

July 2018

Issue 2



## Chairman's Chatter

### Inside this issue:

Chairman's Chatter	1
Seasonal tips	2
Cookery Corner	2
HP Trading Shed	3
Earley Green Fair	4
HPAA BBQ	4

Summer has finally arrived and no surprise that just like farmers, plot holders and gardeners are still not happy – complaining that too much sun requires lots of watering. Many of us would suggest however, that an evening watering is not a bad way to spend the time at the end of the day though – watering and relaxing down on your plot and catching up with your neighbours. Slightly less relaxed is the early morning watering dash on the way to work.

### Slug pellets in your tea?

Earlier in the season, before the summer arrived, we were all battling slugs that would happily eat a whole afternoon's planting overnight before you could return the next day. Whilst one plot holder was carrying a large-scale experiment trying eight (at the last count) different methods to repel the little munchers, the most popular weapon are the little blue slug pellets.

These have long been made containing metaldehyde as the poison that stops those slugs and snail in their tracks. They are effective as slug killers but have the undesirable effect of also poisoning wildlife, pets and children who might eat them. To reduce the impact of this most metaldehyde slug pellets also contain bitrex which is claimed to be the most bitter substance in the world.

There is a further problem with metaldehyde slug pellets. So many are being used in gardens but also in agriculture that the chemical is ending up in the water supply. I am sure none of us would deliberately put slug pellets in our tea or coffee, so this is a bit of a problem.

### The answer

As a result of the leaching into the water supply metaldehyde slug pellets are being phased out in two steps:

The size of container that the public and retail traders like our trading shed can buy is being reduced to 250g during 2018. This is a major change as at the moment we buy sacks of loose slug pellets in 20KG bags – eighty times the size allowed going forward!

It is expected that in the next few years metaldehyde slug pellets will be banned completely – maybe as soon as 2020.

There are a number of alternative chemicals that can be used in slug pellets, of which the most common is Ferric Phosphate. This kills slugs and snails in a different but equally effective way without the disadvantage of poisoning wildlife, pets or children.

They are at the moment more expensive than the old-style slug pellets but as the amount being purchased increases the price does seem to be coming down. The trading shed is now stocking both sorts of slug pellets both pre-packaged and as a refill. Refills have to be into a container already labelled as slug pellets for safety reasons.

Happy harvesting

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## Seasonal Tips—July/August

Water, water and more water, that's the mantra of the moment, consistent watering is what is needed, not a drowning now and then. A mulch such as wheat straw, finely ground bark, pine needles or chopped-up leaves spread on the ground around and under plants is a welcome barrier between the moist soil and the hot sun to stop the soil becoming baked

**Weed regularly** - don't ease up on hoeing, weeds will be growing as vigorously as everything else of your plot.

**Net against birds** - peas, brassicas and soft fruit need to be protected from birds by securing netting

**Dry out garlic, onions and shallots** - a few days before harvest loosen the soil around the roots. Choose a dry spell of weather, lift the bulbs and lie on the soil surface in the sun. The more thoroughly dry they are the longer they will keep.

**Pinch out tops of climbing beans** - climbing beans don't really know when to stop so pinch out the

growing tips when they reach the top of the canes or they will soon become tangled and top heavy.

**Pinch out tomato shoots** - nip off the side shoots and pinch out the growing tip at the top of each plant once four or five trusses have formed. Start watering regularly with a liquid fertiliser as soon as you see that the first fruits have formed.

**Lettuce and other salad crops** - succession sow more lettuce, rocket, land cress and other salad leaves for an ongoing supply into autumn.

### August

August is a great time to enjoy the rewards of your labours earlier in the year.

**Second early potatoes** should be ready now, carefully dig them out and lay out to dry them before storing in hessian sacks in a cool dark place.

**Pick courgettes** regularly while they are small if you don't want marrows.

**Sweetcorn** are ready when the silks

go dark brown, test every cob before you pick. Peel back the outer husk and press a thumbnail into one of the kernels. If the water runs clear, leave it on the plant; milky white and it's ready for picking.

**Tie up tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers** - as the fruits develop they become heavy and the plants will require extra support to the main stems to avoid breakages and loss of crops.

Prune summer fruiting raspberries

**Pin strawberry runners**, still attached to the parent, into pots filled with compost to root. Once they are growing well, sever the runners and hey presto, new plants.

**Cauliflowers** - August is the time to transplant winter and spring cauliflowers. If they overwinter successfully they should give you a harvest in the new year, January onwards.

**Any spare ground?** Sow green manure, this will take about six weeks to mature then it can be dug in.

## Cookery Corner—Chocolate & raspberry brownies

I was going to write up the recipe for traditional Scottish Cranachan, but it involved whisky. For those who are interested, the recipe can be found on the BBC Good Food site.

Instead I chose everyone's favourite, Chocolate Brownies



### Ingredients

200g dark chocolate, chunks

100g milk chocolate, chunks

250g butter

400g soft light brown sugar

4 large eggs

140g plain flour

50g cocoa powder

200g fresh raspberries

Heat oven 180°C/160°C fan/ gas 4

Line a 20x30cm baking tin with baking parchment.

Melt the chocolate, butter and sugar in a pan, stirring occasionally.

Stir in eggs, one by one, into melted chocolate mixture. Sieve the flour and cocoa, add to mixture. Stir in half the raspberries, scrape into tray and scatter over the remaining raspberries.

Bake on the middle shelf for 30 mins, or 5 mins more for a firmer texture. Cool before slicing into squares.

## Trading Shed

As I hope you are aware we are trialling different opening hours in July and August. This matter was discussed at the first meeting of the new H&PAA committee and shared with those members we have permission to email in June.

Looking back at July and August 2017 some things were evident:

In terms of members coming in to buy things in July each day had an average of five customers, in August the number dropped to an average of three customers.

Average takings per day across the whole of 2017 were £54

In April and May which are busy months average takings were over £100 a day

In July however they were an average per day of £25 and in August just £12

In addition, July and August were understandably the most difficult months of 2017 to get volunteers to open the shed.

This naturally led to a discussion as to whether we should do something different in the way of opening hours during these quieter months. In particular, asking a volunteer to give up three hours of their time on a Saturday or Sunday when the quietest day in July had two customers and the least busy August day had just one was felt to be unreasonable.

During these months members have already predominantly bought their compost, canes and fertilisers and are topping up with items like tomato feed or slug pellets. This is reflected in the number of customers using the shed during these months.

### Options considered

There was much debate about whether it was right to change the long-standing arrangements of the shed which quite possibly date back to Dig for Britain days in the 1940s.

There was also an agreement that we need to remain respectful of volunteer's time, especially as on one of the very quietest days the only sale was to the volunteer themselves – no other customers came in and spent money during the two and a half hours we were open.

### Options considered were:

Carry on as we are

Open only on Saturdays – the first day of the weekend

Open only on Sundays – some folks work Saturday but have Sunday as a day off

Open on Wednesday evening instead of, or as well as one day at the weekend

Looking again at numbers Saturday and Sunday across the year are almost exactly equally busy in terms of sales to members. There was a view that getting volunteers for Wednesday evening would be easier than a day at the weekend – it is a shorter period and leaves the volunteer's weekend free.

It was also noted that one of the Tilehurst trading sheds closes completely in August for the whole month.

In the end it was agreed to carry out a trial this year to gauge volunteer availability and member feedback. As a result, we will open as follows:

### For the month of July, we will open the shed on Saturday morning only.

The shed in July will therefore be

open on Saturday July 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>

closed on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>

### During August the shed will only open on Wednesday evenings between 18:00 and 19:30.

In August the shed will therefore be open on:

Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup>

Closed on both Saturday or Sunday in August

The results of the trial will be discussed at the 2019 AGM when members can have their say.

We will return to the more usual Saturday and Sunday opening on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018 and this will continue till the end of November as normal.

I am happy to discuss this with any members who are unhappy or feel inconvenienced by this trial. I am also very happy to talk to any members who would like to join the team of volunteers that make your shed possible.

Richard Tredgett - [tredgett@gmail.com](mailto:tredgett@gmail.com)

## Earley Green Fair

For the second year we will have a stall at the Earley Green Fair. This is a community event run by Earley Town Council to support and publicise local groups especially those with an environmental focus. It takes place at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve off Beach Lane.

The aim of the stall is three fold:

- \* to publicise the trading shed to make more people aware of where we are and the good value we offer.
- \* to raise the profile of the Culver Lane allotments and make residents of Earley aware that the council runs the site for their benefit. Last year we doubled the size of the waiting list by publicising the site.

\* to tell people about the benefits of allotments more generally. Last year we handed out information about allotment sites in Woodley, Reading, Twyford and Shinfield

We need to make sure our stall stands out amongst the forty to fifty that will be there on the day. If you could donate a small amount of flowers, fruit or vegetables that would be appreciated. If you could help out for an hour or two on the day that would also be appreciated. In either case please contact Richard via [tredgett@gmail.com](mailto:tredgett@gmail.com).

If you can't help then just come along for a look. Entry is free and you can also explore around the lake at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

## Earley Green fair

Saturday 4th August 2018  
10 am to 3 pm  
at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve,  
Beech Lane, Earley  
**Come and join in the fun!**

This is Earley's most popular annual event.



Join us for our annual Green Fair .  
Lots of stalls, including many on all aspects of environmental matters.  
At the same time, enjoy a delicious cup of tea, tasty cakes etc .

This event is organised by the Park Rangers Service, Earley Town Council. For more information please phone 0118 9868995

## Huntley & Palmers Allotment Association BBQ



In early September each year the Earley Allotment Association held a BBQ at Culver Lane. With the amalgamation of the Huntley & Palmers Horticultural Society and the EAA earlier this year, I am pleased to let you know that this tradition will be continuing.

This years BBQ will be known as the HPAA BBQ and will be held on the allotment site at Culver Lane.

The event will be held on Saturday 1st September 12.30—15.00 and is free to plot holders of Reading Road and Culver Lane allotments who are

members of the HPAA, everyone welcome, £1 for non members.

BBQ's, one for meat, one for veggie, plates, tumblers and cutlery will be provided but please bring what you would like to barbecue and drink and a salad, side or a dessert which can be shared. Tea, coffee and squash will be available.

The event will include a number of competitions:

- \* Best fruit or vegetable
- \* Best box of 6 vegetables
- \* Best container of flowers
- \* Best food item using plot produce

These will be judged by everybody present on the day. Prizes for the winners.

If you wish to enter any category, bring it/them to the marquee after 12.30 on the day, register and receive a number, paper plates will be provided to display fruit/vegetables. Entries will be accepted until 14.00, no limit on entries.

After 14.00, marking sheets will be distributed, one for each category and you score each entry, 1, 2 or 3, tasting the plot produce if required. The scores are added up and the winners announced, very democratic!

There will also be displays of photographs of the plots, Reading Road members are welcome to contribute, bring them along on the day. Children's activities will include colouring and bug identification.

Look forward to seeing you at this friendly event.