

December 2014

Issue 19



A Word from the Chair

Inside this issue:

<i>EAA News</i>	1
<i>Seasonal Tips</i>	2
<i>Cookery Corner</i>	2
<i>Update on Plot 46 Watering System</i>	3
<i>Best Allotment Award 2014</i>	3
<i>HPHS News</i>	3
<i>And Finally!</i>	3

For those who did not manage to make it to the AGM I am pleased to say that all the business that needs to happen at an AGM took place and we are constitutionally all in order. My thanks to those members who attended the AGM – we do need a certain number of members to make the AGM quorate and allow the AGM business to be completed.

As a result of elections held at the AGM our new committee is:

Julia Tredgett – Secretary
Sandra Christopherson – Treasurer
Roger Bonham
Peter Burton
Linda Pelling – newsletter editor
Richard Tredgett – Chair

As a part of the AGM Linda Pelling completed her term as our Chair and stood down. I would like to record my thanks for Linda's leadership steering us through to be a stable and established group working for the benefit of all members. I believe we now have an organisation that helps and supports plot holders to enjoy and benefit from their plot.

I am pleased to say that Linda has agreed to stay on as our newsletter editor

This is our association and whilst not looking to make big changes I would like your input as to what you want from the Association. Quite simply if you don't tell the committee and I what you want from our organisation we are unable to provide it.

As an example we are looking to invest in a petrol strimmer that some members have suggested would be a useful addition to our mowers and wheelbarrow.

I would like your input to a couple of questions:

Do you believe we should be equipping ourselves with a strimmer?

If yes do you have experience of what we should be buying beyond a strimmer that is not too heavy and one that is reasonable quiet?

As I said above, if you don't let the committee know what you want we can only make decisions in the absence of your view. If lots of people let me know they object to our buying a strimmer, and even better suggest what we should be aiming for instead, then we can respond to what you our members would like.

Enjoy the (relatively) quiet season on your plot and early Christmas wishes

Richard Tredgett - Chairman Plot 46
tredgett@gmail.com



Seasonal Tips

Take a bit of time to reflect on your successes and disappointments, consider what went wrong with some crops. It is worth remembering that there are no failures in allotment gardening, it is always down to the unpredictable weather, furry things, slimy things or just plain bad luck!

Allow yourself a little relaxing time around Christmas and New Year and be ready to hit the ground running in 2015.

Keep picking the Brussels sprouts to ensure the sprouts don't blow open. Also harvest winter cabbage regularly although according to variety they can remain in the soil for months. Leeks can be left in the ground to be lifted as needed, parsnips benefit being left in the ground until after a frost, they always taste sweeter.



If a prolonged cold or wet spell is forecast you can lift leeks and parsnips to store them in containers of old compost or soil to be used at a later date. Cabbages and even sprouts can be lifted with their roots in a soil ball and stored in a shed or greenhouse. Don't forget to water the soil occasionally.

There's not a lot you can plant out in December but if you've not got round to it, you can still plant out garlic. They actually benefit from a period of cold, which prompts growth later.

There is still time to start making leafmold, it is easy. Gather the leaves and stack in chicken wire cages or put in refuse sacks, stabbed with a fork for ventilation and leave for a year. The dark crumbly humus is one of the best soil improvers there is. Be prepared to wait at least a year.

Give the greenhouse a good wash down, using a little detergent and disinfectant and a scrubbing brush. Don't forget to give the greenhouse a good airing on fine days to stop disease developing.

Make sure you get your allotment ready for the Winter by digging in lots of well-rotted organic matter.

Cinnamon Parsnip cake

Many thanks to your chairman for this recipe.

Ingredients

- 300g parsnips, peeled and coarsely grated
- 1 lemon, zest and juice
- 250g plain white flour
- 250g caster sugar
- 1 tbsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 100g honey
- 100ml hot water
- 3 eggs
- 125ml olive oil

20 mins prep, 30 mins cooking

Enough for 6 - 8 people

Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C/Gas 4.
2. Oil two round 9in/23cm sandwich tins. Line the bottom of each one with greaseproof paper.
3. Mix the parsnips, lemon zest and juice. Set aside.
4. In a new bowl, mix the flour, sugar, spices, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda. Mix in the parsnips.
5. Whisk the honey and hot water together till the honey dissolves.
6. Add the oil. Whisk in the eggs.
7. Pour the egg mix over the flour mix. Very gently fold through, careful not to over mix.
8. Divide the batter between the tins. Bake in the centre shelf of the oven for 25 mins or till the cakes are golden on top and fully set in the centre. Insert a skewer to test – if it comes out clean, they're done.
9. Let them cool before removing from the tins.
10. For the icing, melt the butter in a large saucepan till frothy. When it turns from golden yellow to a light, nutty-smelling brown, take off the heat. Sift in the icing sugar. Mix. Whisk (ideally with a hand mixer) till smooth and creamy.
11. Transfer one of your cakes to a plate. Smooth half the icing over. Top with the second cake. Ice it and serve. Keeps covered in a cool room for 2 days.

Update on Plot 46 Watering System

As you may remember we installed a watering system on our plot to water cucumbers, courgettes and butternut squash through the summer and reduce the number of visits needed to undertake watering.

The system was fed by a pair of connected water butts that were themselves fed by rain collected from the roof of our shed. The tap of the front butt was connected through a short length of hose through a simple timer and via a length of hose to the bed we wanted to be watered. This was achieved with a fifteen metre length of soaker hose that went up and back along the width of the bed.

It has to be said that the flow of water was not massive – the flow from a water butt is much less than from a garden tap, and the hose was I think more susceptible to blocking of the small soaker holes by soil than we are used to at home – probably a result of the much lower pressure and flow.

Whilst the flow was not massive it did deliver some water each day to the plants, and reduced the need to visit the plot, which is twenty minute bike ride there and back for maybe just twenty minutes watering of these water hungry crops.

It is difficult to judge the impact of the watering system as there was no “control” bed growing the same crops without the benefit of a watering system however we had a good crop of Butternut squash, the cucumbers were prolific lasting a lot longer than we expected and the courgettes, as ever, came faster than we could eat them.

If all this sounds inconclusive then I am afraid that is down to the lack of science applied to the experiment. If you are able to accept more qualitative evidence I can say we will be doing the same next year, having raised the water butts by one course of breeze blocks to try and increase the water pressure.

Watch this space!

Best Allotment Awards 2014

Earley Town Council announced the winner of the 'Best Allotment Award' 2014 at a committee meeting in November.

In the past it was accepted that a previous winner of the award, could not win again. But a few years ago it was agreed by ETC that this restriction should be removed.

The award this year went to Peter Wynn, plot 63, a worthy winner, I don't know how he does it but his plot always produces the first crops of the season each year.

The award for the 'Best Improved Allotment' went to Joanne and Peter Faithfull, plot 44. They have both worked extremely hard since taking over and it is nice to see a bit of colour added to the plot.

Congratulations to both winners.

These awards are a good way of encouraging plot holders to keep the allotment site well maintained.

HPHS News

The shed will be closed during December and will reopen the first weekend in January.

This valuable asset to the site is open every weekend, manned by John and Tony with Bryan helping out occasionally. I am sure you will all agree that they deserve the break.



When the shed reopens there will be Onion Sets, Shallots and Garlic for sale and later in the month, weather permitting, seed potatoes. Suttons and Fothergills seed catalogues will be available for ordering your seed requirements for the coming season.

A reminder that the annual membership to the HPHS is due in January, the fee for 2015 is £1, this allows them to trade on a Sunday.

And finally!

What are two rows of cabbages called? - A dual cabbage way

What type of room has no windows or doors? - a Mushroom

What vegetable needs a plumber? - a leek

What is the most popular Christmas wine? - I don't like Brussel Sprouts

What do you get if you cross a bee with a bell? - a hum dinger



*Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year
to all members*