

April 2017

Issue 32



Chairman's Chatter

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A BIG thank you

Most of us will have been in the Huntley & Palmer trading shed to buy supplies and materials for our allotment – it has been there for over last seventy five years stocking the stuff we and all our predecessors have needed to grow healthy crops, and at a better price than you can get elsewhere. For the last twenty years the main person in the shed has been John Snow dispensing wit and wisdom in equal measures – while selling you some tomato feed, compost or maybe loose bone meal.

As I hope you are aware John has reasonably decided that he has done his fair share of opening up, ordering supplies and almost everything else that keeps the shed going and he is standing down as Chairman. That is why we have worked over the last year to put together a team of volunteers to take on the various tasks he has done so well. This is going well and my thanks to everyone who has volunteered to give up an occasional Saturday or Sunday morning in the shed looking after the members.

John's last act as Chair of the Huntley & Palmer Horticultural Society (to use its full name) will be to stand down and oversee the election of a new chair at the 2017 AGM. I am very hopeful that he will take on the role of Honorary President of the society and still turn up and drink coffee in the shed, but not necessarily be there bang on ten o'clock on both Saturday and Sunday keys and till in hand.

The AGM of the Huntley & Palmer Horticultural Society will take place at 19:30 on Wednesday 19th April in the Parish room, Earley Community Centre, Radstock Lane, Earley, RG6 5RX.

Please come along to support the society

and show our appreciation for John's efforts over the years to make all our lives that bit easier.

New manure source

I reported last month that Charlie had temporarily stopped delivering his cattle manure from Sonning farm to our site. Our members Rob and Chris have found a replacement supply and have taken delivery of a load of horse manure from Mick whose mobile number is 07769 876908. I have spoken to Mick who has a large supply of horse manure (about fifty tonnes!) at his base in the Hurst area and he is happy to deliver a load for you for £30.

The concern with any manure source is whether it is affected by Forefront T Weed killer first sold in 2009/10 that can be very bad news for the plants it touches. Mick assures me the manure is from organic sources and not affected by the deadly Forefront T.

For her own peace of mind Chis is doing the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) recommended test for the Forefront T weed killer that can be found here: <http://www.manurematters.co.uk/faqs.htm#faq2>. We will share the results of the test in the next newsletter.

New faces

This is the time of year when new plot holders sign up and start on their new allotment. I am sure you will make them welcome and point them in the direction of both the EAA and the Trading Shed – after all we were all new plot holders once!

Richard Tredgett
Plot 46

Seasonal Tips - April/May

Spring has well and truly sprung and on the plot the hard work begins!

Do remember the weeds are springing into action, so keep the hoe going. Don't forget, a sharp hoe is the best friend a gardener can have. Just slide it back and forth slightly below the surface of the soil and you'll stop the weed seedlings in their tracks. Hoeing is also good in the event of drought as the disturbed soil surface stops the water being sucked to the surface by capillary action and evaporating in dry winds.

Sowing

Most root crops can be sown outdoors, but be prepared to cover them with fleece if there is a chance of frost.

Easter is the traditional potato planting time. If you have a comfrey bed and it has sprung back, the first cut laid in the trench under the potatoes will provide nutrition to get them off to a good start.

When sowing parsnips, mark the rows by sowing radishes in the same row as they will germinate within days whereas the parsnips will not appear for about 3 weeks after being sown.

With carrots, covering with a fleece and ensuring the edges are buried will stop the carrot root fly from gaining entry to lay eggs by your carrots. The eggs hatch in larvae that burrow into the carrot root, killing the plant or at least ruining the crop

Brassicas - peas, broad beans, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale and kohlrabi.

Salad crops - rocket, lettuce and radish.

Plant Outdoors

Globe and Jerusalem Artichokes

Onion & Shallot Sets

Asparagus.

Sow outdoors under cloche

French beans

Lettuce

Sweetcorn

Fruit

Strawberries can be planted out now, it's best to remove flowers in the first year as you conserve strength for growth and gain larger crops in subsequent years..

A good layer of compost around the base of fruit trees will ensure they have the nutrition to provide another good crop for you.

Pests

Apart from the carrot root fly, the gardener's worst enemy is awakening. The evil slugs and snails are coming out to eat entire rows of succulent young seedlings overnight so be warned, take action now!



Kohlrabi

Cookery Corner

Rhubarb and Custard Tart

Ingredients

150 ml water

200 g caster sugar

450 g rhubarb, chopped

2 eggs

75 ml double cream

grated zest of 1/2 lemons

Grated nutmeg

1 x 25cm blind-baked shortcrust
pastry tart cases

icing sugar, for dusting

Method

Preheat oven to 150°/gas Mk2.

Make syrup by heating together water and 100g sugar in a saucepan, stirring until sugar dissolves.

Bring the syrup to the boil, add rhubarb and cook for 3 minutes. Set aside to cool.

Break eggs into a bowl, add the remaining sugar.

Whisk until light and fluffy and trebled in volume.

Fold in the cream, the lemon zest and season with nutmeg.

Strain the rhubarb and spread on the base of the pastry case.

Pat down rhubarb and pour over the custard.

Dust the tart with icing sugar and bake for 25-30 minutes.

Allow to cool before serving.

Serve with cream or crème fraiche.



HPHS Trading Shed

In each issue of the EAA newsletter, we would like to spotlight one product that is available for sale in the shed. This time it is **Groworganic** - an organic fertiliser.

Publicity material distributed on behalf of Groworganic:

Every day more and more gardeners and plot holders are turning to the natural way of growing - organically.

One of the most successful organic fertilisers is **Groworganic**, the 100% concentrated, oven-heated fertiliser. **Groworganic** is clean, dry and safe to use, as well as easy to handle, it's not just a tonic supplement, but a compost accelerator as well.

Groworganic not only conditions the soil, but breaks down clay and takes the backache out of gardening, it's safe with lime haters and no matter what condition your soil, hard sticky clay, sand or even dust **Groworganic** will produce healthy bumper crops of fruit, vegetables, flowers and plants - year in and year out.

Assisted by DEFRA - the department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who help to ensure that the product is of the highest standard - **Groworganic** is a healthy way to grow your crops and be kind to the environment.

The History of Groworganic

Life began for **Groworganic** in 1974. Situated in the heart of Somerset, not far from Glastonbury Tor, the factory now produces 25 tons of composted, heat-treated, concentrated natural fertiliser every day.

The composting technique is to mountain the compost in a covered 1000 ton area and with regular turning, extract the ammonia. The composting of the deep poultry litter/wood shavings last for six weeks with regular wet back treatment to prevent the material from drying out.

The next process is to mill the product before the oven heating. Finally the now composted product enters the oven and is heat treated at over 200°C. The product is now clean and stable and ready for bagging as all composting is now complete.

Groworganic is a friable, fibrous and concentrated natural fertiliser resembling a product that looks like a course tea. This natural fertiliser is currently used by over 500 UK allotment and garden societies and is also shipped as far afield as the Orkneys Horticultural Society, the Port Stanley Garden Club in the Falklands and the Middle East.



15kg bags available in the shed - £6.50

Coir by Monty Don

I use a lot of coir, which I buy as compressed 'bricks' and soak to expand into a loose, fibrous potting medium. It produces good root structures, holds water well and is a good base for mixing your own compost. In Holland it has been taken up commercially as an alternative to peat.

Do not overwater. The surface of the container will dry out but it holds the water very well at root level.

You do not need to add anything if you are using it purely to raise fast-growing seedlings, but I like to add loam for anything that is to be eventually grown in the soil.

£2.10 per block

Sulphate of Ammonia

A fast acting fertiliser, rich in nitrogen, that promotes above-the-ground growth and rich, green foliage.

Vitax Sulphate of Ammonia is particularly beneficial for leafy vegetable and salad crops such as brassicas, lettuce, spinach, rhubarb and leek.

An early application also gives flowering plants, shrubs and fruit an extra boost and will quickly 'green-up' a tired lawn.

It can be applied at the recommended rates throughout the growing season. Simply spread evenly and hoe or fork into the top surface of the soil. Water-in during dry conditions.

£2.00 for 3kg box

pH testing

The pH of a soil refers to its acidity or alkalinity and is a vital factor in plant growth. It's easy to measure and is usually listed numerically on a scale of one to 14. Acid soils have a pH of below seven, neutral is pH7 and alkaline is above seven.

Determining pH and soil type

The majority of domestic soil testing kits are very simple and rely on colour rather than a numerical scale. So you can check the pH of your soil using a simple kit available at garden centres. The solution turns yellow-orange for acid soil, green for neutral and dark green for alkaline.

A pH of 7.0 is considered neutral. An acid soil has a pH value below 7.0 and above 7.0 the soil is alkaline.

Most plants prefer a pH of 6.5 to 7 – the point where nutrients are most easily available.



Two homemade soil pH testing methods

1 – You can test your garden soil pH with vinegar and baking soda

Collect 1 cup of soil from different parts of your plot and put 2 spoonful's into separate containers. Add 1/2 cup of vinegar to the soil. If it fizzes, you have alkaline soil, with a pH between 7 and 8.

If it doesn't fizz after doing the vinegar test, then add distilled water to the other container until 2 teaspoons of soil are muddy. Add 1/2 cup baking soda. If it fizzes you have acidic soil, most likely with a pH between 5 and 6.

If the soil doesn't react at all it is neutral with a pH of 7 and you are very lucky!

2 – You can make a cabbage water pH test

Measure 2 cups of distilled water into a saucepan. Cut up and add 1 cup of red cabbage. Simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and allow it to sit for up to 30 minutes.

Strain off the liquid – which will be purple/blue. This will have a neutral pH of 7.

To test: add 2 teaspoons of garden soil to a jar and a few inches of cabbage water. Stir and wait for 30 minutes. Check the colour. If it turns pink, your soil is acidic. If it is blue/green, your soil is alkaline.

There are quite a few fruit and vegetable plants that thrive in **acidic soil**. These include:

Beans, Broccoli, Beets, carrot, cauliflower, cucumber, garlic, lettuce, parsley, peppers, peas, pumpkin, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, spinach.

If your soil tests **alkaline** (pH between 7 and 8) you'll be able to easily grow these vegetables without making amendments:

Artichoke, asparagus, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and Chinese cabbage, kale, leeks, mustard and other leafy greens, spinach, swiss chard, turnips.

Knowing the pH of your soil will help your plants grow by absorbing nutrients better from the soil. Their ability to do this depends on the nature of the soil and its combination of sand, silt, clay, and organic matter. The makeup of soil (soil texture) and its acidity (pH) determine the extent to which nutrients are available to plants. Use these 2 ways to test soil pH and have a great plot this year.

Plant sale

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.

The proceeds helps to cover all the costs of the group and towards purchasing other equipment for use by the members.

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