

April 2015

Issue 21



Chairman's Words

Inside this issue:

<i>A Word from the Chair</i>	1
<i>Seasonal Tips</i>	2
<i>Cookery Corner</i>	2
<i>Manure</i>	3
<i>Mowers</i>	3
<i>Plant & Seed Sales</i>	3
<i>Charcoal</i>	3
<i>BBQ 2015</i>	3
<i>EAA Award</i>	3

Now the clocks have changed it really feels like spring has arrived. We already have seeds and plants in the ground and things are taking off – I can't wait to pick the first of the season's crops, which may well be the Timperley early rhubarb that seems to be doing well on lots of plots. Bring on the custard.

It is also great to welcome many new plot holders; there seem to be lots of keen new people setting off on the journey that is being an allotment holder. I am sure we will all make them welcome.

We are trying to make contact with as many as possible but if you are chatting to a new plot holder ask them if they have heard about the EAA and have considered joining us. If they are interested please let me know or pass on a copy of our newsletter so they can see what we offer for a one off £4 payment.

One of the things new plot holders will learn quickly is that the soil is pretty good on our plots. There seem to be a range of explanations as to why the soil is so great which include:

The site is an old river bed and river silt makes for great soil. – You only have to dig down a spade's depth and you start to hit the gravel of the old river bed. What this gives us is some great well drained soil – fine till we get a warm dry summer in which case start mulching to preserve the moisture on your plot.

The land used to be Suttons trial beds – which mean the soil was well cared for over by people who had a vested interest in creating great soil.

There have been plots here a long time. A gent in his eighties who I volunteer with tells me his father used to have one of the plots and kept a pig in a sty. That

means people have been improving the soil for several generations and that has to pay off.

Recent research in the East Midlands showed that it may well be the long term use of the site as allotments that lead to great soil. The study found that allotments had 32% more organic matter than farmland. This was helped by the findings that 95% of allotment holders create and use compost on their plots and 75% also add manure at some point in their crop rotation.

In case you were not aware 2015 is the International year of the soil (IYS).



The IYS will "serve as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil

management as the basis for food systems, fuel and fibre production, essential ecosystem functions and better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations".

More simply this is a UN supported initiative to emphasis what all plot holders know – without good soil all our efforts to grow great crops will count for nothing.

There are lots of international events; the British Society of Soil Science (BSSS) is running more local ones and If you want to learn more and have a lot of patience watch out for the Glasgow soil conference in 2022.

Happy growing – hope to see you down at the allotments

Richard plot 46, tredgett@gmail.com

Seasonal Tips

April is a 'let's go for it!' month on the allotment but proceed with caution. Potato planting is one of the key allotment tasks in spring, but when to plant is the question?

As soon as the soil is dry enough and not too cold is a good guide. The main clue the soil temperature has slightly increased is when the weeds start growing consistently. No matter how much our experience of running an allotment, there is no definite planting date. The planting window for early varieties is usually mid March –mid April. "Second earlies" follow two - three weeks later, with maincrop types always the last to go in usually no later than the middle of May. Keep an eye out for frost when early growth emerges.

Protecting new growth is a key theme on the allotment at this time of year, fleece is the plot holder's best friend. Alternatively, pop up cloches and other types of cloche are also great at keeping inclement weather off our young plants.

Outdoors, a direct sowing of beetroot, parsnip and carrot seed (carrot seed tapes are a good idea for even germination) becomes a possibility now .

Sow maincrop peas and make the last sowing of summer broad beans. You could try an early sowing of dwarf climbing French beans towards the end of the month. Use the darker seeded varieties they are hardier and more suited to the early sowings.

On a prepared seed bed sow leeks and summer cabbage. Plant out celeriac grown on earlier and keep the plants well watered all through the summer.

Sow under glass, in pots and trays filled with fresh seed compost, the seeds of runner beans, sweet corn, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, outdoor/ridge cucumber.

Put up the runner bean poles and start to support the growing peas with brushwood or netting.

Plant up a new asparagus bed but it will take two more years to establish before producing succulent shoots.

Protect any early strawberries with netting to keep birds and squirrels out.



Cookery Corner - Quick mushroom and spinach lasagne

Spinach is believed to be of Persian origin. By the 12th century, it spread across Europe and became a desirable leafy green known for good health; a reputation that stands firm to this day.

Spinach is available all year round but is in season during the spring (March - June). It is well known for its nutritional qualities, it is rich in iron. and iron plays a central role in the function of red blood cells which help in transporting oxygen around the body, in energy production and DNA synthesis. Spinach is also an excellent source of vitamin K, vitamin A, vitamin C and folic acid as well as being a good source of manganese, magnesium, iron and vitamin B2. Vitamin K is important for maintaining bone health and it is difficult to find vegetables richer in vitamin K than spinach.

Its high water content means it reduces in size by about a quarter when cooked.

Spinach is a versatile ingredient in salads, pasta and pies.

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 250g mushrooms, sliced
- 1 tsp thyme leaves, chopped
- 200g spinach
- 300g light soft cheese
- 4 tbsp. grated parmesan
- 6/9 fresh lasagne sheets

Method

Heat oven to 200°C/gas 6

Heat oil in a large frying pan, add the garlic and cook for 1 min. Add the mushrooms and thyme, then cook for 3 mins. Until they start to soften.

Throw in the spinach and stir until the leaves wilt.

Remove from heat and stir in the soft cheese, 1 tbsp. of parmesan and seasoning.

Put ¼ of the spinach mix on the bottom of a medium sized ovenproof dish, lay 2/3 sheets of pasta on top.

Repeat until all the pasta has been used.

Finish with the final ¼ of the spinach mix, sprinkle over the remaining parmesan.

Bake for 35mins until golden brown.

Serve with a green salad.



Manure

If you are looking to improve your soil further than your compost supply allows, then you need to consider adding manure. Adding manure will improve the soil and in particular its soil retention in the dry spells of the summer.

There are a couple of ways to do this: one option is to do some hard work collecting it from Arborfield stables although this will need a while to rot down – the other involves putting your hand in your pocket.

The horse manure from Arborfield will be pretty fresh and a mix of straw and sawdust along with the “nuggets”. It needs to rot down for at least three months before you apply it to your plants to avoid them being burnt. We leave ours for pretty much a full year and this leaves it very well rotted down.

The faster route involves buying manure. There was a delivery last month of beef manure by a local farmer Charlie. The attached photo shows a delivery at the end of a plot.



The load cost £35 including delivery and as you can see it is a good sized pile. You just need to be aware that if delivered on the track you will need to move it briskly to reopen the track – and make sure you don't trap anyone's car in the plots at the far end of the site!

Charlie can be contacted on 07973 713807

Mowers

The two mowers have been checked over and topped up with fuel and are ready for member's to use. Operation instructions are hanging in the shed .

Please note that the use of these mower's are entirely at your own risk and the EAA cannot accept any responsibility.



Plant and Seed Sales

It is getting to the time of year when we will dig out the racking and set it up next to the EAA shed at the far end of the car park. The way it works is quite simple:

If you have any spare seedlings or plants you leave them on the racking for others to look at and choose from.

If there is something there you can make use of, you make a donation in the honesty box and it is yours.

So in simple terms one person's surplus becomes another person's opportunity to increase the variety on their plot or fill an unexpected gap. I got some great Celeriac plants from the racks last year.

Now this may sound simple and unlikely to raise funds but two years ago we raised enough to cover all the costs of the group – including servicing the two petrol mowers that are available for all members to borrow.

The proceeds will go towards purchasing other equipment for use by the members.

So please think about the racks – both when you have a little too much of something, or if you have a small gap that you want to fill.

Charcoal

The BBQ season will be starting soon, why not try BOWT Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust Charcoal for Sale at £6.50 a bag. All proceed go to BOWT. The charcoal is made at Warburg Nature Reserve by volunteers using wood from the reserve. To order please e-mail juliatredgett@gmail.com

BBQ 2015

Talking of BBQ's, the annual EAA BBQ is Saturday 5th September this year. More details in the next newsletter.

EAA Award

As well as the Best Allotment Award presented by ETC each year, it was thought that the EAA could also give an award. The criteria for this award has yet to be decided, the Most Creative Plot, the most Scented Plot, these are two that have been mentioned, but the committee would welcome any suggestions from members. The award will be presented at the BBQ.

Any suggestions to Richard at redgett@gmail.com