

BUSHY PARK ALLOTMENTS

SEEDS, SETS & CUTTINGS & SEED SWOP

1 INTRODUCTION

There are a number of ways of starting to grow vegetables and fruit. Most can be started by sowing seed, however this is not always the most speedy or reliable method. Dormant plants called sets are the normal means of growing a few of our crops. There are various propagation techniques to produce new plants from existing plant material. Finally you can wait for the annual allotment plant sale or go to the garden centre and buy some plants.

2 SEEDS

Seeds are the most common way of growing annual plants. Most of the brassicas, beets, capsicums, cucurbits, tomatoes and umbellifers are grown this way. Some seed is best sown into pots, seed trays or modules. These can be started at home on the window sill or near a radiator. Some seed must be sown directly into the ground in its final location in a row or small groups for thinning out once the plants are developing and growing. Parsnip and carrot must be sown this way or they will not develop a good tap root which is the bit you are going to eat.

Many allotment holders save seed for themselves. Some seed is very easy to collect for use the following year. Good examples are peas and beans, tomatoes and some brassicas. However some seed cannot be saved without extraordinary care. Pumpkin seed is really only good for eating as some of my allotment neighbours have experienced! It is a promiscuous plant and as it is popular on our allotments the seed will rarely be true to type.

Saving seed has obvious economic benefits. It also allows the preservation of heritage varieties that have their own special characteristics. Some allotment holders are members of the Heritage Seed Library which is a good source of unusual varieties of vegetables. It is a good opportunity to share with other people on the site.

3 SETS

Some plants are best propagated by using sets. Potatoes and garlic are the principal crops grown this way. The set is a dormant plant that will start growing at the appropriate time of year and/or when it gets in contact with soil and moisture. When the set is planted in the ground it can start growing and developing.

4 CUTTINGS & ROOT DIVISIONS

Cuttings are sections of a mature plant that are used to create a new plant with identical characteristics. Good examples are hardwood cuttings from fruit bushes. If you are pruning a currant bush look out for strong healthy shoots to use as cuttings. Trim a 150 mm to 200mm length with a neat cut below a leaf node and put it down the edge of a pot of compost, about 6 to each pot. Once they are growing after about a year, they can be potted on to develop into strong plants that will be identical to their parent plant

Root cuttings can be made from rhubarb and horseradish. Choose a section of the root with a growing point and trim it to include as much of the root as possible before potting up

5 SEED SWOP

We generally have a seed swop at the allotments during the Autumn, usually out our tenant's BBQ. Bring along any spare seed that you have, small brown 'dinner money' envelopes are available from Poundland to package up the seed and remember to label it with the name and year collected.

BPAA Committee – 23/12/13