

June 2012

Issue 4



A Word from the Chair

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At last we have a few rays of welcome sunshine and don't we need it; I can hear the mowers in the distance as I write. Now, where did I put those shorts?

I have to confess that sometimes I do get a wee bit frustrated as I am now. The shed is, well giving us a shed load of problems. First it was up, then it was down and my thanks to those who chipped in to help. The setback seems to revolve around ETC and communications. We are still waiting for a short letter of approval to erect and the hard stand issues just drag on with no information forthcoming. Although, for the time being, the shed is small I feel it will be the centre of our community and the sooner it is established the sooner we become established. When we acquired the shed I volunteered to the sponsor, who also donated us a motor mower that we would like to provide him with a veggie box as a thank you. I hope you will all agree with this gesture for action later in the season.

We need a secretary. Roger, who has done an excellent job, has had to stand down. So if there are willing folks out there please get in touch. There is not a lot of work involved and at present we meet roughly every six to eight weeks. It is

an important role and we would like to fill it as soon as possible – so please think about it.

There are a couple of activities coming up for old and young alike. A scarecrow competition is being organised and the cubs (no, not fox cubs) are visiting on 28th May. More details in the newsletter.

I understand that the EAA annual BBQ is being combined with a fun veggie show later this year; details to follow. However this prompts another thought. EAA is about you, the members. I would like to build a list of members who can get involved in projects/activities on a need to be involved basis. This could be anything from contributing ideas for events, being part of a shed rota to ensuring loan equipment is maintained. I appreciate that we logged some of this information in our early days but I feel it needs to be updated. Please get on board and e-mail or 'phone me with your ideas etc. richard.holdstock@hotmail.co.uk

Tel: 0118 966-5157

I leave you with this thought: -

"What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered"

Ralph Waldo Emerson 1803-82

Deer Alert!

A deer has been spotted on the site, this is probably a muntjac deer. Muntjacs are small and stocky, 55cm to the shoulder, russet brown in summer. Bucks have long pedicles, short antlers and visible upper canines and black facial stripes from nose to pedicles. Does have a black U from forehead to the nose, but it moves too fast to see this.

Beware, it is after your crops.

Muntjacs feed on shrubs, leaves and shoots and are known to strip bark from fruit trees. Strawberry leaves seems to be the favourite at the moment, later in the year, sweet corn will be its target.

Protect your crops by covering with netting, use pea sticks or canes to provide a physical barrier, or there are liquid spray deterrents.

Good luck.



Muntjac Deer—Doe

Seasonal Tips

Sun at last, so keep up the watering especially newly transplanted young plants and flowering and fruiting crops, the ground will quickly dry out.

Frost is now unlikely, so tender courgettes, pumpkins and squashes can go outside at last.

Plant out sweet corn, avoid growing in singular rows as they require wind pollination and wont bear cobs if pollen doesn't blow from one plant to another.

Tomatoes can be planted outside now. Pinch out laterals growing from side shoots as they appear and tie in central stems to a cane. They will need weekly feeding.

Leave transplanting leeks until the end of the month.

Keep earthing up around potatoes to maximize your harvest and prevent poisonous green potatoes forming at the surface.

Continue picking sticks of rhubarb,

there should be another month or two before the harvesting period comes to an end.

Trim off strawberry runners, if the deer has left you any, as they use up energy the plant could be directing towards fruit.

Stop cutting asparagus spears to let the plant build up strength for next year. Apply pelleted chicken manure and apply a mulch.

Fill gaps in vegetable beds with fast growing lettuce, radish and beetroot. Or try Kohlrabi, seeds can be sowed now and they are ready for picking in eight or nine weeks.

Kohlrabi translates to 'turnip cabbage', it has a mild sweet flavour somewhere between a turnip and a water chestnut with a crisp crunchy texture.



What can we expect to harvest now?

After a slow start this year because of the weather, there should be broad beans if the blackfly allows and early peas available. Go over crops every few days and pick pods regularly.

Overwintered cabbage and broccoli can be cut now.

Later in the month, strawberries, well worth waiting for, check plants daily and try to catch them at the point where they have turned completely red but before they begin to go soft, to enjoy them at their sweetest and juiciest.

Carrots, if you sowed an early variety in March or April, you should be able to pull your first carrots of the year.

Last but not least—new potatoes. Early varieties such as 'Rocket', 'Accent' and 'Red Duke of York' should be ready this month, around 100-110 days after planting out.

Weather permitting as always.

Cookery Corner—two using the green gold

Asparagus and Cheese Muffins



- 12 Asparagus spears
- 400g self raising flour
- 200g cubed Cheshire cheese
- 125g butter, melted
- 1 small bunch chives, snipped
- 500ml milk
- 100ml plain yoghurt
- 1tsp English mustard
- 2 eggs, beaten
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Preheat oven to 200°C/gas 6 and line a 12 hole muffin tin with cases

Cut asparagus stems pieces into 1cm in long pieces and blanch in boiling water for two minutes. Drain and refresh under cold running water, separating the tips from the pieces of stem.

Mix flour and cubes of cheese in a large bowl.

Add chives, milk, yoghurt, mustard and eggs to melted butter, stir. Season with salt and pepper.

Gently fold the wet ingredients into the flour and cheese and stir through the asparagus pieces. Be careful not to over mix and stop as soon as the mixture is combined.

Spoon the mixture evenly into the muffin cases. Bake for 25-30 minutes until golden. Best eaten hot, spread with butter.

This unusual recipe comes from a wacky hotel in Evesham, the home of asparagus.

Asparagus Ice cream

It is good with anything smoked, or served with parmesan biscuits, but it is equally good on its own, for its unique flavour.

- 1.5 pints milk
- 12 egg yolks, beaten
- 200 g sugar
- Half a pint of cream
- 500g asparagus

Cook asparagus in salted water, retain tips and purée the remainder.

Bring the milk to the boil and pour onto the egg yolks and sugar, return to the saucepan and cook until the mixture thickens, add the asparagus purée and tips and cream, cool. Churn in an ice-cream maker.

Scarecrow competition

As a bit of fun, it has been decided to hold a scarecrow competition this year. The competition will be open to all plot holders and their children/grandchildren.

Your scarecrow can be traditional or a themed scarecrow

ie Jubilee or Olympics

If you wish to enter, e-mail your plot number to

linda.pelling@ntlworld.com

If the scarecrow is to be totally made by a child, please include the child's age, this can then be taken into consideration when judging.



Guidelines for making your scarecrow:

- They should be made from scratch.
- They should be a maximum height of 1.8m.
- They can be male or female.
- They can be standing or sitting.
- They should include some plant material and show evidence of recycling.
- You may use props or accessories to enhance your scarecrow
- You can give your scarecrow a name.

The scarecrows should be in place on your plot by the evening of Saturday 14th July ready for the judging on the following day, Sunday 15th July.

There are plenty of ideas and instructions for making scarecrows on the internet, so have fun.

Pests

Asparagus Beetle - *Crioceris asparagi*

In May and June these black beetles 6-8mm long with six yellow blotches on their wing cases emerge from old stems they have over-wintered in.

They will start to eat the foliage and bark of the asparagus causing the stems to dry out and turn yellowish brown.



The beetles lay elongated black eggs attached at one end and sticking out at right angles to the asparagus spears and foliage.



The creamy greyish-black larvae will feed on the asparagus foliage and bark too. When the larvae are 10mm long they are fully grown and will go into the soil to pupate. Between May and September there are two generations and in the autumn the adult beetles find old stems to over-winter in.

To combat the beetles and larvae make sure old stems are burnt at the end of the year to destroy over-wintering beetles. Hand-picking the beetles, larvae and eggs when seen on the plants should be enough to keep allotment-sized plantings in good health.

Black Bean Aphid - *Aphis fabae*

This 2mm long aphid is commonly



known as blackfly although it isn't actually a fly.

It is usually black but can be dark olive green or purple. The fly is found in the spring on broad beans, French beans and peas and can seriously reduce plant growth and seed production covering the plant with a sooty mould as the ants suck the sugary juice from the plants.



The aphid survives the winter in the egg stage on the spindle bush as well as on field beans, docks, and fat hen. Female nymphs emerge in March and April and fly to the summer host plants. Female adults lay up to 5 live young a day and these are ready to lay within 14 days.

How to make liquid feeds

As well as being more economic, if you make your own liquid feed you can be sure that they are 100% organic.

I suppose the classic organic liquid feed is **Comfrey Feed**.



Comfrey

Simply steep comfrey leaves in water in a plastic bin with a lid, weighing down the leaves with a brick for 10-14 days. When it starts to really stink then it's ready. Draw off the liquid, dilute 1 part concentrate to 3 parts water, it should be the colour of tea.

Comfrey concentrate

Harvest comfrey leaves from established plants, the hairy leaves

can be a skin irritant, so wear gloves. Remove flowers and tough stems then chop up the leaves and pack tightly in a plastic bin with a lid, weigh down the leaves as above. Preferably the bin should have a tap or hole in the bottom to draw off the resulting liquid. The comfrey leaves decompose slowly producing a thick brown liquid after 2-3 weeks. Dilute 1 part comfrey liquid 10-15 parts water.

Comfrey leaves are an excellent source of potassium essential for flowers and fruit to set. Use for tomatoes, peppers, and courgettes beans.

Nettle Feed, the same method for comfrey feed can be followed, this makes an all purpose nutrient feed. Remember to collect nettles only from shaded areas because butterflies, ladybirds and lots of other insects lay their eggs on stinging nettles for their larvae to eat. Insects require the warmth of the sun, they won't lay eggs in the shade.

You can also make a liquid feed using the same method with leaves of bracken, clover, borage, chicory and strawberries.

Weed Feed, perennial weeds can be a problem if added to the compost pile but if they are rotted down in a barrel of water first they pose no problem and the water they have been rotted down in can be used as a liquid feed. Follow the above method and drain off the liquid after 10 – 14 days.

Liquid Manure, suspend a sack or pillow case filled with well rotted animal manure, some comfrey leaves and bonfire ash can be added, in a barrel of rainwater. Leave it covered for 10 days, give it a stir and squash the sack before removing. The resultant liquid should be diluted to the colour of weak tea. The sack can be suspended in the barrel a second time resulting in a weaker solution. The contents of the sack can be used to line a vegetable trench or as a mulch.

Committee News

On 15th May your committee held a meeting, the following is a précis of the proceedings.

Roger Bonham has had to stand down from the committee and the post of secretary due to health issues. We wish him well. We hope to fill the vacancy in the near future.

The committee welcomed Sandra Christopherson, who is to help Derek with financial matters.

The recent seed/plant swap was reviewed, thanks to all who grew plants and donated seeds for the event, these were eagerly snapped up and there were even some left over. It was agreed that we were unlucky with the weather and I believe that a football match did not help with the attendance either.

Gate security was discussed, Richard

will send out an e-mail to all plot holders regarding this important issue.

Items for the June newsletter were discussed; a scarecrow competition to involve plot holders children, articles on pests and making liquid feeds as well as the usual seasonal tips. Contributions appreciated.

Derek Smith asked if the EAA would be interested in holding a Cub Night on Monday 28th May in the evening.

The 71st (Anderson) Reading Cub pack will arrive about 6.30pm, half will undertake a quiz and the other half will help sowing, planting and weeding on the designated allotments, hopefully about five cubs per plot. Then the roles will be reversed and hopefully by the end of the evening, the Cubs will have gained a basic knowledge of vegetable growing.

This seemed an excellent way of introducing youngsters to the world of allotments as well as getting some willing hands to help on the plots.

Best Allotment **Award** 2012, ETC decided to change the name because it is not a competition. Judging starts in June.

The BBQ scheduled for Saturday 1st September was discussed. As well as 'Best Vegetable', 'Tallest Sunflower' and 'Biggest Sunflower Seed head' already announced, we could maybe add some cookery categories - i.e. carrot cake, potato salad.

If any members have any ideas that they would like to see included in this event, please contact any member of the committee.

Remember, the EAA is there for it's members—you.