

The Bushy Times

Newsletter of the Bushy Park Allotment Association

Website - www.bushyparkallotments.org.uk

Issue 53

MARCH 2020

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

The Plant Sale Open Day will be on 16th May from 12:00 to 3:00 PM, make a note in your diary and pot up a few spare plants to donate as appropriate.

Volunteers will be needed to help on the day, please let a committee member know if you can help: -

- setting up after 10:00 AM
- helping on stalls
- clearing up at the end
- and especially providing some home cooking on the day, home-made cakes and savoury dishes are really appreciated by those attending.

For those who have not been to one of these events, there will be opportunities to buy unusual tomato, pepper, aubergine, squash and courgette plants, varieties that are allotment favourites.

WASTE RECYCLING & FLOODING

Many thanks to Chris, Tony and Mike who ably and with much energy helped Joe Ambaye in clearing the plot next to the recycling bays.

The Council have made a half-hearted attempt to clear the recycling bays, they have only tackled the heavy woody material.

The Council do not understand the detail of allotment work, the waste arising and the implications of the bonfire ban on the allotments. We will have to wait and see if they clear the remaining waste. At least there is now some room to add to it!

Committee Member David Wright is still liaising with the Council and the Royal Parks on behalf of the committee about the flooding over December and January with a view to getting more warning next time they decide to release water onto Brew House Fields and persuading them to take measures to divert water away from the site.

BEHAVIOUR ON SITE

I have to report that someone with access to our site miss-uses the toilet and frequently leaves it in a filthy condition. If this carries on and comes to the Council's attention, they could remove this facility! Please keep the toilet clean for the next user.

If you put kitchen green waste on an open compost bin you are just feeding the resident rat population. Either use a bin with a closed lid or bury the fresh material in the compost and cover with Garrota compost accelerator and water it well. This seems to deter the rats. Providing a ready supply of food allows the rats to breed throughout the year and they will eat your crops!

Please do not leave items in the car parks that you think “*might be of use to someone*”. This is fly tipping and the Council have strict rules about it. I removed a decaying roll of roofing felt recently that someone had left in the shop car park several weeks ago. Fortunately I was heading to the Council tip with my own refuse and had room to take it.

If you use the communal areas for a party, please ensure that you clear away all your rubbish. In the past we have had bin bags and nappies abandoned by the shop.

A tenant has also dumped a pile of apple tree prunings in the shop car park, too lazy to take them down to the recycling bins. Please clear up yourself and respect the other tenants.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Over the years I have tracked down suppliers offering value for money on the essentials for allotment working.

Compost (for potting, seed sowing - not manure) – **B&Q** and **Wickes** supply the cheapest ‘own brand’ sacks of compost and B&Q also stock grow bags. These products have consistently performed well in annual Which magazine trials whilst some of the very expensive alternatives have received the ‘thumbs down’.

Seeds – **Kings Seeds** are the best value for routine seeds and some heritage & specialist seeds such as chicories. They issue a catalogue and do on-line sales.

The Real Seed Company have unusual varieties and crops, online sales.

The **Heritage Seeds** Library run by **Garden Organic** have a subscription service that gives you a choice of 6 packets of seed from their heritage collections each year.

Plant pots – collect free pots from **Squires** on Sixth Cross Road, they have a pot recycling facility near the exit from the checkouts. Their other stock is generally over-priced, but I have bought specialist items from them and strip modules with seedlings of brassicas etc.

Convenient if you need less than 10/12 plants or have forgotten to sow your own seed!

Twelve cauliflower or celery plants is plenty as they are all going to mature together.

Wilko (I use the branch in Hounslow) – stock a good range of gardening sundries and seeds at sensible prices. Tomato feed, gloves, gravel & sowing trays are some of my purchases that have made the trip to Hounslow worthwhile.

Chapmans near the railway bridge on Heath Road, Twickenham, stock potato, garlic and onion setts from mid-January on. You select and buy the spud setts by weight, which is very convenient, for instance if you want to try out a few of a new variety. They are also knowledgeable about their stock; sell a selection of King’s Seeds and I have ordered 20 Kg sacks of Growmore to collect.

Adrian Hall at Hanworth carry plenty of stock required for allotments and are the cheaper than Squires. They also operate a discount card for allotment holders, a PDF of their application form with details of the scheme is being circulated with this newsletter.

SEEDS

The weather on the day of the seed swap was miserable, I am not surprised only a few hardy souls turned out.

I do still have spare seed of the following if you want to try them this year: -

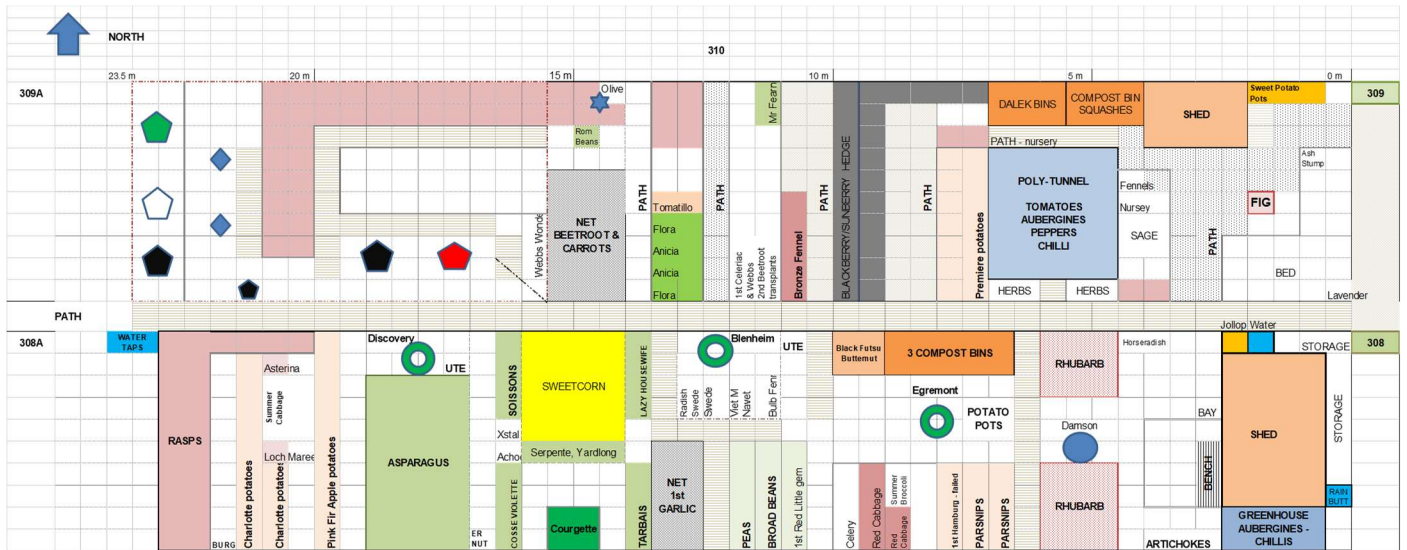
- **Sweetcorn – Rainbow Sweet Inca**, from the Heritage Seeds Library, this corn has multi- coloured kernels in the cobs, yellow/white/re/purple, very decorative and edible!
- I also have seed of the open pollinated **Sweetcorn - Bantam** which is just the regular yellow colour! Remember they need to be planted out in a square block of plants as they are wind pollinated and a block will guarantee a decent yield of corn cobs.
- **Climbing French Bean – Mr Fearn**. See the following article for details of this variety, a top-quality bean.
- **Butterbeans – Soissons**. These climbing beans produce pods with ‘*jack & the beanstalk*’ size seeds. It is a French heritage variety from Soissons in the Champagne region where the climate is very similar to ours, so they do well.
- **Parsnips – Tender & True**. Seed that I collected last year so germination will be good.

If you would like some of these seeds, contact me and we can arrange a time to collect them at the allotment.

I have sorted through my boxes of seed packets, discarded the ones that are out of date and have grouped the valid packets in envelopes in a box by plant family so that I can find them easily. You could alternatively arrange them by “**month to sow**” so that you don’t miss a sowing. Do keep a record of when and where you sow the seed. I use a spreadsheet, below is part of last year’s record, and I have a separate plan of the plot showing crop locations.

ALLOTMENT 2019																			
SEED & PLANT DETAILS				Numbers planted for seed tray sowings is the number that were potted up															
NAME	VARIETY	SOURCE	COST	DATES						NUMBERS			No at Allot	WHERE					
				SowPlntd	Germntd	Potted	Planted	Harvest	Last Use	Planted	Germntd	% Success							
ALLIUMS						Thinned	Thinned												
Garlic	Black Garlic	Mellis	£4.35	23-Oct			6-Dec			9	6								
Garlic	Ail Blanc de la Drome	Carrefour		23-Oct						9									
Garlic	Ail Rose de tarn	Grenoble		23-Oct						12	poor								
Garlic	Turin - White	market	€0.79	23-Oct			6-Dec			12	variable								
Garlic	Violet Midi	Villard	€2.00	23-Oct						12									
Garlic	Solent Wight	Chapmans	£4.50	16-Mar	30-Mar					14									
Oignon																			
Elephant garlic																			
Leek	de Carentan 2	LP	?	4-Apr			4-Aug			40								12	
Leek	Jaune Gros du Poitou	LC		4-Apr			4-Aug			40								16	
ASTERACEAE + COMPOSITAE ETC																			
Cicoria	Catalogna Puntarelle Brindisina	Franchi	£2.00	17-Jun	27-Jun	20-Jul				16	10							6	
Cicoria	Variegata de Castelfranco	SH		27-Jun	07-Jul	30-Jul				24	18							12	
Chicoree Sauvage	Rouge de Verone	LP		27-Jun	failed					12	0								
Chicory	Rossa di Treviso	SH		27-Jun	07-Jul	30-Jul				12	8							8	
Chicoree Sauvage	Rouge de Verone	LP		15-Sep						12									
Lettuce	Little Gem - Moonred	Squires	£0.00				07-Apr			7									
Lettuce	Webbs Wonderfull	??	£0.00			09-May	25-May			8									
Lettuce	Webbs Wonderfull						06-Jun			7									
Laitue Batavia	Reine des Glaces	LP		17-Jun	25-Jun	20-Jul	27-Jul			16	14							12	

I also plot the planting layout on a spreadsheet each year: -



HIGH YIELD CROPS—

A useful article in the Saturday newspaper about crops for good yields from small spaces endorsed some of my own thoughts and is worth repeating.

RHUBARB – not everyone's first choice but incredibly easy to grow. It is a vegetable, but we cook it like a fruit! An established plant will take about a square metre of your plot and will provide enough rhubarb for a family, easily 5-6 Kg per year. Gently pull the stalks at the base when the leaf has opened fully and the stalk is firm. Feed the plant after it has died back in the autumn with chicken manure pellets. Make sure you water the plant well in dry weather whilst it is growing, it is a thirsty crop.

COURGETTES – copiously productive. When planting dig out a pit at the plant location and fill with bin compost, leave a depression around the plant for watering. Last year I took the RHS advice and trained the plant up a sloping heavy mesh and eventually up sturdy canes. This made finding the fruit a lot easier. Allow one square metre per plant and expect 5-6 Kg per plant.

WINTER BROCCOLI & KALES – hungry gap greens. The plants are sown in early summer and live in pots until the spuds are lifted, when they can be planted out as a 2nd crop in that space. Remember to net them to stop them being decimated by pigeons.

FRENCH BEANS – abundance for you and to give away. This is an easy crop to grow, start them off at home in toilet rolls after mid-May and plant them out when they are six inches high. Canes from Giuseppe and apart from keeping them well watered its just harvesting work to do. **Ten seeds** of the **Mr Fearn**s variety from the Heritage Seeds Library gave me 3.3 Kg of beans from August to October and that included hundreds of dried seed to grow this year.

CHARD – grown up spinach. Another low maintenance crop, cut and come again leaves all summer.

BEETROOT – not everyone's taste. Another crop that is easy to grow, 2 square metres of plot yielded 27 Kg of beetroot starting in June 2019 with final specimens harvested in this January.

ORIGAMI PAPER POTS

Jon Porter sent me this link to a Youtube clip about making pots out of newspaper for seedlings.

<https://youtu.be/7dlGQP81yfo>

BLACKCURRANT – ‘BIG BUD’

Not a variety of blackcurrant but a pest/disease of blackcurrant plants that you should know about.



These rounded buds are infected with mites.

Blackcurrant big bud mites are microscopic, much less than 1mm in length. They live inside the dormant buds and suck sap from the embryonic leaves. They cause infested buds to become abnormally swollen and rounded. The mite also spreads reversion disease.

Symptoms: -

- Damage is most easily seen in late winter, when affected buds become abnormally swollen and rounded as shown in the photo.
- **Healthy buds are pointed and longer than broad.**
- Infested buds often dry up, producing no leaves in spring, or stunted foliage and few or no flowers.

The biology of the mites and disease is: -

- An infested blackcurrant bud can contain hundreds of mites, which feed by sucking sap from the embryonic leaves.
- The mites emerge in **early summer** and crawl over the plant in search of new buds.
- They can be blown by the wind onto other blackcurrant plants.
- The mite can also transmit a virus-like mycoplasma disease known as *reversion*. This debilitates plants, resulting in reduced yields of fruit.

These mites are present at Bushy Park. I check my blackcurrant plants each winter and take the following action: -

- Any shoots with the rounded buds are cut back to a normal pointed bud.

- If there is a single rounded bud on an otherwise healthy shoot, I trim of the individual bud.
- **Do NOT put these trimmings in the communal recycle bin.** Bag them up and put them in your home rubbish bin, there won't be a large volume to dispose of.

With this attention, normal pruning, watering during the summer and a good winter top dress of chicken manure pellets, my plants have stayed productive. Last year two well-established plants yielded 13 Kg of blackcurrants.

Check your plants now and take action.

SMOKED HADDOCK & HARICOT BEAN GRATIN

Soak 90 gm of your dried haricot beans overnight. Boil until tender. Alternatively a tin of haricot beans can be used. Fry a shallot to caramelization in a butter/olive oil mix, add in 2 small (about 200 gm before preparation) thinly sliced leeks and make sure they are well cooked. Add about 150 gm of thinly sliced green vegetables. These can be anything to hand, cabbage, celery, fennel, it is a good opportunity to use left-over veg from the bottom box in the fridge or 'foraged' from the allotment. Add a spoonful of water, a selection of chopped fresh/dried herbs, salt and pepper and steam down to create a thick sauce. Add 300 gm of crème fraiche and the beans, stir to combine and put in an ovenproof dish.

Skin a 300-350 gm smoked haddock fillet, divide into serving portions removing any bones and embed the portions in the sauce. Cover with 60-80 gm of breadcrumbs mixed with a 40 gm of grated parmesan, black pepper and the zest of a lemon. The lemon juice can be added to sauce if it needs using up! Drizzle well with olive oil and bake in a 160° C oven for 30-45 minutes until the crust has crisped and the sauce is bubbling. Serve it forth. Also good cold the next day. I have added 2 heaped teaspoons of prepared *moutarde fort de Dijon* to the sauce. This added an extra depth of flavour to the dish.

Phil Iddison	Please contact the council via the website for any matters relating to your tenancy or the T&Cs.
On behalf of Bushy Park Allotments Association	Contact me, Joe Ambaye (Chairman) or Robin Hewitt (Secretary) for local issues.