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Issue 22



Chairman's Chatter

Catchy new title eh!

I spent part of the late May bank holiday weekend down on the allotment finishing the fruit cage so we can enjoy the fruit rather than offering it all to the birds. All a bit of a race against time – the recent mix of rain and sun seems to have got everything growing – including the weeds. The good news is that the cage is almost finished – just in time as the fruit is coming on nicely.

I struggle to understand why we thought land given over to growing fruit would be less work than vegetables but maybe once the cage is finished it will all come back to me. This may be helped by enjoying strawberry teas and lots of jars of redcurrant jam laid up for the winter.

It was good to see while I was down at the allotment lots of enthusiastic new plot holders starting work on their plot. Even though it is well into the planting season they were clearing land and getting things in the ground to provide for an encouraging first harvest. I am sure we will all make them welcome and plug the association when you are telling them about the great things that come with an allotment.

There have been a number of articles in the press recently about the need to protect allotments. There is a case in Watford where plot holders are fighting to keep their allotments open, while the council support a bid from the local football club to turn the plots into a car park. The council lost in court once and is appealing again – in the belief that we need a car park more than allotments.

More positively Monty Don the TV gardener is campaigning that new developments of housing should include an allocation of space for allotments. He argues that where houses are built with very small gardens the land is well used providing allotments for those that would appreciate them.

He emphasises both the physical and mental health benefits of having an allotment as well as being far more sociable than a garden. I don't need to tell you how great it can be as you are already convinced.

In case you feel that this is all spin and hot air, and it is easy to be cynical, I am very pleased to point out that plans for housing development in Shinfield on the old dairy research site include two and a half acres of land set aside for over 100 allotments. This is a part of the planning application for the 126 houses they want to build. Assuming the plan is delivered as proposed this will benefit both the new and existing residents of Shinfield.

Happy growing – hope to see you down at the allotments soon

Richard plot 46, redgett@gmail.com

P.S. from Ed

Please close the gate when entering and exiting the site, except when the shed is open. A deer is visiting the plots again, this time a muntjac, about the size of a large dog. He doesn't jump the fence but walks in through an open gate to feast on the young plants.



Muntjac deer

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Seasonal Tips

June is the last month for sowing many crops as we pass the longest day and head downhill again.

Now as the danger of frost should be past. Plant-out brassicas, broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and cabbage as soon as the young plants have made four or five true leaves.

Outdoor tomatoes can also go into their final position, they should be 15-23 cm (6-9 in) tall, with the first flower truss just showing. Use a cold frame to condition them or move them back into the house at night for a few days before they go into the big wide world. Give them the sunniest, most sheltered spot and provide a tall stake for each plant.

Pot grown leeks may well be ready now, about pencil thickness. Dougie, plot 26, the source of all knowledge allotmentwise, says that when the early potatoes come out, the leeks go in, that should be by the end of the month.

If the weather is wet, watch out for slugs & snails. Whether you use pellets, traps, biological controls (see article opposite) or just pick them off doesn't matter as long as you keep on top of the problem.

In June apples have the "**June Drop**" where the tree drops excess fruit. After this it is worth thinning out if the branches are still overcrowded.

When you've had the last rhubarb, by making the cake

below maybe? give them a good feed by mulching with well-rotted manure mixed with compost or an artificial like Growmore to enable them to build strength for next year.

Towards the end of the month stop picking asparagus, and allow the pretty, fern-like foliage to grow and build-up the roots for next year.

Once the bottom flowers of broad bean plants have formed pods 8-10 cm (3-4 in) long, nip out the tops of the plants to stop them growing any higher than necessary. This also keeps the dreaded blackfly from massing on the tender shoots.

Japanese onions planted out last autumn will be ready, only take what you need for one day, these onions do not store well.



Protect strawberries from the birds by covering with fine netting and place straw under the fruits to keep them clean. The plants will start producing runners in June, these can be used to start new plants for next season. Any unwanted runners can be cut off to ensure the energy stays in the parent plant to produce new fruit.

Keep watering and weeding.

Cookery Corner - Strawberry muffins

Ingredients:

75g (3 oz) porridge oats
 225ml (8 fl oz) buttermilk
 100g (4 oz) plain flour
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 1/2 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 egg
 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
 175g (6 oz) light brown soft sugar
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 175g (6 oz) fresh strawberries, hulled and chopped
 Preheat oven to 190 C / Gas mark 5.

Method:

1. Grease and flour a muffin tin, or use paper muffin cups.
2. In a small bowl, combine oats and buttermilk, and let stand 5 minutes.
3. In a medium bowl, combine flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda and salt; set aside.
4. In a large bowl, beat together the egg, oil, brown sugar and vanilla. Blend in the oat mixture.
5. Stir in the flour mixture, just until moistened. Fold in strawberries.

6. Spoon into muffin cups 2/3 to 3/4 full.
7. Bake in preheated oven for 15 to 20 minutes, or until a cocktail stick inserted into the centre comes out clean



Towards Biological Control

I mentioned our **slugs** in the "plot 69" January newsletter. Does anyone else have them?!

Wondering how we could reduce their numbers in a natural kind of way we thought **frogs** would be a good idea. I've not seen any on our allotment but maybe we are the wrong side – I gather there is a ditch that might support them at the bottom of the embankment on the motorway side.

Yes, first we needed water. Rather disheartened by the price of plastic ponds in garden centres I was delighted to find a discarded dog bath that I could re-purpose. I should have tested it. But having installed it, filled it then dug it up again, at least there was a hole to work with.

This time I managed to find a reasonably-priced 2x1.5m pack of pond liner and a pack of 3x2m felt that nicely doubled up underneath it to protect it from stones. Yes, we have a few stones. Anyone else?

After siphoning water into it from a trough and throwing in a few chunky specimens of Canadian pondweed from same, we were frogspawn-ready. Our pond at home supports a growing population of newts, which are apparently quite partial to tadpoles, so we have a correspondingly diminishing population of frogs and transferring some of their spawn felt like a rescue mission.

A couple of months on and blanket weed was threatening to choke the pond, as you might expect before the nutrient levels drop, but it came out in great skeins like, well, a blanket. Freeing the enmeshed tadpoles was the tricky bit. But they seem to be growing fine, feeding on the more edible forms of algae whose spores blow in. But mosquito larvae also appear to be thriving; I hope the tadpoles reach their carnivorous stage before the mosquitoes reach theirs...

Another quick slug-chomping thought – have you seen signs of any hedgehogs? Apparently their numbers have dropped by around 90% over the last fifty years. Can we do anything to help them too?

Richard, Plot 69

P.S. Do feel free to wander in and see how our new habitat is evolving.



Communal Compost

After a slow start, the bins are filling up, unfortunately not always with the appropriate material. There have been times when couch grass and other perennial weeds such as dandelions and thistles have been found in them. Prunings and twigs can be added but please chop these beforehand or they will not rot down.

As well as organic matter, shredded paper (not shiny magazines though!), tea bags dead leaves, lawn mowings and eggshells can be added.



Couch grass roots



Ground elder roots

BBQ 2015

The annual EAA BBQ and show is on **Saturday 5th September** this year, 12.30 -15.00

As last year there were a couple of entries of boxes of vegetables, it has been decided to add this as a separate class. There will still be the individual fruit or veg class and the plot produce class, as well as the tallest and broadest head sunflower competition.

This is a very enjoyable social get together, why not come along? See the notice board for all the details.

AGM 2015

This year's AGM will be held on Wednesday 28th October at 7.30pm in the Parish Room, Radstock Lane Earley.

The winner of the Best Allotment Award and the Most Improved Allotment will be announced by ETC at the meeting

Companion Planting

Companion planting is all about creating plant communities which have mutual benefits to each other. It can be an organic way to protect your crops from pests or it could help improve pollination of fruit and vegetable crops.

Companion plant 1	Companion plant 2	How it works
Cabbage, kale and cauliflower	Nasturtium	Plant Nasturtiums as a sacrificial crop. Cabbage white butterflies will lay their eggs on Nasturtium plants, keeping caterpillars away from your Brassicas.
Cabbage, kale and cauliflower	Mint	Mint helps to deter flea beetles, which chew irregular holes in the leaves.
Courgette	Calendula (English marigold)	Calendula flowers are highly attractive to pollinating insects which will in turn pollinate your courgette flowers.
Broad beans	Summer savory	Summer savory helps to repel blackfly, a common pest of broads beans.
Carrot	Spring onions	Sow spring onions amongst your carrots - the smell of onion deters carrot root fly. The smell of carrots also deters onion fly from onions.
Carrot	Leek	The smell of leeks deters carrot root fly. The smell of carrots also helps deter leek moth from leeks.
Carrot	Mint	The aromatic leaves of mint help confuse carrot root fly, who find their host through scent.
Chrysanthemum	Chives	The onion scent will deter aphids.
French/runner beans	Nasturtium	Plant Nasturtiums as a sacrificial crop - aphids love them and this will lure them away from your runner beans/French beans.
Onion	Mint	The aromatic leaves of mint help to confuse and deter onion fly.
Radish	Mint	Mint helps to deter flea beetles, which chew irregular holes in the leaves.
Roses	Garlic	The smell of garlic helps to deter aphids.
Roses	Mint, chives and thyme	The strong scent of these herbs deters aphids and blackfly.
Runner beans	Sweet pea	Sweet peas will attract pollinating insects which will in turn help to pollinate your bean flowers.
Sunflower	Chives	The onion scent will deter aphids.
Tomatoes	Mint	The smell of mint deters aphids and other pests.
Tomatoes	French marigold (<i>Tagetes patula</i>)	The pungent smell of French marigolds deters whitefly
Tomatoes	Chives	The onion scent will deter aphids.
Tomatoes	Basil	Basil reportedly improves tomato flavour and the strong scent of their leaves also deters aphids.

Use tall plants such as peas or sweet corn to create partially shaded conditions for crops prone to bolting, such as coriander, lettuce and spinach.

Plant herbs throughout the garden and vegetable plot, as most have strongly scented leaves which help repel insects.

Try intercropping. This is where fast-growing crops such as lettuce or radishes are sown between widely spaced rows of slower-growing crops such as Brussels Sprouts or parsnips. It utilises the space available and helps prevent weeds growing (weeds take nutrients, light and water, and spread disease).

Take care with some companion plants such as mint - these are fast-growing plants and will quickly smother your crop. Grow mint in containers to keep it under control