

October 2013

Issue 12



Earley Allotment Association Newsletter

EAA News

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The second **Annual General Meeting** will be held at the Parish Room, Radstock Lane, Tuesday 8th October, 7.30pm

The Nomination/Resolution forms were sent out last month but there were not any completed forms received by the 28th September. This was disappointing, as the EAA is run for its members.

After the official business, there will be cheese and wine (non alcoholic alternatives available) as well as tea and coffee. There will be a quiz and a raffle.



As has been mentioned before, there is available to the EAA as a RHS Affiliated Society, a **FREE** visit per year to Wisley is included for the members.

The year is galloping away, how about we take advantage of the free visit on Saturday 9th November, to see the late Autumn colour. Suggest travelling in separate cars and meeting up to go in.

The Annual BBQ was held in September. Thank you to those that attended and for the photographs depicting 'A Year on the Plot', they made a good display. See report on page 3. One thing was left behind after the BBQ, a serving spoon, owner wanted.

Thank you to everybody who donated their excess produce for the 'Town Meal', your contributions will go towards feeding 1000 people in Forbury Gardens on Saturday 5th October. See notice board for details.

This month sees the final visit to the allotment by the judging panel of the 'Best Allotment Award'. The winners will be announced in November.

Cub Night

This year again Culver Lane Allotments played host to the 72nd Reading (Anderson) Cub pack on Monday 16th September.

Twenty one boys and girls attended, they were divided into three groups, each taking it in turn to go on a bug hunt, build a bug hotel, so the bugs had somewhere to hibernate and help on members plots with a variety of tasks.

The cubs threw themselves into the tasks and appeared to enjoy themselves, whether it was harvesting the crops, weeding or assembling the bug hotel, even though more straw was thrown at each other than ended up in between the pallets.

Hopefully this event can be repeated next year.



Anderson Bug Hotel

Seasonal Tips

The plot shows no sign of slowing down, the late start and the good summer has extended the season .

There are still beans, both runners and French, sweet corn, cabbages and carrots on plots.

Keep a watch on the weather forecast and cover anything still cropping with fleece, if there is a threat of plunging temperatures.

Keep pumpkin and squashes on the plant as long as possible, but cut them **before** the first frosts or they will quickly turn mushy.

Lift any remaining main crop potatoes now to minimise slug damage.

Root crops that remain in the ground over winter, parsnips, turnips and swede, insulate with a layer of straw to make lifting easier.

Pick apples and pears, if needed to be stored, they can be wrapped individually in paper and placed in crates or on shelves in a cool, frost free, but not too dry place.

After a slow start, the autumn raspberries are good this year and they will keep cropping until the first frosts.

For those who want **more** rhubarb, now is the time to divide the crowns.

Autumn planted garlic often gives better yields than a spring planted crop.

Garlic needs at least 30 nights below 10°C for the cloves to form.

Hardneck or Softneck

Hardneck garlic generally has fewer cloves but a stronger flavour and sends up a flower stalk.

Softneck garlic has smaller cloves, less likely to produce flower stems, but stores for longer.



Beware of Allium Leaf Miner on autumn planted garlic, it is a good idea to cover with Environmesh until spring. Keep garlic well weeded.

The other favourite to sow now is Broad Beans. '**Aquadulce Claudia**' and '**The Sutton**' are both hardy and can be sown now. The former make tall plants that require staking while the Sutton are a dwarf variety (45cm).

Mice are a problem, they find the beans irresistible. A thick layer of holly leaves or tightly secured netting might deter them.

If the beans fail to germinate or the young shoots are eaten by slugs, another batch can be sown in the Spring,

Re-use grow bags. Remove the spent summer crops and cut away a wide strip plastic from the top leaving an open topped container, top up with more compost. Sow winter salad mix, land cress or oriental veg like mizuna or pak choi. Add liquid feed when watering every so often.

Spinach, Courgette & Feta Muffins

Following requests from those who tasted these delicious muffins at the BBQ, Lara (plot 37) has kindly shared her recipe.



Ingredients:

200g spinach
300g self raising flour
2 eggs
125g butter, melted
250ml milk
100g feta cheese, crumbled
1/2 courgette grated
Pinch or two paprika
Pinch or two Cayenne pepper
(spices really to taste, some may just prefer a little zing)

Method:

- 1 Heat oven to 180°C/Gas Mk 4
- 2 Place spinach in a heat proof bowl.
- 3 Pour boiling water over spinach and stand for 1 minute.

- 4 Drain and cool and squeeze out as much water as possible and chop
- 5 Sift flour into mixing bowl
- 6 Whisk eggs and milk together and add to flour along with melted butter.
- 7 Fold mixture together with spinach, feta, courgettes and spices.
- 8 Spoon into greased muffin tray and bake for 20 minutes
- 9 Cool in tray for 5 minutes after baking to allow the cheese to set.
- 10 Lift out of tray and cool further on cooling rack.
- 11 Very tasty toasted with butter

2013 BBQ

The Annual BBQ was held Saturday 7th September, the weather was kind to us even though rain was threatened.

Those who attended were very generous with their contributions to 'share', lovely salads and cakes, which were enjoyed by all.

There was a good selection of entries for the two adult competitions - 'Best Fruit or Veg' and 'Items from Plot Produce'. The children's Sunflower Competitions didn't go too well, mainly due to a lack of sunflowers on the plot. The prize for the broadest sunflower head went to Emma Shier and the tallest sunflower prize went to plot 12, Jason Waters daughters.

Members chatted and mingled while waiting for the food to be cooked and the everybody joined in the voting for the adult competitions.

Believe it or not, there was a tie, so another vote was taken, it was a close run between Sally (plot 40) with two green peppers and Dougie (plot 26) with a selection of vegetables, the result, Sally and her peppers.

The entries for the plot produce competition were varied, but the winner was Liz (plot 38a) with her Rhubarb and Raspberry Sponge, yummy.

Both winners received a £10 gardening voucher.



Composting

Homemade garden compost is brilliant. It will increase your soil's water and nutrient holding capacity, as well as introducing nutrients and beneficial soil organisms into the soil. It is free to make and reasonably quick.



What you need is a supply of 'green' (nitrogen rich) and 'brown' (carbon rich material). The composting process is carried out by a succession of organisms from the micro-organisms bacteria and fungi which arrive with the organic material. They use the nitrogen for protein to grow and carbon for energy. The bacteria (actinomycetes) grow and multiply while the conditions are right for

them. They liberate carbon, nitrogen and ammonium nitrate making them available to plants. When they die off they provide food for the next group, although they don't all die, as they provide the lovely earthy smell we like in our soil and compost.

The next set of organisms to come along are macro-organisms, which we can see, these include springtails and mould mites. They decompose physically by eating the bacteria and fungi. These are in turn eaten by centipedes, beetles, ants and predatory mites. Each level of organism works to keep the populations at the lower levels in check. The millipedes, slugs, woodlice and worms in the compost heap feed on the decaying organic matter. The worms are particularly useful as they consume bacteria, fungi and organic matter. As they digest they leave nutrient-rich casts. The final result is compost or humus, a dark, nutrient-rich soil conditioner.

To make compost you need the right amount of food, air, water, temperature, surface area and volume.

Food – 50:50 Carbon/Nitrogen rich organic matter.

Air – Provides oxygen for the micro-organisms to breathe. Turn compost as often as you can.

Water – Provides moisture for bacteria to thrive. Lightly coat the materials to be composted so that it feels as moist as a wrung out sponge.

Temperature – The warmer the compost the quicker it will decompose.

Surface Area – The smaller the particles the greater their surface area thus exposing lots of area for the bacteria to get to work.

Volume – One cubic meter is recommended as this will be self-insulating and retain the heat needed for decomposition.

Green Manures

What are they?

Specific plants sown when fruit and vegetables have finished their season. This can be throughout the year, not just over winter.

Why grow them?

- To feed the soil naturally
- To fix nitrogen
- To improve soil structure by opening up compacted soil
- To improve drainage and moisture retention
- Winter green manures take up and retain nutrients in their leaf and stem structure that might otherwise be washed into the subsoil. The nutrients are then dug back in with the plants,
- Weed suppression
- Helpful insect attraction

At the moment, I've sown the following:

- * Buckwheat – fast growing, deep rooting, accumulates calcium, weed smothering, pink flowers attract insects (these came up very quickly and are now dug in)
- * Crimson clover – quick growing, the flowers are attractive to bees and a nitrogen fixer (likewise – I left a few to flower to attract bees, which they did)
- * Fenugreek – useful for catch cropping in summer and for increasing humus content (I only sowed these recently – they need more water than I've given them I think and it may be at the end of their growing season – yes, you're right, I sowed them a bit late!!)
- * Phacelia – flowers attract insects, good quick ground cover (Likewise – still waiting for them to show)
- * Lupin – deep rooting, great for breaking up and aerating soil, for retrieving trace elements from the subsoil – nitrogen fixer (a quick appearance, covered the area well)

Lupins sown as green manure



I view this as an experiment of a type.

I'm not a scientist, so whether I can 'measure' the impact is not of interest to me.

But I am curious to see what happens.

At the very least I'd expect an improvement in soil quality and fewer weeds during the 'close season'.

To grow them and nourish the soil in this way seems to fit with developing a respectful relationship with the soil and the plants we choose to grow.

This does mean taking a long-term approach, which itself seems to be a feature of how the natural world works.

Without donning rose tinted specs, this approach and the practices that flowed out from them seemed to sustain us and our ancestors with the amount and quality of food we needed to keep us pretty healthy.

And isn't this one of the main attractions for having an allotment in the first place?

If you'd like to know more about 'The Experiment', pop by plot 68 and have a chat or email me at pbalchemy@yahoo.co.uk.

Peter Burton

Moan of the Month x 2

1. Speed Limit

There is a speed limit on the allotments - **5mph**. Please take note of this and drive accordingly.

There have been a few occasions when plot holders have had to jump out of the way. No accidents as yet, let's keep it that way.

2. Gate Chain

There is now an excellent combination lock on the gate, please remember to use it, the gates should be kept locked at all times except Saturday and Sunday mornings when the HPHS shed is trading.

When fastening the lock through the chain, spare a thought for the next person to unlock the gate, especially when it is getting dark.

If the lock is passed through the links so that the chain is tightly around the gate uprights, the chain is too short to be turned to the other side of the gates to access the lock. Please leave a couple of links slack to enable the lock to be accessed from the other side.