

August 2013

Issue 11



Earley Allotment Association Newsletter

EAA News

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After a slow start, it's all happening and keeping on top of the weeds is a full time job! Not to mention the watering.

The site has been a blaze of colour over the last two months. It's nice to see plot holders making room for flowers as well as vegetables and most of the flowers are self seeded.



There has not been much interest in a **free** group visit to Wisley that is part of EAA's membership as an RHS Affiliated Society.

I have checked with the RHS what their interpretation of a group is. The reply, 'any number up to 55', but only one group booking per year. One proviso is if we arrive in separate cars, we will have to meet up first in the car park and enter as one group. All dates are available.

If anybody is interested in a visit during the next three months, please let me know at linda.pelling@ntlworld.com or by dropping a note in the honesty box on the shed.

The **AGM** is nearly on us again, usually early October, date TBC. Nomination forms for committee members will be sent out nearer the date. They will also include a space for Resolutions to be raised at the AGM. Come along and have your say, all members welcome.

Scarecrows

There was an eclectic mix of scarecrows and a few interlopers on show by 20th July, judging day.

Unfortunately John Snow was indisposed and Tony's daughter, Julia, her husband, Trevor and daughter Natalie, stood in as judges at short notice.

After much consideration the Best Scarecrow sash was awarded to Plot 20, Ann Bowen Jones (centre), with Plot38a, Liz Debbonaire (centre left) the runner up rosette. Well done to everybody for their efforts.

Want to see the scarecrows and allotments on film? Liz Kerry (p60) recently entered the Reading Fringe Festival's 48hr Film Competition. Her entry The Pink Trombone was placed 4th. Very well done Liz.

Follow the link [Ctrl + .fb.me/O8QNWTNk](http://Ctrl+.fb.me/O8QNWTNk) to view the film.



Seasonal Tips

August is soft fruit time. Bird netting is a must, check for holes, the birds will find them.



The summer strawberries have all but finished but the 'everbearers' will be taking over. Plant out any rooted runners for a good crop next year.

Remove fruited canes of summer raspberries at ground level and tie in new growth.

Prune cordon or espalier apple or pear trees by cutting the new growth back to a couple of buds. Cherry or plum trees can also be pruned now.

Keep picking peas and beans to

ensure a long season.

Continue to remove the side shoots from tomatoes, they seem to appear overnight and continue feeding.

Sweetcorn is ready for picking when the tassels turn brown and a milky liquid appears when the kernels are punctured.

Runner beans not setting? It could be the hot weather, night time temperatures in excess of 16°C, inhibit the germination of pollen grains, interrupting the pollination and fruit-set process. Cropping should resume once the nights start to cool down. Spraying flowers does not help.

Plant second cropping potatoes now for new potatoes at Christmas. Plant in pots or bags which can be brought under cover before the first frosts.

Make a late sowing of turnip, carrot, spinach, radish, lettuce and pak choi to last through to Autumn.

Sow green manures on ground where the crop has been harvested,

to help replenish the fertility of the soil. Hungarian grazing rye locks nitrogen into the soil, has deep, extensive roots that break up clay soil and looks lovely in winter, a lush bed of green. It doesn't mind the snow and its only drawback is that you have to wait two weeks after digging in in spring before you can sow (a seed germination inhibitor is released as it breaks down).

Field beans, vetches and crimson clover are especially good for thin, hungry soils. Dig them in in spring, before they flower. Buckwheat is fast growing and stores phosphorus in its leaves. It has a deep root system and plenty of top growth, but will be smashed flat by the first frost. Leave it be, where it will act as mulch.

Keep an eye out for potato and tomato blight if weather damp occurs. Remove and destroy any affected plants immediately to prevent its spread.

Lastly, weed, weed, weed and water, water, water!

Cookery Corner - Chocolate Beetroot Cupcakes



Cooked beetroot is a source of folic acid, vitamins A, B6 and C, good for boosting stamina. Just three baby beetroot = one of your 5 a day. Borsch is the obvious use for beetroot, but try this cupcake recipe, it's wonderfully fudgy and moist.

Ingredients

75g/2½oz cocoa powder
180g/6½oz plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
250g/8½oz caster sugar
250g/8½oz cooked beetroot
3 large eggs
200ml/7fl oz corn oil
1 tsp vanilla extract

Icing sugar for dusting

Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C/355°F/ Gas 4
2. Arrange 12 paper cases in a muffin tin.

3. Place the cocoa powder, flour and baking powder into a bowl, stir in sugar.
4. Purée the beetroot in a food processor. Add the eggs, one at a time, then add the vanilla and oil. Blend until smooth.
5. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients and add the beetroot mixture and lightly mix.
6. Pour into muffin cases and bake for 30 minutes or until the top is firm when pressed with a finger.
7. Cool on a wire rack, the dust with icing sugar.

Potato Tasting Trials

There have been two Potato tasting trials held this year so far, the winner of the first was overwhelmingly Lady Christl. The second trial produced a tie with Mozart and Pink Fir the winners.

In the first trial five varieties were cooked - Lady Christl, Foremost, Charlotte, Swift and Purple Emperor.

The tasters were both children and adults and the winner scored the highest marks both for flavour and texture.



The second trial was not so decisive, only four varieties this time - Mozart, Lady Cristl, Pink Fir and Desiree.

Pink Fir was the winner for flavour, but Mozart won on texture, both scoring the same overall.

It also emerged over the two trials that there was a difference in texture whether the potatoes were steamed or boiled. Lady Cristl, the winner in the first trial was not so good three weeks later when they were larger.

Conclusions:-

For an early potato, Lady Crystl, but be warned, apparently this variety sells out very quickly from the suppliers, so get the orders in early.

For a salad potato, Pink Fir Apple.

For boiling and mashing, Mozart



Forthcoming Events



The BBQ this year will be held on **Saturday 7th September, 12.30 - 3pm** at Culver Lane Allotments

All Plot Holders, Friends and Main Helpers are welcome.

The marquee will be sited in the car park and the BBQ's, 1 meat, 1 vegetarian, plates, cutlery and tumblers will be provided. Please bring what you would like to eat and drink and a salad or sweet to share. Picnic tables and chairs will be useful.

Free to EAA members and children, non-members £1.

There will be three competitions especially for children, a **Tallest and Broadest Headed Sunflower** and a **Funniest Shaped Fruit or Vegetable**, with prizes in all categories.

Again this year, there will be Competitions for the **Best Fruit or Vegetable** and **Items using Plot Produce**, such as jam, wine or cakes.

All entries should be in place by **1.30pm**, and everyone can take part in the voting that will commence at **2pm**. Everyone present can have a chance of voting for the two classes of Best in Show and the Funniest Shaped fruit or vegetable.

There will be a display board with photographs of the allotments through the year, if you have any why not bring them along and add

Cub Night - Monday 16th September at 6.30pm

The cubs from the 72nd Reading (Anderson) Cub pack will be visiting the allotments again this year. There will be about 30 cubs.

They were divided into groups last year, one group helped plot holders, another group did a quiz and the others went on a bug hunt.

Perhaps we could come up with something different this year, any suggestions?

Are there any plot holders that would like some help from the cubs that evening? Weeding, picking beans etc. just to give them an idea of what an allotment is all about.

If you wish to volunteer your plot, please contact any committee member.

The Nettle - Friend or Foe?

Most plots have a clump of nettles, it spreads by means of seeds and underground rhizomes that creep around just under the soil. It prefers a soil rich in phosphates and nitrogen, so a clump of nettles can indicate that your soil is in good condition.



The stinging structure of the nettle is very similar to the hypodermic needle in that each sting is a hollow hair stiffened by silica with a swollen base that contains the venom. The tip of this hair is very brittle and when brushed against, no matter how lightly, it breaks off exposing a sharp point that penetrates the skin and delivers its sting.

Remember when stung a natural remedy will often be found close at hand. The leaves of the dock contain chemicals that neutralise the sting and also cool the skin. So allow the dock to grow where there are nettles.

The stinging nettle is one of the most important native plants for wildlife in the UK, they can give you a nasty sting but they are worth keeping for a variety of reasons.

The nettle supports over 40 species of insect including some of our most colourful butterflies.

The stinging hairs on the nettle developed as a defence against grazing animals. This makes the ideal habitat for insects as there is little danger of adult insects or larvae being eaten by grazers. Insects can also move between the spines without activating the sting.

The most notable nettle patch inhabitants are the Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterfly larvae which feed in large groups hidden in silken tents at the top of nettle stems.



Many nettle patches hold overwintering aphids which swarm around the fresh spring growth and provide an early food source for ladybirds. These aphids are in turn eaten in large numbers by Blue Tits and other birds agile enough to dart around the stems.

Nutritionally the nettle is an excellent source of calcium, magnesium, iron and numerous trace elements as well as a range of vitamins. The young shoots can be used in soups and stews and in place of spinach. Not forgetting the delicious nettle tea, it is reputed to help combat several ailments, including eczema, asthma, hay fever and muscle aches. Just steep a few fresh tips in boiling water, removing them when the water goes slightly green, to avoid bitterness. To serve, add a slice of lemon.

Cloth has been woven from the fibres in mature nettle stems for many centuries. Being similar in texture to those materials using flax and hemp fibres.

The cloth also became widely used by the German army during the First World War when there was a shortage of cotton for the soldiers' uniforms.

The juice of the stems and leaves has been used to produce a permanent green dye, while a yellow dye can be obtained from boiling the roots.

Perhaps the best use of nettles in the garden is as a plant food that can be easily brewed. As well as providing a rich supply of minerals to your garden plants, if sprayed over foliage it deters pest species and prevent fungal diseases.

Nettle leaves are also a great addition to the compost heap, being rich in nitrogen, they provide the fuel for the bacteria to break down the more woody material in the heap.

So is a clump of nettles a welcome addition to the garden? If kept to the back of the plot out of the way, plus a few docks just in case, why not.

And finally!

