



## Chairman's Chatter

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A recurring theme of this newsletter, especially at the end of the year, is saying farewell to folks who after ten, fifteen, or even twenty years sadly find they can no longer manage their plot and reluctantly have to give it up.

Of course it is not just the growing they have to give up but also all the friendship, routine and benefits of the fresh air and exercise that come from having a space that is yours that you can go to and grow whatever takes your fancy from the catalogue in the Trading shed.

For some moving to have a half plot can be the answer – half the work but still with all the fun and friendship that an allotment provides. If this is something you would like to consider please contact either David Pelling our plot rep or talk to Earley Town Council before renewing your rental of your whole plot.

Unfortunately if you are losing the ability to bend and dig, then jobs like preparing the ground, planting, and importantly harvesting can become a challenge, even for a half plot. We are therefore exploring an idea with the council of having some space given over to growing spaces raised to waist height for those who might find this easier. They might perhaps look something like this:



This is very much an idea still being developed and we would welcome your thoughts and ideas. We have looked at information provided by the gardening therapy charity Thrive who have an operation at Beech Hill to the south of Reading. This has provided guidance on dimensions and things like path widths. We are probably looking at providing these on a half plot.

Please let me have your thoughts on this, whether you think it is a good or a rubbish idea, or what we might need to take into account. It would be useful to have these thoughts before we meet with the council to discuss the idea more fully. The councillors have provisionally expressed enthusiasm for the idea.

### Huntley & Palmer trading shed news

The trading shed has now closed for the season and will reopen on **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018**. We will then have the new season seed potatoes and onion sets in stock ready for the new growing year – yes it all starts again.

Can I formally record a HUGE thank you to all the volunteers who have helped run the shed during 2017. It has been a steep learning curve for all of us but we have done it – learning how to work the till, order stock and look after customers – all in one of Reading's friendliest trading sheds.

If you have any questions or concerns about any of the above please feel free to contact me.

Richard

Plot 46

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## Seasonal Tips - December/January

Working on the allotment is a perfect ruse to get out of the Christmas shopping!

December is the winter month in which we can expect the first serious frosts, so cover sensitive plants with garden fleece, bubble wrap or a layer of mulch.

You can harvest lots of veg for Christmas plates, including parsnips, leeks and winter cabbages, all of which can be left in the ground until you need them but if temperatures plummet, cover the soil with straw.

As long as there is no frost, this is a good month to winter prune apple and pear trees to control their shape and size, but not plums, these should never be pruned in winter, due to the risk of disease. You can also prune blackcurrants, gooseberries, redcurrants and white currants this month.

If you have sown green manures, dig these in when ready and cover the freshly dug area with black plastic to help prevent the weeds from taking over the plot again and to warm the soil ready for early crops next year.

Keep filling your runner bean trench with peelings and other organic kitchen waste, such as vegetable peelings, mouldy fruit, apple cores, onion skins and even tea bags. Each time you add a batch of kitchen waste, cover it with a layer of soil until the trench is full and leave it to rot down. As it does so, it will hold on to plenty of moisture, which is just what beans enjoy.

Remove any yellowing leaves from winter brassicas, this helps with air circulation and lets new shoots grow through. Cover with nets to stop the pigeons devouring them.

Mound up the soil up around the bottom of Brussels sprout stems as protection against high winds

Keep clearing up any leaves so that slugs and snails can't shelter beneath them.

When it's too cold to get to the plot, plan for next year, grab a sheet of A4 paper, and loosely draw the shape of the plot. Make a list of what grew well and what didn't this year and sketch out a plan of where you will grow what. Don't forget to rotate the growing sites, rotating crops helps to prevent carry over of pests and diseases.

January is a 'slow' month on the plot, it is just a case of tidying up and checking any existing plants. Draw the soil up around the stalks of cabbages, sprouts and winter cauliflowers to just under the first set of leaves.

The days are still too short and cold even think of sowing seeds either outdoors or in the open.

Seed potatoes will be available in the shed later in the month, see next page for details of the varieties available and prices. They should be stored in trays, in a light, cool, frost-free place to chit ready for planting in March or April

## Cookery Corner - Roasted Roots

What better way to use your harvest from the plot, than in one easy dish at Christmastime. If you are brave you could include some sprouts!!

Serves: 4

Prep time: 15mins

### Ingredients

1 kg (2¼ lb) root vegetables, sweet potatoes, celeriac, carrots, parsnips, swede and kohlrabi

225 g (8 oz) shallots

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp coarse sea salt

1 tsp ground black pepper

few sprigs of fresh thyme

few sprigs of fresh rosemary

### Method

Preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F, gas mark 7). Scrub or peel the vegetables. Cut large carrots or parsnips in half lengthways, then cut the pieces across in half again. Cut swede, celeriac and kohlrabi into large chunks. Leave shallots whole.

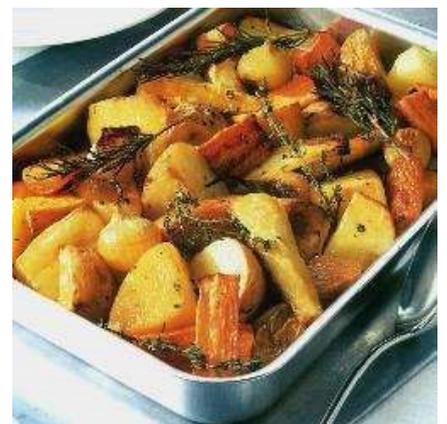
Place oil in a large bowl, add the vegetables and stir around so they are all coated with oil, sprinkle with the salt and ground pepper.

Place the vegetables in a roasting tin, add the herb sprigs to the tin and place in the oven.

Roast for 30–35 minutes or until the vegetables are golden brown, crisp and tender. Turn the vegetables over halfway through the cooking

### Note

The vegetables can be roasted at the same time as a joint of meat or poultry. Allow 45 minutes at 200°C (400°F, gas mark 6), or longer at a lower temperature, if necessary.



## HP Trading Shed

The shed reopens on **Saturday January 13<sup>th</sup> 2018** Don't forget to renew your membership, £1.50 per year.

We have introduced some new varieties this year – Lady Christl, Pink Fir Apple, Maris Piper, Mayan Gold and Sarpo Mira as well as the old favourites.

All Potatoes Priced at £1.00 for 1kg or £2.70 for 3kg		
Type	Variety	Characteristics
1 <sup>st</sup> Earlies	Arran Pilot	White skin colour. Very Early. Good Flavour. Boil well. Bake well.
	Foremost	Russet skin colour. Good scab resistance. Boil well. Bake well.
	Lady Christl	High yield. Waxy yellow tubers. Disease resistant. Good flavour. Boil well
Salad	Charlotte	High yield. Waxy long light yellow tubers. Good flavour. Boil well.
	Pink Fir Apple	Long knobby pink tubers. Good flavour. Boil well. Bake well. Good in salads.
Main Crop	Desiree	Red skin colour. Fairly waxy. High Yield. Drought resistant. Boil well. Bake well. Roast well. Chips well. Mash well.
	King Edward	Part red skin colouration. Good flavour. Boil well. Bake well. Roast well. Chip well. Mash well.
	Majestic	Large white tubers. Good yields. Disease resistant. Stores well. Chips well. Mash well.
	Maris Piper	Uniform in shape and size. Good yield. Good flavour. Boil well. Good chipper. Bake well. Roast well. Chips well. Mash well.
	Mayan Gold	Rich golden flesh. Unrivalled nutty flavour.
	Picasso	Stunning red eyes. Massive yields. Mild taste. Stores well. Some resistance to blight. Boil well. Bake well. Roast well.
	Sarpo Mira	High resistance to blight. Good boiler. Bake well. Mash well. Good in salads.

All Onion Sets Priced at £1.10 for 500g		
Onion Sets		
	Stuttgarter Giant	A flat shaped yellow skinned set with good yield and keeping properties. Plant in February. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
	Turbo Spring	A globe shaped golden yellow skin set with good yield and keeping properties. Slow to bolt and strong grower.
	Red Barron	A red skinned flat-round onion. Good in salads. Plant later. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
	Sturon	A round straw coloured onion which stores well. High yields of medium sized onions. Plant in February to April. RHS Award of Garden Merit.

All Shallots Priced at £1.90 for 500g		
Shallots		
	Arista	Banana shaped with red flesh. Very sweet with good flavour, ideal in salads, casseroles and roasted.
	Golden Gourmet	Yellow with a mild flavour. Good for pickling and can be planted from February onward. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
	Pikant Red	Red skinned and resistant to bolting. Matures early and stores well.

Continued on next page

## HP Trading Shed (cont'd)

All Garlic Priced at £3.35 for two bulbs		
Garlic		
	Edenrose	French grown – hard neck. High yielding rose skinned cloves with strong flavour. Spring or autumn planting.
	Printanor	French grown – soft neck. Producing large bulbs with tasty cloves. Spring or autumn planting.
	Flavor	French grown – hard neck. An Italian pink type that matures in late July and stores well.

Beans and Peas		
Type	Variety	Price
Beans	Enorma Runner	£1.60 for 125g
	Imperial Green Windsor Broad Bean	£0.80 for 125g
Peas	Kelvedon Wonder	£0.70 for 125g

## Mares Tail

It was agreed at the AGM that EAA would provide a working party to help remove some of the material on the closed plots to the front of the site.

If you can spare some time there will be a working party 10:00 - 13:00 on **Sunday 3rd December 2017** where we can dismantle the sheds and remove the larger shrubs growing on the closed plots so that the council can progress with more speed to improve the plots and get them reopened.

There will be refreshments and bacon butties in shed after wards.

## Best Allotment Awards 2017

This years awards were announced at the AGM by Earley Town Council, congratulations to you all.

- Best Plot – Peter Wynn Plot 63
- Most Improved Plot – Ann Tunley Plot 33
- Highly Commended – Sue Clarke Plot 22

## Gifts for allotmenters

Tired of trawling around the shops? A few online suggestions.

**Knee Pads - £17** [www.worm.co.uk](http://www.worm.co.uk)

soft, squidgy memory foam which puffs back into shape after you have been kneeling and weeding - even on the most uncomfortable gravel. Velcro fastenings, so will fit a variety of knee sizes, and stay comfortably in position as you work round your garden

**Ladies Garden Gloves - £5** [www.worm.co.uk](http://www.worm.co.uk)

snug stretch fit so they can be used for most jobs around the greenhouse and garden, have nitrile-coated fingers and palm for grip and protection against dirt and moisture.

**Berry Picker - £13** [www.worm.co.uk](http://www.worm.co.uk)

No more scratched arms and sticky hands when picking berries among thorn-covered bushes! The rounded wire comb scoops up the fruit in double-quick time.

**National Garden Gift Voucher/Card**  
[www.thevoucher garden.co.uk](http://www.thevoucher garden.co.uk)

Available for amounts of £10+, exchangeable at local garden centres.

There is also a large selection of books available at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) A couple I found useful as a newbie:

**RHS Half Hour Allotment - £15**

and **RHS Allotment Handbook & Planner, £9**