

The Bushy Times

Newsletter of the Bushy Park Allotment Association

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BUSHY PARK ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

COMMITTEE & COUNCIL NEWS

COUNCIL LIAISON

On 17th January the site was visited by the Council's new allotment officer, Ms Jo Rodgers, who indicated that:

- a) The padlock on the pedestrian gate would be replaced (this was in fact done within 48 hours of her visit).
- b) That disused and contaminated plots will in due course be cleared and readied for reletting by Council appointed contractors and not by the 'community payback' scheme.
- c) That she will liaise with Royal Parks regarding the flooding issue.
- d) That her team will begin reletting vacant plots in April, once the disused and contaminated plots have been rendered fit for purpose.

WOODY WASTE AREA

The Committee is supervising the woody waste area to prevent an unmanageable accumulation of waste during the winter plot tidying activities. It will be open for deposit of woody waste **only** as advertised with notices on the gates.

The ban on bonfires will continue to be observed.

SOCIAL EVENTS - BPAA OPEN DAYS 2022

The following were set as provisional dates for your calendar/diary:

- **Saturday 21st May;**
- **Friday 3rd June, to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee**
- **Saturday 16th July; and**
- **Saturday 17th September.**

FOODBANK DONATIONS

From May there will be an on-site collection point where plot-holders may put surplus produce for donation to a nominated foodbank. More details to follow.

HOUSEKEEPING

The new pedestrian gate padlock is quite stiff to operate but seems to be OK. If you have trouble with the padlocks, try giving the padlock a brisk tap on the gate to reset the tumblers. If your key is very worn, the Council can issue a replacement.

We have managed to return lost gate keys to their owners, if you personalize your key with a distinctive fob, it improves identification return to you!

THE FUNGHI IN YOUR COMPOST HEAP

Commercial composting uses copious quantities of material and achieves high temperatures to promote and speed up the process, typically above 40° C. Small 'hot bin' composters for the gardener are now available with various claims as to their efficacy in speeding up the composting process, they are quite pricey though and of limited capacity.

I mentioned my composting technique in the last newsletter and an article in Gardening Which magazine has shed some more detail on the process that goes on in your allotment compost bin.

You will have seen the striped brandling worms that make their home in your bin. They eat their way through some of the compost, but the 'heavy lifting' will be done by bacteria and fungi. The bacteria go for the softer materials and the fungi tackle the woodier stuff. I expect that some moisture is also a requirement, very dry material does not degrade as quickly as moist material.

Researchers studied 10 different bins in Manchester gardens, growing fungi samples from them on agar plates and also sequencing DNA. The DNA work revealed the presence of 478 different fungi species. Each heap had a unique community of fungi with 13 species unique to a particular bin! There were several species of penicillin, but about half the fungi identified by the DNA were unknown to biologists with no scientific name. The fungi were different to those found in commercial composting and also different to the ones found in soil and leaf litter, we have a very diverse world.

The differences indicate that there probably isn't a perfect recipe for composting, anything will work eventually in this slow and cool process.

The researchers did find human pathogens, potentially causing disease. However these were the same species as those found in soil and other organic matter. Your compost heap is no more dangerous than the rest of your allotment!

SEASONAL NOTES

Some brief notes: -

- I have just completed harvest of my carrots and beetroot from last year's crop. The carrots have kept well and are still tasty under the protection of an enviromesh net, principally used to eliminate carrot root fly but which also 'hides' the crop from rat attack! There was some slug damage and some roots had grown to a size where they split but still a welcome crop at this time of year.
- Last year I made a support frame for the net over the carrots and beetroot from 40 mm dia drainpipe and right-angle push-fit connections, making inverted **U** frames to support the net about 75 cm above ground level. This left enough headroom for the plants and crawl space to harvest. I secured the net to decking boards around the perimeter with nailed battens that can be lifted to get access.
- If you have blackcurrant bushes, trim any shoots with 'big bud' when you do your pruning. The general rule with pruning is to remove a third of the old darker woody shoots to encourage new growth.

POTATO DISEASES

I collected a selection of potato sets from Chapmans in Twickenham last week and they are chitting in a cool bright room.

Two rows of maincrop will go in the ground as usual but I now grow some earlies in large pots of compost. I plant them in late February/early March into the pots and keep them in the polytunnel, they can be stacked up with boards between the pots until they push through the soil surface. When the frosts are over, they go out and can occupy any spare space on the allotment, even being moved around.

Last year was tough for potatoes with serious late blight for the first time in my experience. The main diseases that I have experienced at Bushy Park are outlined below. Don't be deterred from growing potatoes if you like them, they are generally a reliable crop and don't need a lot of attention.

Early blight (*Alternaria solani*)

Early blight usually affects potato foliage, but tuber infections can also occur. There will be brown spots and patches on the foliage. Most years this has been quite minor and the plants seem to get over it and the harvest is okay.

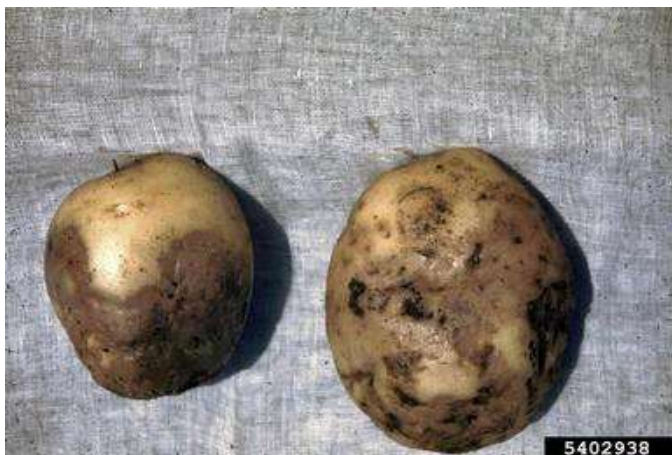
If there are tuber lesions, they are dark, sunken, and circular often bordered by purple to grey raised tissue. The underlying flesh is dry, leathery, and brown. Lesions can increase in size during storage and tubers become shrivelled.



Late Blight (*Phytophthora infestans*)

Late blight affects potato foliage and tubers. Foliar symptoms start with brown to black, water-soaked lesions on leaves and stems which produce visible white sporulation at the lesion margins under humid conditions. Whole plants and fields may collapse rapidly. Tuber infection is initiated by sporangia from foliage being washed down into the soil and usually begins in wounds, eyes, or lenticels. The general advice is to cut back all infected foliage and dispose of this in the green bin not the compost bin. Hopefully this stops the spread of the infection to the tuber, so they are left for at least 2 weeks before digging up.

Lesions are copper brown, red or purplish and white sporulation may occur on tuber surfaces in storage or cull piles. Infected tubers are susceptible to infection by soft rot bacteria which can turn entire bins of potatoes in storage into a smelly, rotten mass.



Common Scab (*Streptomyces* spp.)

Common scab produces tan to dark brown, circular or irregular lesions which are rough in texture. Scab may be superficial (russet scab), slightly raised (erumpent scab), or sunken (pitted scab). The type of lesion is dependent on potato cultivar, tuber maturity at infection, organic matter content of soil, strain of the pathogen, and the environment.

This is chiefly an unsightly disease, peeling the spuds removes it and they are edible. It is usually blamed on soil alkalinity such as liming the soil for brassica crops. Traditionally in a crop rotation there is a rest year between brassica crops and potatoes.



Black Scurf and Rhizoctonia Canker (*Rhizoctonia solani*)

Black scurf is purely cosmetic and does not reduce yield, even in storage. Irregular, black hard masses on the tuber surface are overwintering structures (sclerotia) of the fungus. Presence of these sclerotia may be minimized by harvesting tubers soon after vine-kill and skin set. While the sclerotia themselves do not cause damage, they allow the pathogen to survive in the soil and serve as evidence of its presence.

I have seen this on my spuds and confirm that it is largely cosmetic and can be rubbed off the tubers which are definitely edible.



Technical information from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst with observations from my own allotment experience

ROASTED BEETROOT PASTA

The winter beetroot does not have the fresh flavour of the young specimens from the summer and autumn harvests. However roasted with some garlic it makes a fine meal.

500 gm raw beetroot, scrubbed, topped and tailed and any root trimmed off, I used a mix of colours and various sized specimens, cutting to an even size. With appropriate substitutions it can be veganized. Cooked beetroot also works, reduce the cooking times.

Good glug of olive oil, in the style of Jamie Oliver!

6 fat garlic cloves, peeled and lightly crushed

Any fresh herbs and/or a sprinkle of dried herbs

100g walnuts, roughly chopped

OPTIONS - handful of greens/herbs/small pepper chopped, chopped reserved younger beet leaves work well – chopped tomatoes – end-of-season green peppers cut into strips.

200g crumbled feta

crème fraiche/thick yoghurt (optional).

Beetroot; cut into 1-2cm wedges. These and the garlic cloves were tossed in the oil in a roasting tray, seasoned, sprinkled with some dried herbs and roasted for 40 minutes at 180°C. Any softer veg, such as peppers or tomatoes can be added whilst giving the pan contents a stir to promote an even roast halfway through. Check that the beetroot is tender.

Cook the pasta and keep some cooking water. You can make a creamy sauce for the pasta. Blend the garlic and some of the beetroot with creme fraiche or thick yoghurt together with a little of the pasta water.

Added the walnuts & feta to the contents of the roasting pan, give them a stir and back in the oven to heat through, about 10 minutes. When the roast has finished, added the blended sauce if made and gave it a light stir before serving over the pasta. Good flavours, it needs the whole block of feta/white sheep's cheese. Makes a good cold lunch.

Phil Iddison
On behalf of
Bushy Park
Allotments
Association

Please contact the Council via their website
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/parks_and_open_spaces/allotments
for any matters relating to your tenancy or the T&Cs.
Contact, Hugh Munro (Secretary) allotsec@protonmail.com.for local
allotment issues and me about the newsletter.