



Longcroft Allotment Association

Newsletter – August 2015

It's that time of Year



It's warm, there are long dry spells, and it's the busiest time of year for harvesting soft fruit, early tree fruit and vegetables – a time of year for watering and picking. August is the month of plenty and, just as there is a wide range of fruit and vegetables to pick each day, most of us will go on holiday! September brings the end of the early crops the first of the later crops – it can even be a time for the first Brussels sprouts!

After digging up early vegetables and before leeks and winter cabbages, there is a chance to catch crops – grow radishes and other fast growing vegetables

Slugs and snails haven't been so much of a pest as recent years, but this year's problem for most of us has been the black-fly. For those of us who don't like using pesticides, a colleague (and former landscape gardener) has told me that spraying them with cold tea works, although I haven't yet tried it myself.

Jobs

August: dry out onions/garlic, mulch the soil to retain moisture, pinch out growing beans (French and runners), prune summer fruiting raspberries

September: clear away any dead foliage and add as much as you can to your compost heap (a good time of year to build a new compost heap).

Plant (outdoors)

August: carrots (the last of the year), spring cabbage, new strawberry plants

September: overwintering onions and green manure

Harvest

August: early sweetcorn, beans, courgettes, plums and gages, potatoes

September: beans, tomatoes, potatoes, apples and pears, squashes and beetroot



LAA Update

Work parties: There was a work party at Broadwater on Saturday 30th May to mark plot boundaries, re-instate path boundaries, weed under the fruit trees by the car park, mow all communal areas and generally tidy up.

Work parties are scheduled at both sites on Saturday 19th September at 10am – please come along and help out if you are available.



Plot markers: All plots at both sites have now been staked to mark boundaries.



All plots are measured in 'poles', and most of have plots which are 'five poles': if you wondered what a pole is and why they are used, read "A bit of history" below.

Break-in at Broadwater: unfortunately, on Saturday 9th May, there was a break-in at the Broadwater site. Thieves broke into the mower shed and stole one of the mowers, along with a selection of tools from members' sheds. The police were informed at the time.

Members are advised not to keep anything of value in sheds and not to lock them because this suggests that there are valuable contents inside.

Seed catalogues: we are taking delivery of the Kings catalogues within the next week or so, so expect to receive a 'lookout email' shortly. The prices are very competitive for seeds/plants which most 'regular' fruit and vegetable varieties and some less common plants.

Health & Safety: take care if you are using ladders to collect fruit, and beware of stinging insects.

New members: Mr Norman Tann and Dr Huw Williams have just taken plots at the Digswell site, and Lisa Bank has one at Digswell – welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

A bit of history

'Rods, poles and perches are different names for the same length. Medieval ploughing was done with oxen, up to 4 pairs at a time. While the ploughman handled the plough, the oxen were controlled using a stick, which had to be long enough to reach all the oxen – this was the pole (or rod, or perch). A pole is measured as the length from the back of the plough to the nose of the ox, and this had an obvious secondary use as an implement to measure the fields".

The use of the term 'perch' dates back to the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), the 'rod' has been used since 1450, and the pole since the 16th century. In the 16th century the rod was decreed to be the combined length of the left feet of 16 men as they left church on a Sunday morning.

In North Devon there is a tradition that fencing (cutting and laying of a hedge) measured by 'land yard', which is about 5 paces or 5.5 yards – the same length as a rod, pole or perch.



Down at the Shed



The Shed we stock a wide range of composts, fertilisers, pots, seeds, netting, canes and many other useful items for your allotment. There are often special offers which LAA members can make use of. At this time of year it is a good place to purchase sheets of weed suppressant.

Shop opening times: The Shed opening hours are **11:00am to 12:30pm on Sundays** from the end of February to the end of September.

If the shop is unmanned during these times, and Helen McLean is up there in her yellow high viz jacket, she will sell. Instructions are, that if you want something from the shop, you bang the large saucepan pan. Seems to work!



Make your own...

...rainwater harvesting system

Our fruit and vegetables need regular watering (and regular harvesting!) throughout the summer. In September 2012, Roger Edgson wrote an article in the Newsletter about his rainwater harvesting initiative, and is now able to tell us how it has performed since it was installed...

"I thought it might be useful to give a bit of an update on my rainwater harvesting initiative.

"I had decided that I wanted to see how practical it would be to generate a reasonable amount of water for use on my plot and after a bit of research finished up going for a structure which was made simply from 2" x 2" timber, a 2m x 2m corrugated plastic sheet for catching the water, some guttering and some water butts (see photo).



Although my limited research suggested that it should be possible to collect a decent amount of water, I was still a bit sceptical. However, I have to say, I have been pleasantly surprised. This month [July 2015] was the first time since I put in the system that I have had to start using water from a site tank, so that is about two and a half growing seasons where I have only used rainwater. Pretty impressive I think.



Having got out of the habit of carrying cans I really found it a chore when I did eventually run out of rainwater and had to start lugging watering cans from the tank again and I guess for some plot holders who are maybe a bit less physically able it must be a real challenge having to cart water from a tank all the time.

Probably the key thing that I have learnt in this is that you need to ensure that you have enough storage containers to collect all the rainwater that falls in the wetter, out of growing season months so that when you start needing it, you have plenty. I finished up with two large and four medium sized butts all of which were full at one time.

Anyway the main reason for this update is to give encouragement to plot holders who are thinking about doing something. With a bit of time and a modest amount of money you can make watering, one of our key tasks, much less of a chore and at the same time make a contribution to using less treated water, something we are all going to have to do in the future."



August Recipes

Strawberry ice-cream

To make 2 litres of ice-cream (a typical supermarket tub) use

- 250g (8 oz) strawberries (or a mixture of soft fruit: strawberries, raspberries, currants),
- 250g (8oz) double cream and
- 125g (5oz) white castor sugar

(If you store your sugar with vanilla pods the ice-cream will taste even better!)

Puree the strawberries then mix in the cream and sugar. Put them in an ice-cream maker. If you don't have an ice-cream maker (then add it to your Christmas list and) put the mixture in a 2 litre tub and put it in the freezer, give it a stir every hour or so to keep the mixture smooth before it sets.

If you keep the ice-cream in a freezer, it will set harder than shop-bought ice-cream so remember to take it out and allow to de-frost for 15-30 minutes before serving.

Beetroot Chutney

A nice 'Branston' style pickle, and a good way of preserving surplus beetroot.

- 1kg beetroot¹²
- 500g onions
- 750g cooking apples
- 500g raisins
- 1kg sugar
- 2-3 tablespoons ground ginger
- 1 litre malt vinegar



Peel and grate or chop the (raw) beetroot and peel and finely chop the onions and apples. Then put in a pan with the other ingredients. Bring to the boil and then simmer until thick. Put in sterile jars.

Summer Pudding

This is a simple and delicious way of using small amounts a mixture of soft fruits. Quick to make, and ready to eat the next day. The following quantities are enough for a 1lb pudding.

- 12 oz mixed berries (raspberries, strawberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants, gooseberries)
- 1-2 tablespoons of water
- 2oz sugar (golden castor sugar is best)
- White bread (around three slices, crusts removed)

Line a pudding bowl with a single sheet of cling film, large enough to seal the 'lid' (this is the most difficult part of the recipe!). Then put a layer of bread in the bowl, saving a piece for the lid.



Dissolve the sugar in 1-2 tablespoons of water, add the fruit and bring to the boil. Boil for 3-5 minutes – enough to generate a rich syrup, with the fruit still intact. Tip the syrup first into the lined bowl, so that it can soak in to the slices of bread, then fill with the fruit/syrup mixture.

Cut the final slice of bread so that it forms a well-fitting, round lid, place on the mixture, and seal with the cling film. Cover with a plate and keep in the fridge.

Open the cling film and tip upside-down to serve, with cream and any spare fruit mixture.

Local Coffee!

Used coffee grounds are freely available from local cafes and supermarkets (Waitrose keeps two buckets just outside their entrance which are topped up throughout the day), and are good for the garden in so many ways...

Worm farm - Worms will turn and aerate your soil for you. Mix some soil with coffee grounds, and add a few worms. The worms will love it. Then, just add the mixture around your plants and they will do the rest.



Enhance your compost - Coffee grounds are rich in nitrogen – just what your compost needs to be at its best. Simply add used coffee grounds to your compost and give it a good stir.

Deter pests - sprinkle coffee grounds around young fruit and vegetable plants – slugs, snails, and other bugs are put off by the acidity of the mixture

Make your own fertilizer - You can add half a cup of coffee grounds to one gallon of water. Mix well and allow the mixture to 'brew' for 24 hours or more. Then it will be ready to pour over growing plants without any harmful side effects ().

Fight off fungus - Coffee grounds can help fight off various types of fungus that can grow on your plants. To enlist their help, all you need to do is sprinkle the grounds directly into your soil. As the grounds break down in the soil, they will help fight some moulds and fungus colonies.



Polite reminders

When filling up buckets or watering cans from the tanks, please wipe off any grass and mud - the roses in others' watering cans can easily become blocked by floating debris.

Please remember to lock the gates and sheds if you know you are the last person to leave the site or if you can't see anybody else around when you are leaving.

Comments and feedback

Many thanks to Kim Hayes and Roger Edgson for contributions to this edition of the newsletter.



If you have any news, tips, features, recipes or photographs that you would like to submit for future issues of the Newsletter please send them to...

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