

April 2012

Issue 3



Earley Allotment Association Newsletter

Seasonal Tips

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Hopefully there will be warmth in the sun in the coming month, but be aware frosts still lurk.

A good sign that the soil is warm enough for outdoor sowings is the emerging weed growth. Keep hoeing to stop the weeds in their tracks.

'Early Nantes' carrots and broad beans can be sown outdoors now. Try sowing companion plants at the same time, strongly scented marigolds confuse carrot fly and whitefly; nasturtiums are decoys for blackfly.

Peas and climbing French beans can be sown directly into prepared soil now, it's not a bad idea to protect them with a cloche for a few weeks. Leave the dwarf French beans until next month.

Continue main crop planting potatoes, the earlier you get them in, the sooner you'll be harvesting them.

Plant ready grown asparagus crowns in a trench, sit crowns on a mound of soil and spread out the roots.

Beetroot can be sown in prepared beds for an early crop.

Sow tomato, squash, cucumber and courgette seeds in pots under glass in a heated propagator or a sunny windowsill to encourage quick germination.

If you have raised young plants in a greenhouse or on a windowsill, these will need to be hardened off over about two weeks before planting them out or why not bring any that are surplus to requirements to the Plant /Seed Swap in April.

Spring also brings the allotmenters worst enemy, the slugs and snails are coming out in force. So take action now, nematodes, beer traps and barriers such as grit, broken egg shells and copper strips are more environmentally friendly than pellets.

Plant/Seed Swap

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, we will be holding a Plant/Seed Swap on Saturday 21st April from 2-4pm. The marquee will be set up in the car park as usual.

If you have been busy sowing seeds for planting out, usually you end up with more than required.

If so, please bring your surplus vegetable seedlings, herbs and garden plants, clearly labelled and swap them. This is a great way to increase your stock for the forthcoming growing season and a good opportunity to try something you haven't grown before.

If you have any seeds that are surplus to requirements, you can swap them too.

There will also be some plants and seeds available for a donation to EEA funds.

Free coffee and tea and chocolate brownies will be available.

The EAA has been in existence for six months and in accordance with the constitution, a review of the progress should take place. So during the afternoon members will be asked how they think the EAA has or hasn't come up to their expectations and we will welcome any suggestions for the future, be it events or in which direction you would like to see the EAA develop

So come along and restock for the new growing season and have your say, remember the EAA is run for you.



Slugs and Snails

Slugs and snails are the number one plant pest problem.

Slugs and snails are hermaphrodite and lay spherical translucent white eggs about 2-3mm across. Eggs are laid in batches of 10-50 and can often be found in the soil, in compost heaps and other dark, damp places. Up to about 500 eggs per slug may be laid in a season.

They attack young and tender garden plants, especially annuals, perennials and vegetables, Slug and snail damage is most severe during humid periods, especially in Spring and Autumn.

Slugs and snails are soft bodied, gastropod molluscs that move along on a singular muscular foot and secrete slime. They have two sets of retractable tentacles, one pair for smell and taste and one pair for eyes. They scrape their food up with a spiky, rasping tongue. Snails tend to hibernate in the winter and are unable to move through the soil whereas slugs can be active all year round both above and below ground in all but very hot, dry or frosty weather. Snails are able to climb higher when feeding as they retreat into their shells to prevent drying out. Both slugs and snails mostly feed at night.

The most common species of slug found in gardens and allotments :-

'**Garden slug**', dark grey to black above, yellow/orange below, up to 3cm long.



'**Large black slug**', dark brown to black in colour, up to 15cm long.

Species of snail found in gardens and allotments:-

'**Garden snail**', most common, large with a grey/brown shell.



'**Strawberry snail**', small about 13mm with grey to brown flattened shell.

'**Banded snail**', shells have distinctive yellow/brown bands. Less destructive than the other two.



10 things you didn't know about the garden pea

The earliest pea is thought to have dated back to 4800BC to 4400BC.

In the mid-19th century Austrian scientist Gregor Mendel used pea plants in his genetic experiments.

Peas are a good source of vitamins A, B and C, they also contain potassium, iron and calcium.

The average pea weighs between 0.1 and 0.36 grams.

Peas are said to give relief to stomach ulcer pains because they help 'use up' stomach acids.

Pea leaves are considered a delicacy in China.

Only 5% of peas grown are sold fresh,

most are either frozen or canned.

Bioplastics can be made using pea starch.

A 100 calorie serving of peas contain more protein than a whole egg.

The pea is only green eaten because it is picked when still immature, a ripe pea is yellow in colour.

Cookery Corner

Leek and Carrot Stir-fry



A quick and tasty accompaniment to grilled chicken.

750g leeks

250g carrots

2 tbsp olive oil

1 large sprig fresh tarragon

Salt and black pepper

Discard the tough outer leaves and two thirds of the green tops from the leeks, and then slice thinly, widthways.

Place them in a colander and rinse under the cold tap, drain them well.

Peel the carrots and grate them.

Heat the oil in a wok or large frying pan over a moderate heat. Rinse and chop the tarragon.

Add the leeks to the hot oil and fry for about 2 minutes, or until they just begin to wilt.

Stir in the grated carrots and add salt, pepper and the tarragon. Continue to cook for a further 2 minutes, then serve.

Serves 4

Dealing with Drought Conditions



We have had below-average rainfall for 19 of the past 24 months and we will have a drought this year but when and how bad has yet to be seen.

A hose ban is now in force, anything you can do to save water is helpful, but our allotments need water.

Here are some water saving ideas for you to consider.

Organic matter dug in, such as garden compost, or well rotted manure improves soil structure and water retention in the soil, locking in moisture at depth where it is needed.

When planting out thoroughly water the plants beforehand. Fill the planting hole with water and allow to drain, position the plant, backfill and firm in. When planting out sink a bottomless plastic bottle next to thirsty plants such as cucumbers and courgettes so the water gets to the roots where it's needed.

Mulch a moist warm soil with a layer of

organic matter such as garden compost, well rotted manure or leaf mould, to 5cm deep, but don't let the plants come into contact with the mulch. Alternatively use mulching sheets.

Water in the cool of the evening or morning to avoid excessive evaporation.

Keep the soil of seedbeds and newly planted out crops moist until established. With established crops check the soil at a spade's depth and if it is damp then it is probably unnecessary to water.

For robust plants remove the rose from the watering can and direct the water to the base of the plant. Creating a ridge of soil around the plant can help keep the water where it's needed.

For areas un-mulched keep the moisture competing weeds down by hoeing, which is also good in drought situations, as the disturbed soil surface stops the water being sucked to the surface by capillary action and evaporating in high winds.

Bees

Albert Einstein once warned that if bees disappeared, man would have only another four years.

Bees – those little black and yellow creatures that fly around everywhere including at your allotment are at risk from a bug called Varroa, as well as changes from farming practices and land use. As a result bee numbers halved between 1985 and 2005.

This matters to you and I because plants pollinated by bees include Apples, Asparagus, Beans, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Celeriac, Cucumbers, Leeks, Onion, Parsnips, and squash. There are many more but I suspect by now I have listed some of the crops you are growing this year on your plot – bees permitting.

There is research being belatedly done to help the bees. In the meantime we can all help by planting

a small area of bee friendly plants that will help them along. Wildflowers in particular are very bee friendly as they providing a good source of nutrition for bees.

In addition choosing the right mix can act as a green manure fixing nitrogen in your soil if it includes a legume such as red clover. It will also improve the soil structure by the addition of organic matter when the



green manure is dug in.

Earley Allotment Association has sponsored the purchase of packets of bee friendly mix to the tune of ten pounds to help create bee friendly patches across the site. This will benefit the bees and everyone on the site. The mix provide contains Borage, Phacelia and Essex Broad Red Clover.

If you are interested in sparing a little bit of your plot for the bees please contact Richard Tredgett on plot 46A or by emailing tredgett@gmail.com and I will leave some seeds and sowing instructions on your plot marker.

I hope you can help the bees and yourself by finding a little space on your plot.

Richard Tredgett

Plot 46A

Annual Best Allotment Competition

Each year Earley Town Council has a Best Allotment Competition, the judges are three members of the Council Leisure committee and the previous year's winner.

The competition is open to all plot holders and judged over five months, starting in June and ending in October. The winners will receive a cup, certificate and vouchers for seeds or plants, the vouchers are donated by the HPHS shed. The cups are presented at the end of the year and are awarded in recognition of the continuity of effort and the results achieved during the previous growing season.

The four criteria that the judges are looking for are:

CROPS: Variety of fruit and vegetables

CULTIVATION: Quality of produce and lack of pests and diseases

GENERAL: Tidiness of the plot, weed control and grass cut.

GREEN: Evidence of compost production and recycling

There are two classes:- 'Best Allotment' and 'Best Improved Allotment'.

Maybe your hard work this growing season will be recognized.



Spot your plot!

Giggles



"I think," said the sweet potato, "therefore I yam."

If April showers bring May flowers what do May flowers bring? Pilgrims

What is small, red and whispers? A hoarse radish

What is a vampires favourite fruit? A neck-tarine

What's the strongest vegetable on the allotment? A muscle sprout

What flowers does everybody have on their face? Tulips

What is the skeleton's favourite vegetable? Marrow

Have you heard of the garlic diet? You don't lose much weight, but from a distance your friends think you look slimmer.

Once again the EAA Spreadsheet will be distributed with this newsletter. Feel free to add any planting plans, favourites etc. to share with other members.

Please E-mail back contributions to juliatredgett@gmail.com and she will collate and send them out with the next newsletter.

Your Committee

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