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Issue 15



EAA News

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Apologies for the late publication of this month's newsletter, illness and holidays intervened!

So Spring has sprung, it's a busy time of year for allotmenters. The hard work starts this month.

The Big Allotment Challenge starts on Tuesday 15th April at 8pm on BBC2, it might be interesting. One of our members, Liz Kerry, did apply in response to the posters that were put up asking for participants for the second series. Unfortunately she had to decline because the time that the participants were expected to give to the programme was too great.

Don't forget that there are two motor mowers in the EAA shed for use by the members, the padlock combination is 354. If you use a mower, could you please give me a ring on 01189672486, or email me linda.pelling@ntlworld.com

so the mowers can be refuelled. As petrol is not kept on site for safety reasons, this will make sure that the mowers are ready for use at all times.

The EAA has secured two white heavy duty plastic awnings with sides and windows, to be used for our events. The sizes are 10mx3m and 8mx3m, they are also stored in the EAA shed, with a bit of a squeeze. These awnings are available to any member to borrow, perfect for summer garden parties, contact as above.



Fruit Tree Nursery

The observant amongst you may have noticed a group of fruit tree saplings planted on Plot 60. The space has been kindly donated by Liz Kerry for a year to give the grafted trees a good start, before planting out in March 2015. This is part Transition Town Reading's Community Orchard Project.



Fruit tree saplings on Plot 60

Transition Town Reading (TTR), kicked off its project to plant community orchards in public spaces around Reading in February 2013, by planting 40 trees in the old orchard near the Mansion House in Prospect Park. A 50 tree planting followed in Waterloo Meadows on the 23rd

of February 2013, with a further 3 sites to be planted around Reading over the next 2 years.

A site in Earley has been earmarked for one of the orchards next year.

TTR's Dave Newman said: "Fruit trees take carbon out of the atmosphere as they grow, and the fruit provides free food for local residents. The planting, maintenance and harvest are good opportunities for building local community; the blossom feeds our ailing bee population, and the orchard sites provide excellent habitat for local wildlife."

If you'd like to be involved in the Community Orchard planting, or any of TTR's other projects, please contact communications@transitionreading.org.uk

Seasonal Tips

Easter has always been the traditional time to plant out potatoes, but this is a superstitious idea rather than a practical one. In Ireland (where potatoes were the staple food crop) they were planted on Good Friday on land blessed with Holy Water and look what happened there!

As the soil warms up, onion sets, shallots and garlic can be planted

now in a well drained, sunny spot. If you have sown broad beans in pots, these can be transplanted in their growing positions.

Start sowing brassicas now, there should be plenty to transplant in a couple of months.

Carrot and parsnip seed can be sown on soil that hasn't been newly manured. These crops do not like to be transplanted, therefore sow in

their growing positions. Always use fresh parsnip seed as they do not keep from year to year.

Asparagus spears should be starting to pop through the surface, cover with fleece if frost is forecast. Frosts can still be a risk at this time of year, cover vulnerable plants.

Keep on top of the weeds by hoeing them off the surface and digging out the perennial weeds.

Rhubarb, Rhubarb, Rhubarb



Those delicate pink sticks, slightly poached, or with a crumble topping served with custard, Yummy. Soon there will come a time when there's a glut, so don't waste them, try the following recipes courtesy of Sue Bonham (plot 59)

Rhubarb and Ginger Jam

Ingredients:

1½lb (700g) Rhubarb, chopped

1½lb (700g) granulated sugar

2 small balls Stem Ginger, finely chopped, or more if liked

Juice 1 lemon (freeze the zest to use later in cakes)

Juice of ½ orange (freeze the zest and rest of juice for later use)

Method:

Put everything in a preserving pan and cook on low heat until sugar has dissolved.

Turn up heat and boil for 15-20 mins.

Until setting point is reached.

Put into sterilized jars. Keeps for 9 months to a year.

Spiced Rhubarb Chutney

Ingredients:

2lb (900g) Rhubarb, chopped

9oz (300g) cooking apples, can use eaters

3 onions medium/large, chopped

2 inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and grated

1-2tsp ground ginger or use cumin if liked, can even use chilli

1 tsp onion or mustard seeds

450ml pickling or malt vinegar,

1lb (450g) light soft brown sugar

8oz (225g) dates, chopped

Method:

Put rhubarb, apple, onion and dates in a preserving pan add 2 tbsps of water and cook for 10 minutes.

Stir in everything else , except sugar and simmer for 40 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add sugar and simmer for another 10-15 minutes.

Put into sterilized jars.

Rhubarb: To some folks it's a mystery, to others, it's a welcomed spring goodie. Whether you're a devoted fan or rhubarb neophyte, here are six rhubarb facts.

1. The earliest records of rhubarb date back to China in 2700 B.C., where it was used for medicinal purposes.
2. Rhubarb is a member of the buckwheat family and botanically speaking, it's a vegetable, not a fruit
3. The word rhubarb comes from the Latin word "rhababarum" which means "root of the barbarians"
4. As early as the mid 1500's, it was much more expensive than the cinnamon in France. By the mid 1600's, rhubarb was double the price of opium in England.
5. Rhubarb is also commonly referred to as a "pie plant" after one of its most popular applications...pie.
6. There is even a song - 'Rhubarb Pie', sung by John Fogerty of Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Sowing Folklore

When it comes to sowing seeds, gardening lore has many variations about how thickly to sow, but they all add up to the following advice:

Sow seeds in a row, one for the rook, one for the crow, one to die and one to grow.

In short, err on the generous side. Between seed predators and natural failure, they're not all going to germinate.

Two more:

Sow beans in the mud, they'll grow like wood. and

The gardening rule, never forget, to sow dry and set wet.

These warnings mean be sure the cold wet phase of spring weather has passed and the ground is beginning to warm up, before you sow your seeds.

But another saying is:

Who sows in May gets little that way.

In other words, don't be over cautious or you may leave it too late.

Last one:

Never sow seeds when the moon is waning.

An old wives tale, or is it? Scientific research has come up with corroboration of old folk wisdom.

Lunar fluctuations affect the Earth's magnetic field and its atmosphere, causing all water to move in almost tidal fashion. This makes rainfall statistically more likely after a new moon. So if you sow your seeds after the full moon, they should get a good shower or two to help their germination.

These examples of folklore were taken from the book 'Tips from the Old Gardeners' by Duncan Crosbie.

There is also another saying:

You pays your money and takes your choice.

Why a Polytunnel?

The great advantage a polytunnel has over a greenhouse is that it is large enough for you to plant into soil and rotate your crops, so you don't have to change the soil regularly or plant in pots and grow-bags; this means much less watering and feeding.

First, work out what you want to grow. Tender crops, which so often fail outside in our climate, are the obvious choice for summer: tomatoes, sweet peppers and chillies, basil, climbing French beans, winter squash, and ridge cucumbers will thrive, but give hothouse cucumbers a miss - they need a hotter, steamier atmosphere than the others, as do aubergines.

Some vegetables - over-wintering brassicas, parsnips, peas, broad beans, most alliums, summer spinach and chervil, and potatoes - do better outside, either because they prefer cooler conditions or because they fail to set fruit (runner beans) when it gets hot. It is, however, worth growing a couple of

early potatoes, a row of overwintering peas, a courgette and perhaps some calabrese and sorrel to harvest before the outside crop matures.

Strawberries crop earlier in the tunnel, safe from birds and more easily protected from slugs.

Allow space for pots. Potted blueberries and apricots can be brought in while the fruit ripens, chillies fruit much better when starved in pots, and bay and tarragon can be brought in for the winter.

High-sided tunnels are more convenient than the very stable semi-circular type; on an exposed site, choose the latter and a heavier frame. Choose the best quality cover you can afford for longer life; anti-hot spot tape increases the life of the plastic by at least a year.

Ventilation is crucial for healthy crops, so consider mesh instead of plastic for the lower part of the tunnel, on the lee side. This stops

the tunnel overheating and drying out if you go away for the weekend, or when it's too windy to open the doors. However, mesh will make your tunnel cooler and more vulnerable to frosts, so it may be worth getting plastic to roll down over it in bad weather.

The tunnel will let you grow two crops a year, but only if you sow into trays or modules, and pot plants on so they're ready to go into the soil the minute the previous crop comes out. Remember successional sowing, and bear in mind that tunnels only protect from a degree or two of frost.

Seedlings can be hardened off in the tunnel; if frost threatens, cover with horticultural fleece or a cold frame within the tunnel.

Unless it's very windy, open the doors daily, not just to ventilate but to allow in pollinating insects.

You will need to hand-pollinate crops like sweet corn, which normally rely on wind-pollination.

View from No 68

This article is by Peter Burton Plot 68

Patience, patience

Ah, the weather during the month of March.... 'In like a lion, out like a lamb' my mum used to say.

No longer so predictable, if it ever was.

More like a barn dance, with one step forward, one step back. And that's on a good day!

So patience, tolerance and 'listening' to the soil, seeds and plants, as well as the calendar is really important at this time of year.

As is much the case with an allotment if you view it like that, a pretty good approach to life.

I do get frustrated at this time of year though.

My spuds are saying, 'Ok, that's as much chitting as we need, thanks. Can you get us in now?'

The soil is saying, 'Err, where did that warmth of last week go?'

Patience indeed.

Managing your plot – contained or random?

I've noticed the habit increasing in recent years for plot holders here and in other allotments to use raised or contained beds.

I can totally understand how relatively easy it is to manage a plot in this way.

My partner, Chris and I talked about doing this but we decided to be led by what nature herself seems to do, if left to her own devices.

I don't know much about permaculture, but this seems to be what informs that practice.

Plus, we like to experiment!

So we've sown onion sets in a spiral this year, just to see.

(Watch this space, but don't hold your breath!)

I learned something the other day I never knew.

Garlic needs 10 days when the temperature drops below 0 degrees Centigrade to really thrive.

Do you know if this is true?

And with such a mild winter, what impact on the garlic this year?

Growing herbs and flowers.

I wouldn't say this is an experiment, just something we like to do.

Thyme, sage, lavender and rosemary are classic favourites of ours – but what about dill, hyssop, borage and tansy?

So we're committed to growing 'randomly' and experimenting.

How about you?

What informs your choice about what to grow and how to grow it on your plot?

Send Linda a piece, 250-300 words long, about you and your plot by May 18th for inclusion in the next newsletter,

MEPs Vote

Vegetable growers can breathe a sigh of relief, common sense has prevailed for once.

Proposed EU regulations, that would have cut the range of seeds available to gardeners, has been voted down by MEPs. 46 MEPs stood against the proposals with only 4 in favour.

The proposed regulations, which could have prevented the sale of many non-commercial crops, had faced opposition from organisations including the RHS and Garden Organic.

What's wanted And finally!

It is intended to hold the very successful Plant Sale throughout the Spring and Summer. The racks will be by the EAA shed, you can bring any surplus plants, flowers as well and place them there. You can also buy the plants.10p per plant, placing the money in the honesty box.

What do you as members want the proceeds to be spent on?

Hire of a shredder is one suggestion.

More communal equipment.

Suggestions please, contact me or put them in the honesty box.



Happy Easter