huge growth in the weeds against the surrounding fence!

On the May working party date, with the added help of John Allen, we did a lot more weeding and managed to get some of the log path laid. Sue Pollard had donated some Oxeye daisy and miniature viola plants so these were set along the finished part of the path and around the entrance. All the mature wild flowers planted earlier by Barbara Kazer are coming on really well – the teasels especially are looking magnificent and during June the corn cockles/poppies provided a brilliant and colourful display.

A BIG 'thank you' to Ann Nobbs who, on the Friday before the June working party, gallantly strimmed all the weeds round the fence as well as much of the Duckmore Lane entrance – it made a big impact and meant, on the following rather damp morning I had time to weed out all the thistles & identifiable weeds.

The whole area is currently somewhat overwhelmed by feverfew which has grown very tall, but the delicate white daisy flowers made a great backdrop for the red corn poppies and I personally think the area is beginning to look great - butterflies are already taking advantage of

the extra nectar so we will be trying to identify & log the species seen on site.

The many nettles under the hedge have not been cut back because they are essential for caterpillar food and I'm rather reluctant to simply 'tidy' everything. Once the caterpillars have pupated & matured the nettle growth will be cut back & turned into liquid plant food & compost for the allotment.

The whole wild flower plot will be allowed to 'seed' until September when we will cut the foliage back and lay the remaining log path.

It seems everyone has had similar problems in germinating the wild flower seeds I distributed last year – I've received a single report of two successful scabious seedlings ☺ Who would have thought growing wild flowers was so difficult – obviously patience is going to be needed here, as well as continuous weeding in the area to keep the thistles, docks etc in check!

Tring Town Council – Allotments & Environment Committee Meeting: 9th June Co-optees re-appointment

Due to family commitments, both Amy & Iona stepped down this year. This means myself and Mary Lynn remain allotment cooptees for 2008/09.

Compost Toilet for Duckmore Lane

The Clerk's office confirmed we will have to apply to Dacorum for planning permission. To cover the additional costs this will involve, Councillors agreed to release money from the project 'reserve' funds.

As we can't make any application to the Lottery or elsewhere until planning permission has been granted, progress on this project is now expected to take a little longer.

Allotment Assoc Cooptee Report

Over the 2 years I have been on this committee, I've personally been extremely frustrated at having most of the Association Committee's ideas declined.

Following a robust discussion, Cllr Wil Berdinner & Colin (our Town Warden) arranged to meet me @ the Duckmore Lane site on Mon evening, 23rd June to check the allotments and discuss various future possibilities and which of our ideas may/may not be viable.

We came up with a number of ideas which I will discuss with our Committee and then put on the Agenda for the next A&E Council meeting in September.

Wil had visited the site before but seeing it in full 'growing' mode, he was very impressed and appreciated even more the hard work that goes in to keeping up an allotment together with the wide range of growing methods used and the high quality / variety of vegetables/flowers produced.

Colin made a note of plots which appeared to be no longer cultivated and reported these back to the Clerk's office for investigation. *I do not always have time to monitor this so, if you have a neighbouring plot that seems to be drifting into disuse, please drop me an email or text me on 07984 198523 with the plot number. Any of our members who are possibly struggling to keep up with their allotment because of family commitments/ illness/etc should let me know as early as possible so I can investigate the possibility of help – waiting until it's too late makes the task far more difficult.*

Rodents at Duckmore Lane

In June I saw my first rat so, until then, hadn't realised how big they can grow and was relieved it wasn't scampering on my plot as I'd have probably run away!! I've heard these pests are again being seen more regularly on allotments during the

day and are quite bold. Could I please ask that any sightings be reported to the Clerk's office (preferably in writing) so the Council can have a fairly accurate estimate of their numbers.

My recommendation to anyone bringing younger children on site to help would be to try and keep them away from overgrown plots/pathways and persuade them not to wander too far away from your own plot.

The good news is we seem to have a nesting pair of kestrels in the Aylesbury Road hedge and to watch these birds in flight is really something special (I've seen one dive to catch live food and another do a long low-level sweep of the site - fabulous!)

Hopefully the adult pair will soon be teaching their fledglings and the hawk population around our site might begin to increase.

It's illegal to use bait in such a manner that it threatens wildlife so to protect these birds, my general advice would be to avoid laying rat poison during the period March – October (at least) and seek advice from Dacorum Pest Control. If the kestrel population increases, maybe everyone could desist as the natural remedy would be preferential.

Amy says she & Mike have also seen red kites circling our area. These birds don't attack small live animals but only eat dead carcasses – another reason for caution. All we need now are few owls and (although I don't believe they breed in our neck of the woods) maybe some falcons to scare off the pigeons☺

Unfortunately the kestrels were not out to give their aerial display during Wil & Colin's visit but we did come across some gorgeous alstromeria growing on one of the top plots. At my request, Colin took a

photo and if we can figure out how to transfer this & get a copy on the web site we will do so – well done to the grower they looked fantastic ☺

Contributions are invited for the remaining Winter 08 newsletter: cut off date is:
19th September 08.

In reality, the printing & circulation costs of this quarterly newsletter are unsustainable and, if I'm honest, I'm struggling to find things to write about. This is my 5th year of trying to grow my own fruit & veg on an allotment and my lack of knowledge/experience in this field has led me to feel I'm tending to ramble and write 'superfluous nonsense' which bears little relation to allotments and growing your own!

In view of this I've decided this will be the penultimate issue and the winter copy my final contribution.

From 2009 onward, the Committee will circulate only information on items of

interest that affect the Tring allotment sites together with Association and local upcoming events/activities.

Two allotment related articles I read recently give me some hope though: (1) the author wrote he'd been working on his allotment for 15 years and this was the first time he felt he'd really *got the hang of it* ☺ and (2) another author said the first time he realised he'd become a true allotment holder was when passing a skip, he thought the contents could prove useful on his allotment – something I've done on many occasions & even asked permission to remove said contents!

I guess there are several more years of lessons (challenges!) on the allotment ahead of me ... ☺

Finally, on a recent trip to Wyevale, I picked up a book on berries which, amongst others, included recipes for sloe gin and elderberry wine. I will try & remember to print these in the final issue so you have a stock for Christmas ☺

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

www.tringallotments.org.uk