

December 2013

Issue 13



EAA News

The second **Annual General Meeting** was held on Tuesday 8th October.

As well as the existing committee, this year a new member, Dionne Tannetta, was welcomed.

The first decision taken by the new committee was that the fees for the 2014 would be **zero** for existing members, but a joining fee of £4 would be payable by new members.

It was also decided not to renew the membership to the RHS Affiliated Societies, it was felt that there was no benefit to being a member and there was little or no interest shown by EAA members for the free visit to Wisley.

Business out of the way, gardening knowledge was tested with a quiz, which was won by Sue Clarke, plot 19. This was followed by refreshments - cheese and wine, very 1960's and a raffle. Thank you to those who attended.

Events scheduled for next year - the Plant Swap/sale will be held April/May, trying to avoid Easter and school holidays. Following this there will be an ongoing sale of donated excess plants as last year, this was very successful and a good way of stocking the plots at very little cost.

There will be a scarecrow competition to be judged on Saturday 26th July, theme to be announced. The annual BBQ is scheduled for Saturday 6th September, with the AGM on Tuesday 7th October. Watch the notice board for other events that might be added.

May I take this opportunity on behalf of the committee to wish all members a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

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Best Allotment Award

Earley Town Council announced the winner of the 'Best Allotment Award 2013' in November.

The accolade this year went to Jason Waters, plot 12, I am sure you will agree, a well deserved winner. His plot is an example of vegetables and flowers growing happily together.

The award for the 'Best Improved Allotment' went to John Littlefair, plot 19. As he and Sue only took over the plot in July, this was no mean feat, they have both worked extremely hard.

Both these plots make use of defined growing areas with chipping paths in between in their layouts.

What are the benefits of laying out a plot in this way?

Being able to grow a wider range of plants on difficult soils or where a plant requires a specific pH as you can change the soil mix inside the boxed area.

Allows the soil to warm quicker in spring and bringing forward the vegetable growing season.

No compacting of soil around plants because no walking on the soil.

Higher yields and less weeding as plants are planted closer together.

Pest control – Slugs and snails do not like crawling across chipping or grit paths to get to plants.

They look neater (that's the woman talking)

Let us know of your experiences.

Seasonal Tips

December is a month for housekeeping. Out on the plot, there's not much to do except digging and mulching, and winter pruning fruit trees, bushes, and vines.

Dig in plenty of manure and compost to areas where it is needed, to enrich the soil.

Cover beds with black plastic to suppress weeds and help to warm your soil ready for early crops next year.

Harvest the last of the carrots, turnips, kohlrabi, and any remaining beetroot. They can be stored if necessary. Celeriac and parsnips can stay in the ground if there's no risk of their being "frozen in", though

a mulch of straw or bracken will help protect them.

Leeks should be ready. Just take what you need and leave the rest to stand until required. Leeks are much better harvested from the garden as they are required, but in severe weather this can be difficult. You can lift a few and heel them in on well dug ground.

Earth up Brussels sprout stems if they have become unsteady. Wildlife will be on the lookout for food, so make sure nets are secure, to stop pigeons eating the brassicas.

If you have a greenhouse then do spend time now, if you haven't already done so, insulating it. It is easy to get bubble wrap free and it

really does make quite a difference.

Check on stored the fruit and vegetables. Remember that one bad fruit or vegetable can destroy the whole crop if it's not removed quick enough.

Finally, have a review of the year on your allotment – if things have been successful then do grow them again, if not do it differently next time – gardening is very forgiving! The weather plays a very important role in how things grow, or maybe seeds were sowed too early, too close together, or maybe a drought means fewer runner beans and fruit.

Don't forget to order seeds for next season, a bit of fireside gardening is what is needed now!

Edible Christmas Gifts

Nigella's Beetroot and Ginger Chutney



This recipe is enough for 6x250ml sealable jars

Ingredients:

500g beetroot, peeled & chopped
1kg cooking apples, chopped
275g red onion, chopped
2.5cm piece fresh ginger, grated
75g crystallised stem ginger
350g soft light brown sugar
1 tsp. Maldon salt
1tsp ground allspice
750ml red wine vinegar

Method:

- 1 Place the beetroot and onion in a large pan.
- 2 Add the fresh ginger, chopped crystallised ginger, brown sugar, salt and ground allspice.
- 3 Add the vinegar and stir to mix well.
- 4 bring to the boil, turn down the heat and simmer for approx. one hour, stirring now and again, until the beetroot is tender.
- 5 Spoon into sterilised jars and seal. Keep refrigerated and use within four weeks.

Homemade Chilli Oil



You will need 2x250ml sealable bottles

Ingredients:

450ml olive oil (not virgin)
20g dried red chilli flakes
3-4 whole dried red chilli

Method:

- 1 Gently warm the olive oil in a saucepan. Add the chilli flakes and whole chilli's and heat for 3-4 minutes. Remove from the heat and leave the oil to cool slightly.
- 2 When the oil has cooled slightly, carefully pour into sterilised, sealable glass bottles using a funnel. Add the chilli flakes and dried chilli's from the pan. Seal the bottle.
- 3 Keep the bottles in a cool, dark place, shaking the bottle once a week. As time goes on the oil will become redder and hotter.