

The Bushy Times

Newsletter of the Bushy Park Allotment Association

Issue 35

March 2014

OPEN DAYS - 2014

The following dates are confirmed for this year's events:

Spring Open Day and Plant Sale:	10th May
Summer Open Day:	19th July
Autumn Festival:	6th September

Please make a note of these in your diary. We welcome your help and support to continue and build on the past success of these events.

ANNUAL RENT

The annual rent for your plot rose dramatically last year by 47%. The council did this to balance the books on the Allotment Service. We were able to make a presentation to the Council Committee that reviewed the charge for next year when it met in January. Next year's increase was agreed at the meeting and will be 5.2% to raise the standard rent to £14.20 per rod or £71 for a 5 rod plot, before any concessions are applied. It was pointed out at the meeting that this is still only 20 pence a day for a plot and when expressed in those terms it does still seem like a good deal in comparison to other public services. The councillors made the point that the service has been subsidised by the Council for many years and that subsidy could not be continued.

For your money the principal and unique benefit is the plot that you rent. You also receive:-

- free water, please use it wisely
- basic maintenance of the site, particularly water repairs, security
- The support of the Allotments Officer in dealing with issues, inspections and evictions.

There are also administrative costs for issuing the invoices and collecting the rents and the usual office overheads.

COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE

The Council issued a questionnaire with the rent invoices last year and received 54 responses from Bushy Park. Of these: -

- 74% were satisfied or very satisfied with their allotment
- 22% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 4% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

TRACK REPAIRS & A THEFT

Many of the questionnaire returns from Bushy Park mentioned the state of the track. As a result of this information the Council has agreed to pay for 10 tons of material to repair the potholes. This material has been delivered and on 26th March we have arranged for the Richmond Volunteers to come in and start filling the potholes. If you are available to help on that day, your assistance will be welcomed.

One person was seen helping themselves to the road material and taking it off site. If you see anything illegal such as this please make a note of the vehicle registration, colour and type if possible. Another tenant's corroboration of the event or a discrete photo would be great and would really help the Council to pursue the thief!

COUNCIL LIAISON

Plot inspections were undertaken jointly with the Council Allotments Officer in September. A total of 38 plots that were not considered to be adequately cultivated were inspected and as a result the Council sent letters to several tenants. Some responded positively and have worked on their plots to get them productive. Some gave up their plots and there are a number that are still being followed up.

Since the last newsletter we have assisted the Council to let 30 plots to new tenants. If you see new faces please welcome them to Bushy Park. They may need your advice and experience to get started.

If you have problems with the standpipes please report them to Pete Lewis on the Council website. His contact details are also on the gate notices.

BBQ & WOOD FIRED OVEN

We made good use of the barbeque that Henry constructed at the social event following the AGM last year. Like the community area and summer house (newly treated and tidied up), the barbeque is for all tenants use. If you wish to use these facilities please let Giuseppe know and your name will be added to the calendar in the shop.

Not content with a barbeque, a wood fired pizza/bread oven has now been constructed for community use. Henry has done the construction with Giuseppe's and other tenant's advice. On Sunday 16th February it was fired up in earnest and Giuseppe baked focaccia and bread loaves. I can confirm that they were very tasty.

Many thanks for the support and material donations from our tenants which made this project feasible.

The oven is now being lit most Sundays. You are welcome to bring along bread dough, pizzas or other dishes to bake in it. **Please note that only breads should be placed directly on the firebrick base of the oven. Meat, fruit pies etc must be in a dish and do take care as it gets very hot indeed.** People have been very generous in sharing some of the baked goods.

It is generally operating between 12 noon and 4 -5 PM, it is not a precise tool, Henry was not able to fit a timer or thermostat!



Giuseppe's focaccia



Day 1 of the oven operations.

GREEN SHOOTS IN SPRING

If you grew Cavolo Nero (the Tuscan crinkly kale), curly kale or Brussel sprouts and have not harvested them fully, you may have noticed that they are now producing flower shoots from the base of each leaf. These can be harvested just as the flower head starts to develop and are very tender and similar to broccoli.

Beetroot, chard and even chicory plants that are still in the ground from last year will also be starting to develop the flower stems and can yield tender young leaves for salads or stir fries. This is usefull food at a time when there is little else to harvest.

EARTHWORMS

Digging trenches to plant spuds revealed lots of very healthy earthworms, most of which survived my work as I was using a fork. I have been reading Joy Larkcom's autobiography, "Just Vegetating – A Memoir" which has a couple of chapters on earthworms with plenty of interesting facts: -

- there are over 20 species of earthworm in the UK.
- the brandling or manure worm, *Eisenia foetida*, is the one that lives in huge colonies in compost heaps and which is striped concentrically.
- The burrowing and casting worms, such as *Lumbricus terrestris*, live in the soil and their numbers are an indication of the amount of organic material in the soil, more worms = more organic material.
- Worms burrow as deep as 2.5 metres and burrow deeper in cold and dry conditions.
- The oldest worm on record reached the grand old age of 12 years.

- They reproduce by developing a cocoon of eggs around their body, often visible on specimens. These are slipped off the body to develop in the soil.
- The dried up leaves that appear to 'plant' themselves in the soil over winter are actually leaves that worms have dragged into their burrows to feed on, they leave the indigestible stalk poking out of the soil.
- *Lumbricus terrestris* forages for food on the surface but leaves its tail in the burrow. If it is touched it will retreat quickly. Its tail swells and anchors it in the soil, hence the classic image of a blackbird in a 'tug of war' with a worm.
- Worms are not damaged by common fertilizers but pesticides are deadly.
- The activities of earthworms are beneficial, breaking down organic material and helping with aeration and soil drainage.
- Worms eat their way through the soil and the organic matter that it contains and in the process enrich the soil with micro-organisms and inorganic materials which are made more readily available to plants. When they die they contribute nitrate in appreciable quantities to the soil, on average 10gm per square metre per annum.

BEETROOT RISOTTO

I am a bit late sending out this winter recipe but you may have a rather tired beetroot that is just about surviving at the allotment. Boil the roots until they are tender, skin and cut out any slug-eaten areas and then grate coarsely to yield about 250 gm of flesh. This recipe feeds 2 with a small portion for a lunch the next day.

Heat half a litre of 'Marigold' stock in a saucepan and add half the beetroot and keep it warm. Soften an onion in olive oil and add a crushed garlic clove for a minute, then 150 gm of Arborio rice to coat and fry lightly. Add a glass of white/red wine and let this sizzle, then a ladle full of the stock and beetroot at a time over about 25 minutes and stir regularly as the rice absorbs the liquid. Stir in the rest of the beetroot, 2 tablespoons of grated parmesan and fresh thyme leaves. Serve up the risotto and dot with cubes of a cheap goat's cheese to melt into the surface. This is a meal in itself but could be accompanied by a veg or salad. It has a wonderful purple red colour and is also good cold. It is essential to season well, something the Marigold stock does effectively.

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Please email if you want to go on the newsletter mailing list or wish to contact the Committee.