



## **TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION**

### **15<sup>th</sup> Newsletter - Winter (January) 08**

First of all a belated Happy New Year to you all – already the weather is playing havoc – I've had California poppies growing all winter and my neighbour's cherry blossom is in full bloom!

My apologies for the delay in this issue – I've been somewhat preoccupied but am now looking forward to spring & putting ideas into action. My personal 2008 New Year Resolutions for my allotment are (1) to add as much colour, in as many ways possible, on my allotment, (2) try brassicas (again!!!) and (3) see if I can finally grow parsnips – it will be a case of 3<sup>rd</sup> year lucky if I do ☺

We start the year by welcoming onboard a new committee member – Duckmore Lane allotment holder - Mike Perry of Plot 11 – at last, a male representative!! Thanks to Mike for his support of the allotments association – he is brimming with ideas.....

#### **URGENT REQUEST FOR HELP – SAT 2<sup>ND</sup> FEB – 1PM**

**Tring Task Team have to plant the remaining hedge saplings this weekend (circo 70 to heel in). I can't make it & the team will only be Brian & Barbara Kazer + Jan Thurley. If you can help, please meet the team @ Duckmore Lane Car park as above – sorry for the short notice!**

By now, all members should have received their Metcalfe discount cards – if you haven't got yours, please let me know as soon as possible so you can start making savings on any garden related purchases.

At the time of printing, all orders from Kings have been distributed and although we only made a small amount in commission – every little helps!

The NSALG have increased their fees from September 08 to £2 per member. This means only 50p from your membership fee will be paid to this organisation. I don't begrudge the NSALG fees – they've been an enormous help to me over the last year. As well as the Kings seeds availability, we also have unlimited legal advice and are able to get our Public Liability insurance cheaper. However, it does mean we will have to depend on our fund raising to support any activities and it would be nice to increase membership – your help in both these areas is invaluable and much appreciated.

#### **TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION CALENDAR**

Unfortunately due to insufficient time last year & my inability with IT systems to produce a 2008 calendar professional enough to sell, we have not made these generally available. However, we had a pretty good go - the winners of the Photo competition received free copies and committee members purchased the majority of the remaining stock. Should anyone be interested, I have 4 remaining which are priced @ £1.50.

#### **2008 EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY MARCH**

Possible social Evening: Either the Red Cross or Bulbourne Hall, 7pm. Based on numerous years experience and 2 allotments, we are hoping John Allen will

be available, with others, to answer any questions on such issues as how to get started on a new (and probably overgrown) plot, what grows well on our site, heritage seeds, organic growing, companion planting, crop rotation etc.

In addition we hope to have a seed swap table so if, like me, you've over ordered (yet again) bring along your excess seeds/sets/seedlings and swap for something you forgotten or would like to try. The intention behind the evening is to provide an early opportunity, just before the Easter planting, to get together and generally exchange views about the trials, tribulations and challenges of an allotment. Teas, coffee & cakes will be available – once details are finalised, we will notify all members and hope many of you will support this first event of the year.

#### **MAY – BEST KEPT ALLOTMENT PRIZE**

Judging for this will be taking place between now & April with the prize being presented at the Council Annual Open Evening. If you're trying to win the plots to take your cue from are last year's winner & runners up: 59, 26, 42 & 82 ☺

#### **SATURDAY 7 JUNE – CHURCH SQUARE**

Our first fund raiser for 2008! Once again we will have a plant stall on Church Square. Plug, pots or trays of vegetable seedlings, herbs, perennial/annual flowers; early excess crops if you have any; cut flowers; shrub cuttings and any garden miscellanea all welcome.

If you prefer, donations can be collected beforehand by me - any time 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> or any evening 3-5<sup>th</sup> June. Please leave a message for me on 07984 198523 with your name, time & date when you would like me to collect.

Donations on the day are also welcome from 08.30 onward – please label all plants with the plant name but don't worry about

pricing – expert Mary Lynn will take care of that task☺.

To hopefully generate more funds, we intend to also run a raffle on the day – (prize(s) to be discussed by the committee). Meanwhile, if you are able to help on the stall during the morning, please let one of us know – the more hands the merrier and it makes planning easier! More news in the next issue ....

#### **OPEN DAY – NATIONAL ALLOTMENTS WEEK: AUGUST**

This will take place around mid August but we are waiting for the final dates to be announced by NSALG - more details in the spring issue.

#### **SEPTEMBER – MOST IMPROVED ALLOTMENT PRIZE PRESENTATION**

Assuming the winner is able to be present, David Metcalfe will once again be making this presentation at the Duckmore Lane site during the latter part of September. The Council will be checking plots from now through to August before making their decision & advising the winner(s). Our committee will provide teas & cakes for all who wish to come along – further details in the summer newsletter.

#### **OCTOBER : AGM**

We're aiming for Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October – subject to the Red Cross Hall being available. As before, 7pm for prompt 7.30pm start. **I would remind everyone that Linda Donaldson is standing down in September, so the Association will need a new Treasurer. If anyone has a feeling for figures, or knows someone else who would like to take up this challenge, please contact Linda on 01442 823666 for more details of what is involved.**

#### **8<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER – STALL ON CHURCH SQUARE**

An autumn fund raiser – same as June but more emphasis on chutneys/ jams/ cakes/

home-made wine, excess vegetables etc. Depending on the earlier results, we may run a further raffle and it is hoped copies of the Association 2009 calendar and some recipe leaflets will be ready for sale. (I've a mountain to start typing up but more welcome – so far have 4 typed up !!!)

### **PHOTOGRAPH COMPETITION 2008**

Of all our suggestions, the 2007 photograph competition generated the most interest. We are keen, therefore, to hold another this year and with luck, I will be more organised to improve on the calendar quality/production so we have some to sell on our autumn stall above.

All those budding photographers get snapping. Any subject matter around the allotment sites – be it animal, insect, plants at various stages from strange angles, etc or simply the wonderful views to be had from different points – especially on the Duckmore site or around Bulbourne.

Digital photos give a better finished quality, but we were able to scan hard copy photos into a .jpeg format. Basically, the higher pixel-count the better of the photo the better (that said from a true amateur who can't yet use a digital – I keep trying to look through the lens!)

Electronic photos should be submitted to Sue Pollard via the web site and hard copy photos can be sent to me @ 12 Fields End, HP23 5ER. **Cut off date will be 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008.**

This year's voting will be in a slightly different format, as, in addition to the physical vote at our AGM, we will have online voting.

### **THINGS TO BE DOING .....**

For new allotment holders, the best thing you can plant to improve your cleared soil is potatoes. They fix nitrogen in the soil and you are digging/manuring/growing a crop at the same time so saving effort!

If you haven't already done so, buy seed **potatoes** now and start chitting early varieties (reusing old egg boxes for this before recycling onto the compost heap). Should you not want to plant masses of potatoes, Wyevale now have smaller bags available @ £1.99 & I've been told Woods in Berkhamsted also sell loose seed potatoes so you can buy however many you want of each variety.

I tried pink fir apple 2 years ago & had such a high yield I delivered a huge bag to the Hospice shop to sell on and still had plenty for myself & work colleagues. The potatoes were fabulous in salads and with mixed roast vegetables so I will be planting again this year☺.

Buy **spring garlic, onion & shallot sets**. I've read various instructions on when to plant: onions apparently need a long growing season so seed onions should be started by the end of Jan. Sets generally should be planted from March but I'm sure I've seen the end of February also quoted!

Garlic, I believe, needs the cold so should be planted Jan/Feb and comes in 2 types, **Hardnecks** (with a hard stem/core) and **Softnecks** (with a soft stem/core – I think!). Monty Don's recommended varieties are 'Sprint' and 'Sultop' for hardnecks and 'Cristo', 'Thermidrome', 'Printanor'. 'Moralux' and 'Germidour' for softnecks.

All this is most confusing for a beginner like myself – so it's probably best to ignore me regarding the planting times & follow the instructions on the pack (or ask a more experienced neighbour☺)**NB:** Due to the wet weather in 2007 I've heard the onion harvest has been decimated so these vegetables will be very expensive in 2008 – I eat a lot of red onions so will be trying both seeds & sets!

**Beetroot, broad beans and peas** can be sown under a cloche for an early harvest.

**Leeks, winter cabbage and broccoli:** Harvest the last of your winter vegetables to make space for the spring sowing.

**Herbs:** Sow seeds into pots for growing indoors. Try basil, coriander, parsley & chives..

**Tomatoes:** Sow seeds in trays or modules in a greenhouse or on a sunny window sill.

**Rhubarb:** All plots have this plant and I use mine simply to improve my compost heap. However, for those of you who like to eat it, now is the time to cover & force the head so you can pick the tender pink shoots much earlier – I'm told they taste much better.

### February/March

Start sowing, under cloches or in the greenhouse, **parsnips, summer cabbage, peas, Brussels, turnip, rocket/ salad leaves and leeks.** In my ignorance, I didn't realise there were early, medium & late varieties of leeks and last year, having unknowingly planted the 'early' variety, couldn't understand why my leeks were ready in September! This year, I've got all three so can hopefully have a constant supply, as I've taken to them in a big way.

### HINTS AND TIPS

During last year, we received many requests for more suggestions that would help on the allotment. I haven't received any suggestions from plot holders so, as with the above growing tips, those included in this issue are either what I've picked up in magazines/books or have/am in the process of trying myself. No guarantees but they might be worth a try☺

If anyone has more suggestions to print in the spring/summer issues, please do send them to either me or another committee member. If you're online, simply go to our web site, click on 'Contact us', select the relevant name, complete the mandatory queries, add your suggestions & submit.

(1) Economical way to increase your stock in the garden. **Holly, Yew, Cotoneaster, Pyracantha & Berberis:** I've read these all need a period of chilling before they will germinate effectively so collect a few handfuls of the berries (if the birds have left you any!), wash off the flesh to reveal the seed, sow in shallow pots of 50:50 compost and sand.

Cover with fine netting to prevent mice and birds stealing the seed, place in a cold part of the garden and keep moist until spring. Plant the resultant seedlings where you will. (I'm writing this paragraph & looking out at a blue sky & sun, so am not sure where that forecasted 'worst winter for years' went too!)

### (2) SLUGS AND SNAILS

With such a wet summer, 2007 was definitely **the** year for slugs & snails and everyone's crops were hit at some stage. Last September I decided to try an experiment using the harvested flower heads of my lavenders as a deterrent to snails (it has a very drying effect on human skin).

At home I have 2 pots of Hostas which are normally shredded each year by snails. I put a layer of lavender seeds over the top gravel - initial results were very good as snails and slugs disappeared instantly & have never returned.

The seeds are now sodden but still forming a thick layer - the real test will come when new shoots start appearing .... I'll report progress in the next issue. Meanwhile, I still have a jarful of seeds left for the first allotment vegetables seedlings and have scattered the cut lavender stalks around the wild flower seeds I put down to see if they also act as a general deterrent☺

### (3) Crop Rotation

This is really for newcomers & I still haven't quite got the cycle firmly fixed in my own head so intend, this year, to have a

laminated card permanently pinned to my compost bin as a reminder☺

To keep your soil healthy, and minimise common infestations, it is highly recommended that crops in similar families are not grown on the same ground every year but rotated. This allows the right levels of nutrients to be maintained and should help you increase yield.

The four main families are Potatoes & Legumes plus Brassicas Roots.

The Sequence is a 4-year cycle:

- (1) **Potatoes** followed by
- (2) **Roots** followed by
- (3) **Legumes** followed by
- (4) **Brassicas** – repeat from the top

Potatoes & Legumes need manure for good crops & both fix nitrogen in the soil. Roots & Brassicas need nitrogen & less nutrition, so you can see the immediate benefits. For a list of which vegetables fit in which group (*and you'll be surprised by some*) check any 'How to grow vegetables' book. My 'bible' is 'The Allotment Handbook' by Caroline Foley and it's available from Tring library.

If, like me again, your memory needs a little jog, it's also useful to draw a simple plan of your plot each year so you can remember which vegetables were planted where☺

#### **(4) Comfrey/Nettle 'tea'**

This one is more for late spring/early summer. If your allotment has comfrey on or, more likely nettles, don't just put the leaves on the compost heap. Soak either leaf type over a few weeks in a container of water. Once 'stewed' strain the resultant 'tea' into containers (more recycled milk bottles ☺) and use 1part 'tea' to 10 parts water as a very powerful plant food.

Need a comfrey plant – I have plenty and I'm sure your neighbours do too – just ask next time you see me on my plot & I will dig up a 'starter' plant as you don't need too many.

#### **RECYCLING**

The words 'carbon footprint' and 'green' are in practically every publication you read and on many TV/radio programmes! So, another thing I shall be exploring on my allotment this year is how to recycle as much as possible of my everyday waste (and hopefully reduce the amount I pay to Dacorum Council in tax!).

I already recycle most of my plastic bottles as pole covers/bird scarers but in January's 'Gardner's World' there was an article showing how a school had built a custom made greenhouse using recycle bottles as the walls – intriguing. I shall be experimenting on a smaller scale for incubated growing areas & report back in later issues.

I also collect used toilet rolls throughout the year and, as I have 2 cats, use the cardboard cat food boxes as the 'seed trays'. By using recycled plastic wrappers tied round the bottom/sides of each box for waterproofing, each box takes 8 toilet rolls & enables me to grow beans & pea seedlings with a longer root system.

The added bonus is virtually no root disturbance when replanting into the allotment. Last year my pea crop was much more successful using this method – although I've never yet tried the recommended use of 'guttering' to sow peas in – has anyone else? Does it work? I'd loved to know if it's successful.

Meanwhile, I'm working on another recycling prototype reusing tape from unwanted videos for bird deterrent tapes and support ties. I'll print the results in the next issue.

## THE HEMEL HEMPSTEAD CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

undertake numerous regeneration tasks. I was approached by Vicky Duxbury of Groundwork Hertfordshire to include their work @ Millhoppers Butterfly Reserve Long Marston on 6<sup>th</sup> January but unfortunately didn't get myself into gear in time. Anyone interested, the web site is [www.hhcv.fnet.co.uk/prog.htm](http://www.hhcv.fnet.co.uk/prog.htm) or we have added this link on our site – just click & go.

If you are interested in visiting Millhoppers it's adjacent to the Black Poplar Trail in Long Marston. To my shame, I only discovered College Lake last year so this is another one to go on my exploration list.

## HARLEQUIN LADYBIRDS

The two samples I sent off last year proved to be the common varieties of this invasive ladybird. (circled on the attached leaflet)

I discovered the orange species in large numbers on the feverfew in the wild flower area but have since seen many on my allotment and at home in the garden. Having discussed it with others, it seems they are very prevalent and can nip! The larvae are also highly visible - long slim black spiny insects with an orange 'belt' down the centre. As they so closely resemble the native ladybirds, I was advised by CEH not to destroy any, but to report any further species we discover – not sure how they plan to stop further invasion of the species this way!

## Wild Flower Area

I haven't checked my seeds yet but I hope those of you who volunteered to grow some are seeing results - we need to bring them on ready for planting in September.

Meanwhile, the area will need weeding and clearing once Spring gets on the way so, weather permitting, I've set aside **Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup>** and **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March**

as Work Party days. If you're interested in helping with this project, please meet at the Duckmore Lane care park area any time from 10.30am onward.

## RATS ON DUCKMORE LANE SITE

You will have all received a letter from the Council re actions to try & prevent rodents taking hold. My health recommendation was missed from the list so may I strongly recommend, until an injury is healed, anyone who has a cut/graze on their hands always wear gloves when working on the allotment and bring a bottle of water for hand-washing rather than use the tanks – especially those adjacent to Aylesbury Road.

I went online to see what plants deter rats – not many I'm afraid. However, it did say rats hate 'catmint' or 'field balm' (*Nepeta cataria*) so it might be worth planting a few near your more precious crops – if nothing else, it attracts cats, which in turn, may help to see off the rats ☺ However, I rather think sturdy wire netting is probably the best bet!

## FRUIT TREES

A small clarification to the Council's letter, which I felt was could be misinterpreted.

After our Association AGM, the Council A&E working party (*that's Allotments & Environment, not accident & emergency!*) voted 2:1 to reject the Council's request to ban fruit trees on allotments. There was a lengthy debate amongst Councillors & cooptees on 7<sup>th</sup> January and, despite some opposition by a few, the committee agreed *not* to impose a ban but to add a new rule permitting only the growing of dwarf rootstock, for which I was asked to supply the list included in the Clerk's letter.

Many allotment holders already grow fruit trees as cordons or espaliers – both methods being very successful with less

impact on space to grow vegetables or soft fruit.

### **MARCH/APRIL**

Another outcome of January's Council meeting was Cllrs James, Batchelor, Berdinner & Ransley agreed they would visit the Duckmore Lane site and chat with plot holders, as well as check the height of fruit trees.

This is a very positive step by the Council and I would encourage anyone who is on site at the time of the visit to pass on ideas or concerns you may have in respect of the allotments. The next Council meeting is 7<sup>th</sup> April in the Council Chambers, High Street.

During this same period, please keep an eye on the notice boards. To further deter rats & minimise nesting, the Council have been approached by Cllr Allen to provide a large skip over 2 weekends on Duckmore Lane, for the disposal of allotments waste material – ie old carpets, iron, covering, etc that rodents can next under *not* green waste.

If agreed, this is likely to be sited on the car park area & the council have been asked to put up notices giving the relevant dates.

As I have previously mentioned, the ideas & information in this newsletter as, in the main, from my own research or experience.

I would very much welcome more input from other plot holders and repeat the cut off dates for the remaining issues:

**Spring issue - by 23<sup>rd</sup> March 08**

**Summer issue- by 25<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

**Autumn issue- by 19<sup>th</sup> September 08**

Meanwhile, all that remains for me to do is wish you a successful start to 2008 & happy gardening on your allotment☺

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

**Chairman & Cooptee: Lynda Hobley**  
**(Kings Seed Coordinator for the interim)**  
12 Fields End  
Tring, HP23 5ER

Tel: 07984 198523  
Email: [l.hobley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:l.hobley@yahoo.co.uk)

**Treasurer: Linda Donaldson**  
29 Henry Street  
Tring, HP23 6BH

Tel: 01442 823666  
Email: [j.donaldson@tesco.net](mailto:j.donaldson@tesco.net)

**Iona Stretton**  
83 Longfield Road  
Tring, HP23 4DF

Tel: 01442 823666

**Web Master: Sue Pollard**  
51 King Street  
Tring, HP23 6BJ

Tel: 01442 828797  
Email : [missus@acidburn.gotadsl.co.uk](mailto:missus@acidburn.gotadsl.co.uk)

**Secretary: Amy Overy**  
2 Counters  
Miswell Lane  
Tring HP23 4EU

Tel: 01442 891666  
Email: [amyovery@hotmail.com](mailto:amyovery@hotmail.com)

**Mary Lynn Moxon**  
Kozy Corner  
21B Charles Street  
Tring HP23

**Tel:** 01442 826543

**Karen Fotheringham**  
10 Adams Way  
Tring HP23 5DY

Tel: 07765 404142  
Email: [karenfothers@hotmail.com](mailto:karenfothers@hotmail.com)

**Mike Perry**  
76 Mill View Road  
Tring HP23 4EW

**Email :** [The.Perrys@btinternet.com](mailto:The.Perrys@btinternet.com)