

April 2018

Issue 1



Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Huntley and Palmers Allotment Association Newsletter, a bi-monthly publication for all members of the newly created HPAA. The Newsletter will be sent by email to all members of the former Huntley and Palmers Horticultural Society, namely plot holders from Culver Lane and Reading Road Allotments, members without a plot and residents of the surrounding area.

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It will contain allotment orientated articles and news regarding the trading shed.

I hope you find it of interest.

Chairman's Chatter

After a long wait, spring has finally sprung, everything is coming to life on the plots, including of course the weeds. The material our seeds, plants and weeds grow in is soil. It might be easy to take it for granted but without the soil, all our allotments and gardens would come to nothing.

Looking after our soil

The newly formed Sustainable Soils Alliance is a coalition of companies, charities, universities and NGOs. It has a vision to address the fact that "soil health is declining to the extent that we are now just one generation away from a soil system that is unable to meet the needs of the people that depend upon it".

Some of their aims include:

- Reducing our reliance on chemical input as this would reduce the amount of soil lost to pollution and contamination
- Better management of flooding and run off – to reduce the amount of soil that is just washed away when we have heavy rain or flooding
- Training and accredited qualifications to improve knowledge and awareness in farmers and landowners of how to manage their soil

Their aim is that their efforts over the next twenty-five years will reduce the 2.9 million tonnes of soil lost to erosion and poor management. To put it in context that is enough soil to cover Palmer Park in Reading with a ten-meter depth of topsoil.

To many plot holders of course this is nothing new or clever. We are all used to making our own compost and bringing in manure to improve the quality of our soil – maybe farmers and other landowners could learn from our smaller scale operations?

New name for your allotment association

At the AGM on Wednesday 18th April it was agreed to incorporate the Earley Allotment Association into the Huntley and Palmers Horticultural Society.

The new combined organisation will be called the Huntley and Palmers Allotment Association. Apart from the name there will be little different to see for our members – the shed is still there and available to sell you what you need at a very reasonable price – come and see us soon.

Happy growing

Richard Tredgett

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Seasonal Tips - April/May

With any luck, the cold and wet weather is over and better growing conditions can be hoped for, but keep the fleece handy, it might be needed.

Continue with planting out the seed potatoes; aim to complete the job by the end of April. Be prepared to cover the emerging shoots of the earlies with soil if a frost is forecast.

Complete the planting of onion sets and carry on making successional sowings of beetroot, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, spinach, spring onions, kohlrabi, radish, turnips, early peas, Swiss chard.

Put up poles for runner and climbing French beans.

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. Protect them from frosts.

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, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, outdoor/ridge cucumber.

Sweetcorn does not like its root being disturbed, sow in old toilet roll inners packed with compost and plant out the whole roll below ground level when ready.

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

May

At this time of year, early directly sown carrots invariably need thinning out. This job is best done during late evening during still conditions. This will reduce the chances of alerting any carrot fly nearby. Keep the rows of carrots covered with fleece or create a barrier around the plants.

Gradually harden off your remaining vegetables under glass; ridge

cucumbers, pumpkins, runner beans, french beans, squash. All tender vegetables can be planted out at the end of May or when the risk of frost has passed.

Look out for blackfly on broad beans, greenfly on peas, lettuce, cabbage root fly, carrot fly, thrip damage on brassicas especially when the plants are small. Spray the affected plants with soapy water (diluted washing up liquid) or squash the flies with your thumb and finger.

Keep hoeing between crops to control weeds. Hoeing is best done on a dry day so that the weeds do not have a chance to recover. Perennial weeds like dandelion and dock will need their roots removed to prevent regrowth.

In the greenhouse and polytunnel it is an equally busy time. Continue to pot on tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines and peppers as required. Maintain good ventilation.

Don't worry if your planting is a bit late, the allotment will always catch up eventually and reward your patience with bumper harvest.

Rhubarb Crumble Muffins

Fluffy and golden, with just a touch of crunch

Makes 12 Ready in 45mins

Ingredients

50g Porridge oats
25g plain flour
125g golden caster sugar
50g unsalted butter
1 beaten egg
150g full fat natural Greek style yogurt
100ml semi-skimmed milk
1 tsp vanilla essence
200g self-raising flour
1 tsp baking powder
200g chopped rhubarb

Preheat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/
Gas 6

Line a 12 hole muffin tin with paper cases

To make the crumble topping:-

1. Mix together the porridge oats, plain flour and 25g golden caster sugar
2. Cut butter into small pieces and rub into the dry mixture, until it resembles breadcrumbs
3. In another bowl, stir together the remaining golden caster sugar, beaten egg, yogurt, milk and vanilla essence
4. Mix in the SR flour and baking powder, add chopped rhubarb

5. Divide the muffin mixture between the paper cases, sprinkle each one with the crumble mixture
6. Bake for 20-25 mins or until golden brown and springy to the touch
7. Allow to cool



Rhubarb Crumble Muffins

Trading Shed

Business has been brisk in the shed since the weather has taken a turn for the better.

We sold out of all seed potatoes extremely quickly this year, a note for next year to order more.

The last of the onion sets and shallots were sold last week, but there are still a few garlic bulbs left, these are half price. Loose peas – Kelvedon Wonder at 70p per 125g.

Don't forget Suttons seeds, there is a good selection on offer

Broad beans, to replace the overwinter ones that were lost to the snow and rain, there is still time to catch up.

Runner and climbing beans and bamboo canes for them to climb up. If short on space, try a wigwam of 6 canes, with the addition of sweet peas, these can look very attractive.

Carrots, whatever variety you choose, sow them thinly so as to cut down on thinning out, this is when the carrot root fly descends. If possible sow in a raised bed and use mesh (available in the shed) as a barrier around the edges or better still an old bath. The carrot root fly cannot fly above 45-60 cm (or 18-24" in old money)

With the seeds, you will need pots and growing medium

Plant pots – both plastic and peat, sizes 6 – 9cm, root trainers, with 9, 12 and 40 cells

John Innes seed compost and 1, 2 and 3 and multipurpose compost.

We've even got plant labels and pens!

Don't forget the flowers seeds, particularly pertinent at this time are sunflower seeds, At the annual BBQ in September there is a competition for the tallest sunflower and the one with the largest head, so get sowing. Sunflowers can be sown directly in the soil, but sown in root trainers encourages deep roots to develop and can be planted out with the minimum of root disturbance.

Trial of Wednesday Evening Opening

In the past the Trading shed use to open on a Wednesday evening as well as Saturday and Sunday during the busy spring period. Members would pop in either on the way home from work or on the way to an evening working on their plot.

We are therefore trialling this for the month of May to see if this is of benefit to members who as we move into summer might find the weekends taken up with other family activities but who take advantage of the lighter evenings.

The Trading shed will therefore be open 6:00 pm – 07:30 pm on the following dates:

Wednesday 2nd May

Wednesday 9th May

Wednesday 16th May

Wednesday 23rd May

Wednesday 30th May

We will see if this is popular with members and if it is, we will consider more Wednesday evening opening.

Data Protection

If you are a member or supporter of any other charity, community group or church you have probably heard about GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). This new law is about raising the standard of data protection by organizations in respect of their members or supporters. The legislation takes effect from Friday 25 May 2018.

Like these other groups we need to be ready for this new legislation. What that means is that we need a positive "opt in" from people to say that they are happy for us to communicate with them. At the moment we presumption we can communicate as a result of their taking up membership or we assume we can as you have not told us we can't.

What we are doing to comply with the legislation and keep in touch with you:

We will shortly send out an email to all those members we have an email address for asking them to give a

positive affirmation that we can communicate with them

For members that we don't have an email address for or who prefer to deal in pen and paper we will ask them to sign a new style consent form in the shed when they next visit

If we don't get your permission we will not be allowed to write to you anymore this year. Next year will be easier as we have a new style membership form that gets your full permission at the time you become a member and we will be able to keep in touch all year.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in letting us keep in touch with you and informed about things at the trading shed.

Richard Tredgett

Chair

Huntley & Palmer Allotment Association

Slugs

Slugs are the number one plant pest problem, they are usually, but not exclusively herbivores.

Slugs are hermaphrodite and lay spherical translucent white eggs about 2-3mm across. Eggs are laid in batches of 10-50 and can often be found in the soil, in compost heaps and other dark, damp places. Up to about 500 eggs per slug may be laid in a season. Slugs can live for up to four years but the lifespan is usually less.

Slugs are soft bodied, gastropod molluscs that move along on a singular muscular foot and secrete slime. They have two sets of retractable tentacles, one pair for smell and taste and one pair for eyes. They scrape their food up with a spiky, rasping tongue. Slugs can be active all year round both above and below ground in all but very hot, dry or frosty weather. Slugs mostly feed at night.

They attack young and tender garden plants, especially annuals, perennials and vegetables, Slug damage is most severe during humid periods, especially in Spring and Autumn. Slugs are more mobile in wet weather because their slime is hygroscopic; it draws in moisture. Slime becomes far more effective in wet conditions. It's this hygroscopic property that makes slug slime so hard to wash off your hands. Adding water just makes it more slimy!

The most common species of slug found in gardens and allotments :-



Spanish slug

6-15cm, when mature, chocolate brown with dark brown tentacles



Balkan Threeband slug

4-8cm, when mature, greyish brown, often found in compost bins, under logs or plant pots



Large Red slug

6-15cm, when mature, grey with bright orange foot fringe

How to control them?

Barrier methods are more environmentally friendly, slugs do not like crawling over a rough surface.

Crushed egg and nut shells, horticultural grit, coffee grounds, sawdust, sandpaper or pine needles placed around plants make it more uncomfortable for the slugs to cross. Cheap but needs replenishing frequently.

Copper tape around pots – slugs experience a small shock when exposed to copper, which will make them turn back.

Beer trap – use a shallow container (plastic coleslaw or yoghurt pot) and insert it into the soil. Leave a rim 2cm above soil level to prevent beetles and other creatures from falling in.

Organic control - There is a microscopic nematode *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita* which kills slugs. It is a native species and can be found naturally in the soil throughout the UK. For it to be effective, however, you need large numbers and regular application. The nematodes are commercially available, often supplied in a pack of moist clay. This is mixed with water and applied to the soil with a watering can. Slugs will be controlled for up to 6 weeks, after which re-application is often necessary. Expensive and mail order only.

Chemical methods - slug pellets, when scattered around plants, these are eaten by the slug and they burrow into the ground and die. Two types available, standard, based on metaldehyde or methiocarb and organic, based on ferric phosphate, these are pet and child friendly. Cheap, but expect to pay more for organic pellets, readily available.

Natural predators, slugs have a variety of predators such as:

- Hedgehogs
- Birds (e.g. Thrushes)
- Toads
- Ground Beetles

When a slug is attacked by a predator it will contract its body to make it a smaller target. The mucus that covers a slug's body doesn't taste very nice and is slippery, so this is why you will often see birds wiping slugs on the grass before they eat them.

