

February 2013

Issue 8



## EAA News

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Happy New Year to all members from your committee.

Well, what can be said about last year on the plot? The wet weather played havoc with the crops, that is the ones the deer didn't eat. ETC have no control over the weather but have been busy putting up extra fencing when possible access points have been identified. The deer are still around, so if you see any evidence of Derek and Doris coming on to the plot, please contact your plot rep. at - [david.pelling1@ntlworld.com](mailto:david.pelling1@ntlworld.com) and he will request more fencing.

At the AGM, the advantages of the EAA becoming an RHS Affiliated Society was discussed. It was agreed to delay the decision on joining until the start of the new subscription year, which is now.

The RHS Affiliated Societies scheme supports nearly 3,000 gardening clubs and societies throughout the UK and overseas.

The benefits of joining include: a free annual visit to an RHS garden for up to

55 members, a monthly magazine, gardening advice and a medal and certificate to award for our annual show.

There is also an optional benefit of reduced price entry cards to RHS gardens, a 30% reduction, making the entry to Wisley £8, the other gardens £6.

The committee will be deciding on this issue next Tuesday 5th February, if you think this is a good idea, please e-mail me with your comments before then at: [linda.pelling@ntlworld.com](mailto:linda.pelling@ntlworld.com) It would help with our decision if we knew what the members think.

Following my episode on the allotment before Christmas, when an ambulance had difficulty finding the site. The address and post code are:-

Culver Lane Allotments  
Blackthorn Close  
Earley  
RG6 1DH

## Potato Tasting Trial

Yes, it's time to think about potatoes again, which variety, earlies or maincrop, reds or whites?

Would you like to take part in a potato tasting trial?

So when you have decided on your seed potatoes, e-mail me at [linda.pelling@ntlworld.com](mailto:linda.pelling@ntlworld.com) stating the varieties you are planting and your plot number and you will be included in the trial later in the year.

There will be two or three different trials to coincide with the lifting of the varieties.

The trials will take place at the allotments where the potatoes will be cooked and everybody can score them for taste and texture.

This isn't a very scientific trial as the potatoes will be grown under varying conditions, but it gives plot holders a chance to taste different varieties and get together.



## Unusual Veg - a personal experience

When I first began to grow vegetables in a small patch at the bottom of my garden, someone suggested that it was not worth growing common vegetables because by the time yours were ready they would be plentiful and very cheap in the shops. I disagreed with this as my main reason for growing my own is the flavour, you cannot buy a carrot or a runner bean in a shop which has the flavour of one that you have just picked.

Now that I have an allotment and plenty of space to grow whatever I like I have ventured into the world of the more unusual vegetable, with varying degrees of success.

The first one I tried was celeriac an odd looking root vegetable with the flavour of celery. The first year I grew it I had a good crop of good sized roots and we enjoyed it in mash, salads and in soups. Since then it has been a different story, the next two years I had very poor germination giving me a very poor crop and this year the germination was good but the roots are very small, in fact so small they are not worth harvesting. I shall give it one more go this year.

My second vegetable was Kohl Rabi. I had a good crop but was not quite sure what to do with it. It was ready at a very busy time, what with going on holiday, harvesting other crops, and all the other jobs needing to be done in the garden and on the allotment I did not have time to find out how to use it and the crop was wasted. I have now researched it on line and see that it can be used in lots of different ways in fact Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

is a great fan, so maybe I shall try it again.

My third try, Asparagus Pea, was another one that I should have researched before growing but having seen it growing on a stand at Chelsea Flower Show it was so pretty ( anyone who has seen my allotment knows I like pretty) I just had to give it a go. Very easy to grow, I had good plants plenty of beautiful flowers but was not sure when to pick the pods. I tried when they were about 1.5 ins. long and they were completely inedible, I now know they should be picked when about 1ins and no longer. From my crop I think it would be quite hard to get a yield big enough for a meal if picking them at that size. I think I will try one more time as even if I do not get a good harvest they are good nitrogen fixing plants so will do the soil some good..

There are lots of unusual veg. out there well worth trying, but I would recommend that you do your research before and not like me after you have grown them. One year on a request from my grand daughter I grew popcorn, very good crop but only the first corns successfully popped, I still need to find out when to harvest for the best pop, if anyone knows the answer please let me know. With grand children in mind a seriously good plant to grow is the alpine strawberry, fruiting all summer long never enough to say you must save them until tea time just pick and eat while working on the allotment, which is really what it is all about.

Many thanks to Sandra Christopherson for this article.

## Cookery Corner

Leeks seem to be one of the few vegetables that didn't suffer too much from the rain last year and if you were lucky and they didn't get attacked by leek moth, you should have reasonable supply of these green and white batons.

This recipe is very easy and quick and makes a change from using leeks as a vegetable accompaniment.

### Oven-baked leek and bacon risotto - Serves 4

1 tbsp. olive oil

6 rashers smoked back bacon, roughly chopped

2 leeks, halved lengthwise and sliced

250g risotto rice

70ml hot chicken stock

175g frozen peas

3 tbsp. soft cheese

Zest of 1 lemon

Heat oven to 200°/180°C fan/gas 6.

Heat the oil in an ovenproof casserole dish over a medium heat, add bacon and fry for 2minutes. Add the leeks and cook until soft, but not coloured, for about 4-5 minutes. Add rice and cook for 1 minute more.

Pour over stock, cover and place in the oven for 20 minutes, stirring halfway through.

When rice is just tender and all the liquid has been absorbed, remove from oven and stir in peas. Return to the oven for 2 minutes more.

Remove from oven and stir in the cheese and add zest of lemon and season.



## Seasonal Tips

For this months seasonal tips, I have reproduced an article from the Ministry of Agriculture Allotment and Garden Guide dated February 1945. I think you will agree that is it still relevant today.

*‘Never work the soil when it is too wet and sticky and clings in lumps to your boots. You do more harm than good by walking on it and working it when it is like that. And that applies also to sowing seeds, for seeds sown in cold, wet soil will rot instead of germinating, or they will make but poor growth.*

*Remember the importance of Crop Rotation (see below). If you can settle down to do a bit of thinking and planning and plotting things out on paper, it may save you a headache in the months ahead.*

*If you haven't ordered your **Seed Potatoes**, do so at once. As soon as they reach you, set them up to sprout*

*(rose end uppermost) in shallow boxes in a cool (though frost-proof), dry shed, where they can get plenty of light and produce the short, sturdy shoots that make for earliness and high yield. Don't let them get even slightly chilled, for that's enough to kill the "eyes".*

*Perhaps if the weather is suitable, you will be sowing **Broad Beans** (unless black fly has broken your heart!) and **Spinach** in February—and planting **Shallots** and **Jerusalem Artichokes** (if you like them). Have you got these items or ordered them? If not, get busy. And if you have planned all you are going to grow this season, order all your requirements right away from your seedsman or nurseryman.'*

That's the beauty of vegetable growing, over 65 years later, the advise is still the same, except you can read 'internet' or HPHS shed for seedsman.

## Crop Rotation

Why bother with crop rotation? Keeping vegetables growing in the same place for more than two years will eventually result in lack of productivity. Different plants use up different nutrients at different rates and pests and diseases specific to individual crops will have a chance to build up in the soil.

What's the basic idea of crop rotation? To prepare the soil for the specific needs of the vegetables and avoid repeat plantings. Green manures are also useful on bare ground over winter to prevent nutrients being leached from the soil and to add humus and if of the pea family to fix nitrogen in the soil.

### Year 1

**Plot 1** - Manure in the spring making the soil a little acid which potatoes like and add humus to retain nutrients and water. Grow Potatoes followed by green manure such as mustard that kills potato soil pests in the same season.

**Plot 2** – Test the pH of soil and lime in early spring if necessary. Grow Peas and Beans that will fix nitrogen in the soil and prepare the soil for Brassicas.

**Plot 3** – Add a layer of manure in the autumn to add nitrogen and humus and cover to stop leaching. Fork over in the spring and test pH, adding lime if necessary. Grow Brassicas.

**Plot 4** – Grow any other crop preparing the ground to the crop's specific needs.

**Plot 5** - Add compost in autumn or spring rather than manure that can make roots fork. Grow roots and onions.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Plot 1	Potatoes	Peas & Beans	Brassicas	Others	Roots &
Plot 2	Peas & Beans	Brassicas	Others	Roots & Onions	Potatoes
Plot 3	Brassicas	Others	Roots & Onions	Potatoes	Peas & Beans
Plot 4	Others	Roots & Onions	Potatoes	Peas & Beans	Brassicas
Plot 5	Roots & Onions	Potatoes	Peas & Beans	Brassicas	Others

## Plot Fees

There have been some questions arising regarding the increase in plot fees. This is an extract from a reply from the Town Clerk in response to a similar request that he had received.

*“The reason why the town Council has decided to increase the fees is because, at the moment, the allotment rents collected do not cover the cost of maintaining the allotments and, therefore, the council is subsidising allotment holders at approximately one third of the annual cost. This council has not increased Band D Council Tax for at least two years and, therefore, the cost of services has to be received from other means.*

*I should point out that the income received reflects full occupancy of the allotments at Culver Lane, and, indeed, this Council has a waiting list. At the moment differential rates are charged for existing tenants and new tenants, the discount for existing tenants amounting to approximately 13% for an 8-pole plot. The aim is, over a five year period, to increase the fees for existing tenants to that of the new tenant level so while increases are made on both of these tariffs, the fee for existing tenants has been increased above the level of inflation.*

*The Town Council does take the view that at £41 per annum for existing tenants for an 8-pole plot represents good value for money and the proposed increase for 2014 to £45 is not an unreasonable charge.”*

## HPHS News

The Shed has opened again.

Available are Onion sets at £1 per 500gm and Shallots at £1.25 per 500 gm.

There are also bulk pea and bean seeds sold by weight and packets of Suttons and Fothergills seeds.

Seed potatoes will be available from the second week of January, weather permitting.

Earlies - Pentland Javelin, Arran Pilot and Foremost

Maincrop - King Edward, Majestic, Pentland Crown and Desiree

Salad - Charlotte **All £2.30 per 3 kilos**

Organic fertilizer is available in 60ltr bags.

Environmesh is now available in packs at £11, elsewhere £15 plus.

Don't forget to renew your Membership fee, £1 per annum.

## Festive Seed Swap

This was held in December at the Allotments.

For once the weather was kind to us, mild and no rain.

For those that attended, there was a warm welcome in the shape of a cup of vegetable soup, prepared by Liz Kerry from vegetables from the allotment, very tasty. A big thank you to Liz, it was much appreciated by all.

There was a large assortment of seeds available, flowers as well as

vegetables, even some dahlia tubers. A fair number of seeds changed hands and hopefully, the left over seeds will be sown and sold as plants at our Spring Plant Sale.

There was also mulled wine, mince pies and tea and coffee available.

A competition to guess the 'number of beans in the jar' was won by Peter Wynn with his guess of 130, the actual number was 159. Peter won a tin of Celebrations.

A pleasant afternoon.

## Christmas Meal at the Roebuck

With a name like that, it was a very apt venue for our Christmas Meal.

Eleven plot holders enjoyed this festive get together. The food was very nicely cooked, well presented and portions were large.

Afterwards, some of us gave a rendition of Carols and seasonal tunes on 'penny whistles' that were in the crackers.

Hilarious Fun!