



Longcroft Allotment Association

Newsletter - May 2015

It's that time of Year

The weather is getting warmer, the days are getting longer and it is time to plant and sow outdoors. Cropping really gets started in early summer as the first potatoes, peas and soft fruits become ready to harvest. But watch out for frost during May, keep plants watered as we move into summer, and keep slugs and other pests at bay.



Jobs

May: harden off plants, hoe/weed regularly, earth up potatoes, and prune cherry/plum trees

June/July: keep plants watered plants and apply mulches (used grass clippings if they are seed-free), pick out broad beans to protect against black fly

Plant (outdoors)

May: beetroot, winter brassicas, carrots, French and runner beans, sweet corn

June: French and runner beans, sweetcorn, peas, chard, brassicas

July: French and runner beans, salad crops, brassicas

Harvest

May: rhubarb, asparagus, spring brassicas, oriental greens and leaves, spring onion

June: early potatoes, peas, broad beans, spinach, onions, garlic, beetroot, strawberries, gooseberries

July: garlic, onion, raspberries



LAA Update - 2015 AGM

The 41st AGM of the Longcroft Allotment Association was held on 3rd March at Woodside House.

In the absence of an elected Chairman, the Secretary, Kim Haynes, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The minutes of the 40th Annual General Meeting held on 3rd March 2014 were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

The Committee

During the past year Les Fry had stepped down as Chairman and in the interim Don Fisher had been Acting Chairman until the AGM. Volunteers or suggestions for this vacant post would be welcomed.

The following Committee members were re-elected:

Kim Haynes: Secretary / Membership Secretary (email: hayneskim2@gmail.com)

Debbie Eustace: Committee member (email: deborah.eustace@virgin.net)

Helen McLean: Digswell Site Representative (email: helenmclean38@hotmail.co.uk)



The following members have agreed to serve on the Committee:

Philip Fotheringham: Treasurer (email: philipf2@sky.com)

Roger Jones: Committee member (email: rogerjones55@gmail.com)

Helen McLean: Shop Manager (email: helenmclean38@hotmail.co.uk)

Christine Smith: Lettings Secretary (email: christinesmith7@virginmedia.com)

Helpers /volunteers were invited – particularly from the Broadwater site.

The Secretary thanked the Committee members who were retiring – Les Fry as Chairman, Kath Monk as Site Representative for Broadwater, Don Fisher as Acting Chairman and Lettings Secretary, Barbara Wilton as Shop Manager, Tony Ridler as Treasurer and June Tomlin as Secretary. They all did invaluable work which was much appreciated.

Member Survey

A survey had been sent to all members at the end of last year and one outcome from the survey was the proposal of a swap/share box in memory of Dave Rogers at each site where members could leave any surplus produce in a box for the free use of other members. The box would be by the shed at Digswell and probably by the mower shed at Broadwater. These boxes are being costed. Other requests from the survey were for a regular newsletter and an updated website.



Plots and Site News

Management Agreements had been signed with the Council for both sites - both ten-year contracts, with a break clause of twelve months' notice on each side (as previous conditions) and with no rent increases for the coming year.

There are plans to mark out all plots to the correct sizes with stakes and to indicate plot numbers.

Contact has been made with the nursery on the boundary at Digswell in an effort to reduce the height of the trees bordering the allotments, but nothing could be carried out at present due to the imminent nesting of birds.

Use of surplus funds was considered to: replace the door and increase security around the shed and upgrade the boundary fencing to protect against rabbits at Digswell; and to investigate the



possibility of installing a toilet at Broadwater.

Equipment

During the past year four new mowers had been purchased and a shed installed for the ones at Digswell.

Waiting List

The waiting list is now nineteen people, with a few more opting for Digswell, and a few plots will shortly become vacant.

It was suggested that plots be handed over on 1st January where possible to avoid plots becoming overgrown by spring - this could also be borne in mind when site inspections were carried out. It was suggested that annual subscriptions be brought forward by one month to help with this and it was agreed that this be voted on at the next AGM.

New member: Mr Mike Pestle has just taken a plot at the Digswell site – welcome to the Association and let's hope you have many enjoyable and productive years with us.

A bit of history

Allotments as we know them have their roots in the nineteenth century, when land was made available to the poor (the 'labouring population') for food growing. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act came into force in 1908. But it wasn't until the end of the First World War that land was made widely available to all and not just the poor, and this change was made primarily to assist returning servicemen.



The 1908 Act established the current framework whereby, if there is a demand for allotments within a district council's area then they have a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of plots. Subsequent Allotments Acts of 1922 and 1925 specifies that land purchased or appropriated by local authorities for use as allotments must not be disposed of without Ministerial consent.

Looking after your toms!

Blossom end rot – a common disease which rots away the base of the tomato, and is caused by erratic watering. Only give enough water to keep the ground moist. Do not let the soil dry out or become waterlogged.

Fruit splitting – This is caused by the plant taking up too much water quickly and the outer skin splitting. Keep the soil/compost moist, and never flood the roots if they have dried out.

Grey Mould – a very common fungus caused by inadequate ventilation or damp conditions. Remove infected vegetation and destroy. Ensure that other plants are not restricting good air circulation.

Pale yellow leaves – most common cause is a Magnesium deficiency. The leaves turn yellow between the leaf veins. Prevent this by feeding the plants in spring with a plant food which contains magnesium.



Down at the Shed

At 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:

- Canes for runner and climbing beans (8' canes – 30p each)
Multi-compost for growing seedlings under cover (£4.90/75litres)
- Gro bags (£2.50 each)
Tomato feed (£1.60/500ml)
- Fish blood & bone £13.50/25kg
- Fertilisers (e.g. superphosphate @ £2.30/kg)



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 a bell will be provided and the volunteers will be on-site wearing hi-vis jackets.

May Recipes

Rhubarb Vodka



A quick and easy way to preserve any surplus rhubarb. Delicious on its own or (I'm told) mixed with lemonade or a sparkling wine.

Ingredients: about 500g (1lb) of rhubarb, about 500g (1lb) of sugar, about 1 litre of vodka (the exact proportions don't matter, so you can add adjust the relative amount of fruit and sugar to suit your own taste).

Simply soak all of the ingredients and store in a cool dark place. I use 2 litre kilner jars, but any air-tight container will do. Initially the liquid will need inverting or gentle stirring every day or two to stop the sugar from setting. It is

ready to bottle (or drink!) after 3-4 weeks - when the liquid turns a pale shade of pink and the rhubarb turns a pale brown/green colour. You can leave it for much longer (up to a year) and the rhubarb taste becomes more pronounced. For a special treat add two or three vanilla pods per litre (vanilla pods are excellent value on eBay if you buy in bulk, then you can also make real custard).





Beetroot Chutney

A good 'ploughman's' style chutney that goes well with cheese or cold meats. Improves if left for a few months.

- 1kg beetroot
- 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. Pot in sterile jars.

Local Manure!

Manure is a great way of improving soil condition. The following local sources of manure were listed in the autumn 2014 edition of WHBC's Allotment News:

Raybrook Riding, Bluebridge Road, Brookmans Park, AL9 7SX. Geoff Clarke on Tel: 07716 878894: various ages of manure bagged for collection plus a "heap" which may be excavated. Parking for cars and trailers but please telephone before you arrive to check on availability. There is no charge, but donations to Horse Rescue are welcome.



Welwyn Equestrian Centre, Arnolds Farm, Pottersheath Road, Welwyn, Herts, AL6 9SZ. Tel: 01438 815491 or 07747 694215. They have two manure heaps which can be excavated for collection but you will need to supply your own bags and call the centre to notify them you are coming.

Riding for the Disabled, Rectory Road, Welwyn Garden City (opposite The Red Lion pub on the B197). Collect it yourself and make donation – the collection jars are in the common room at the corner of the stables.

Make your own...

...wigwam tops

Most gardeners accumulate pots and it can be difficult to put them all to good use. Well, they can help to make robust wigwams and are easier and quicker to assemble (and dismantle) than tying canes together. If your pots have round drainage holes you may be able to use these. Push the canes through the drainage holes and push the other end into the ground to make the perfect wigwam for growing runners and climbing beans.





Polite reminders

The mowers are provided to help members keep their plots tidy. Please empty the clippings basket return them in a clean state after use. They are one of the main expenditure items for the Committee and keeping them in good condition is in everyone's interest.

Comments and feedback

The next newsletter will be circulated in August.

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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