

# The Bushy Times

Newsletter of the Bushy Park Allotment Association

Visit the website – [www.bushyparkallotments.org.uk](http://www.bushyparkallotments.org.uk)

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## NEWS UPDATE

Joe Ambaye has reconfigured the recycling facility to provide more capacity. **Please continue to stack material neatly and as high as possible to make best use of the space.**

**Chapmans** (Heath Road, Twickenham near the railway bridge) are still open for business. I got seeds and young cabbage/lettuce plants there yesterday.

**Adrian Hall** are doing deliveries and Squires seem to be taking phone orders but don't sound very organised.

**Guiseppe now has his usual shop supplies.**

Remember, don't keep power tools in your shed, too tempting for thieves.

If you exercise your dog at the allotments, please remember to pick up the poo! We are a public space. It is also a Council rule that dogs are kept under control. In the past we have had incidents resulting in injuries that have had to be reported to the Council for their action.

Please remember to disconnect your hose and turn off the tap when you have finished watering. This is on my checklist before I leave my plot for the day.

## PLANT SWAP

It is now unlikely that our Plant Sale Event in May will happen. I have conferred with committee members and fellow tenants and propose that we set up a **PLANT SWAP** table/tray in each car park so that tenant's spare plants can be put out for others to use. I have just sown 140 tomato seeds of 17 varieties, I will only need about 20, so I will have spare plants in four weeks time.

**Please label the plants. Pot them up, a yoghurt pot will do, a seedling wrapped in newspaper will not survive.**

**Take only what you need and what you can put to good use. Don't take them on a whim or because "a friend might like them". They will be donated for our community use.**

We used to make a small charge for plants at the sale. Hopefully we will still have a September open day and like last year it will be for charity. So if you have benefited from someone else's hard work and generosity at the plant swap, please give a donation to charity at our next event.

## SEED SOWING

Handy tips on seed sowing from Garden Organic, with my practical edits, whether you're experienced or a neophyte: -

*Growing from seed is so satisfying: it saves money, you (and your kids) have the joy of watching your seedlings grow and the satisfaction of achieving mature, healthy plants which are well suited to your growing area. From peas to sweetcorn, marigolds to brassicas - you can fill your beds and pots with as many plants as you want.*

- Choose seeds of traditional varieties. Other tenants may have spare seed, check with your neighbours. F1 seed often matures at the same time giving a glut of produce. (I admit to growing F1 winter squash Crown Prince because the pumpkins store well)
- Make your own seed sowing compost if you are sowing in trays/pots indoors. Mix equal parts garden soil and finely sieved composted material from your compost bin. Seeds carry their own nutrients, so they don't need an enriched potting compost to germinate. Adding some compost makes a lighter medium for roots to get established and retains moisture.
- Some seed is best sown directly into a seed drill (shallow V trench, eg turnip) or dropped into dibbed holes in your soil (eg peas and beans). Cover seed drills with re-cycled compost to suppress weed growth and retain moisture.
- Start of frost sensitive plants such as French beans in toilet rolls/root-trainers at home, monitor the weather forecast for frost warnings before planting out.
- Sow into firm compost or soil. Whether sowing indoors or out, prepare the soil by making sure there are no large lumps and gently firm it down.
- Follow the instructions on the seed packet (or the internet in the absence of a packet!) - when to sow, how deep, how far apart, and whether the seed needs to be covered. Many seeds like to be covered by the equivalent of their size in soil depth, but some seed needs light to germinate and can rest on top of the prepared compost.
- Watering is important. Make sure the soil is damp from the beginning and maintain that dampness while germinating and growing. Too wet, and the seeds can rot, too dry, and they won't survive to put down roots. Use the rose on the watering can. it makes a fine spray and doesn't wash the seeds away.
- Thin out young seedlings once they have produced 2 or 3 pairs of leaves. If you've sown thickly, the roots will compete for water and nutrients and the young plants may become leggy. Carefully lift seedlings out of the soil, separate and re-plant, either in pots if you're growing under cover, or elsewhere in the growing area outdoors. Some seedlings cannot be transplanted, eg parsnip & carrot.

## RECYCLING

We all recycle something at the allotment but here are a few ideas from my own and others re-cycling experience.

**Commercial Compost** –an article in Gardening Which a year or so ago did a trial on using commercial bagged compost a second time. They found that with the inclusion of a modest amount of fertilizer, yields from re-cycled compost were comparable to using fresh material. I use commercial compost for pepper and aubergine pots and to grow tomatoes and then do keep it for a second use next year

**Allotment compost** – make your own, all green waste including slightly woody items like bean haulms cut into short lengths can go into the compost bin. Add some layers of the stable waste that we receive to balance the soft green material or use paper shreddings. Perfectionists 'turn' their compost. This is hard work and requires more space. I just keep filling my bins and over the winter excavate the rather wet compost and put it into plastic sacks to store under the blackberry hedge for use the following year in the potato and bean trenches.

**Plastic compost sacks** – these survive re-use for storing compost, leaves etc for years.

**Wire coat hangers** – three cuts with a pair of pliers and each hanger becomes 2 U-pins for securing netting to the ground.

**Plastic product tubes 5cm diameter** – cut of the base and trim the top if it is a restricted opening, these slide over corn cobs to ward off the rats, squirrels and I guess the parakeets when they have found out about the sweetcorn! Put them on when the corn starts to swell and the end 'tassel' is drying out. Will last for years, so a multi-use of plastic.

**Pop socks** – ditto for corn cob protection.

**Loo roll centres and supermarket clear plastic fruit boxes** – the sort of boxes in which grapes are packaged neatly hold 8 loo roll centres and 4 of the boxes fit in a standard 38 cm gravel tray. This is the cheap equivalent of a root trainer usually costing £8.99! When you plant out, peel away the top of the cardboard or make sure it is well buried so it does not act like a wick and waste water.

**Water** – not really recycling but a water butt to collect rainwater from your shed/greenhouse roof is a good idea. A modest roof of 2 square metres will yield 1200 litres, enough water to tide you through the winter when the water is turned off. Also blueberries prefer rainwater to tap water.

**Another way with plant debris** – A neighbour has pointed out that she stacks her woody plant material neatly on her plot over winter to mulch the ground and start breaking down. Some of the material then goes into trenches under crops such as beans to continue breaking down.

## ***MASON BEES***

Fellow tenant Sarah Wood has alerted me to the potential of mason bees: - I quote:-



*Female red mason bee*

"She advises going to <https://www.masonbees.co.uk/>. They run a mason bee guardian programme, which she joined last year, whereby you buy nesting tubes and cocoons to install in your garden or allotment plot which help with pollination of all sorts of fruit, veg and flowers. They are used in commercial orchards to ensure adequate pollination of fruit trees.

Mason bees don't sting and are very friendly, so they will be no issues with them at the allotments. You don't keep them, you put a nest up and they please themselves. Sarah's whole family loved watching them hatch and make their cocoons last year, and the cocoons they made are ready to release this year in a week or two. Helps bees, helps our veg - winner! And the more people who join, the more lovely bees we have at our allotments. Here's one of Sarah's trying to be born last year: -

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bvobronh6BI/?igshid=kuvyasg7kn1g>"

## ***FENNEL – PLANT FOCUS.***

We are all used to buying a bulb of fennel at the greengrocer/supermarket but can it be grown at the allotment? I have to admit that I have not had great success with bulb fennel but have seen others succeed and I will keep on trying. My seeds germinated and start to grow with lovely feathery leaves but then fail to form a bulb at soil level and grow a massive flower spike.

A rampant flower spike has not stopped me putting them to good culinary use, see the recipe at the end of this newsletter. I also leave some of the flower heads to develop, they have magnificent flat yellow umbels of tiny flowers that are a feast for bees and other insects. They easily get to six feet high but have a small footprint. I also collect the seed, cutting whole seeds heads as they turn brown, put them into a clean bucket and just squeeze to release the seed. Great in baked goods.

Bolting is encouraged by fluctuating or low temperatures. Fennel seedlings are also very sensitive to root disturbance, sow seeds direct in the ground in late spring/early summer when the threat of frost has passed. Sow the seed thinly in 1cm-deep drills, 45cm apart. Short rows with succession sowing will act as an insurance against bolting and poor germination and will spread the harvest. Once germinated, thin to 15cm and water regularly, it's a thirsty plant, mulch and weed. You can also earth up the stems as they swell to blanch and sweeten them. Slugs can be a problem at seedling stage - other than that, it's just dry spells to watch out for.

Herb fennel that is grown for foliage and seed production can get established as a perennial clump, good for a number of years and very reliable. There is a bronze leaved version that I treat in exactly the same way.

## ***SICILIAN FENNEL PASTA SAUCE***

This dish evolved from a lack of sardines in the market! It is essentially the classic Sicilian recipe *Pasta Con Sarde* but without the sardines and with a little reorganisation.

Slice and fry two medium shallots to a crisp. Add a tin of anchovies and 20 pitted and halved black olives to melt down into the sauce. If available, add a pinch saffron, pine nuts and also ½ a cup of sultanas/raisins soaked in boiling water. It will still taste good if you are missing an ingredient.

Bruise the tough lower stalks of the fennel and add to the pasta cooking water to impart some extra flavour. A chunky pasta such as fusilli is ideal. Fry breadcrumbs crisp in olive oil.

Chop a good quantity of fennel fronds including the tender top stalks and any developing flowers. Put these into your sauce with a good ladle of pasta cooking water to slacken and steam the sauce, covering the pan. Serve over the pasta with the breadcrumbs to garnish at the table.

Phil Iddison

On behalf of  
Bushy Park Allotments Association

Please contact the council via their website for any matters relating to your tenancy or the T&Cs.

Contact me, Joe Ambaye (Chairman) or Robin Hewitt (Secretary) for local issues.