

March 2019

Issue 5



Chairman's Chatter

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Happy spring

Whilst spring arrives on the 1st or 21st March depending on which calendar you follow, the last couple of weekends have definitely started to feel spring-like. We have all enjoyed the warmer weather, longer days and signs of life in the warming ground.

As a result, we have encouragingly seen many more people returning to their plots and discussing plans for the new season. In addition, now is the time when we meet new plot holders – please chat to them and make them welcome, they are sure to have a number of questions. These could range from “where is the loo?” to “how do I plant potatoes?”

Allotments are good for your health

This won't come as a surprise to most of you – having an allotment that gets your hands dirty, lots of exercise and fresh air surrounded by friendly folks is good for your health and wellbeing. A Doctor in Dursley, Gloucestershire is now catching up with us and prescribing an allotment to patients as well as or instead of pills.

The scheme, that copies a similar set up in South London, is so successful it is being extended from using five allotments to fifteen to accommodate all those who might benefit.

Previously patients might get access to the gym but according to one of the doctors involved the allotment scheme has three advantages:

The allotments are far more sociable – people stop and chat as we all know rather than working out in isolation

The fresh air beats the rather enclosed environment in a gym

Patients get the benefit of the crops they choose to grow. Interestingly all the participants so far have chosen to grow organic crops.

The scheme even has the support of Matt Hancock the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care who is keen to see alternatives to pills being considered to address issues faced by patients and those needing social care.

Whatever your reason for running a garden or allotment – best wishes for the new season.

Stop Press - ETC have said that the water on the plots will be turned on this week.

Richard Tredgett

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Seasonal Tips - March/April

March can have some beautiful spring-like days, but don't be fooled it can also turn very cold. Snow isn't unheard of in March and frosts are still common this month, caution is the watchword. If seeds are sown too early in cold, wet ground they will rot.

Seeds can be sown outside towards the end of the month if the ground has been covered, otherwise sow in cloches or cold frames or indoors if really cold. Seeds such as broad beans, sprouting broccoli, early cauliflowers, cabbage, calabrese, spinach, peas, leeks, lettuces and spring onions.

It is possible to grow asparagus from seed but much easier to buy asparagus crowns. dig a trench 30cm (12in) wide and 20cm (8in) deep. Work in well-rotted manure to the bottom of the trench and cover the base with a 5cm (2in) layer of the excavated soil.

When to plant potatoes?

As soon as the soil is dry enough and not too cold is a good guide. The main clue the soil temperature has slightly increased is when the weeds start growing.

The planting window for early varieties is usually mid March-mid April. 'Second earlies' follow two-three weeks later, with maincrop types always the last to go in usually no later than the middle of May.

Plant onions shallots and garlic by the end of the month.

Plant individual cloves so the tips are 2.5cm (1in) below the soil surface. Space 15cm (6in) apart and in rows 30cm (12in) apart.

Plant shallot and onion sets in rows with the tip of each bulb only just protruding through the surface of the soil.

For onions, leave a space of 10cm (4") between each bulb, and 30cm (12") between each row.

For shallots, leave a space of 18cm (7") between each bulb, leaving 30cm (12") between rows.

Cover with horticultural fleece to prevent birds from pulling up newly planted onion, shallots and garlic cloves.

April

Carry on making 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, support growing peas with brushwood or netting.

Prepare the soil for next month's transplanting of sweet corn, courgettes, marrows, pumpkins and outdoor/ridge cucumbers.

Rhubarb self-saucing pudding

Self-saucing puddings are magical: what goes in to the oven as a dish full of batter transmogrifies into a golden-topped sponge with a deliciously saucy, gooey bottom.

Ingredients

75g unsalted butter, plus extra for greasing

800g trimmed rhubarb, cut into 2.5cm pieces

juice and finely grated zest of 2 oranges

220g caster sugar

3 medium eggs, separated

75g self-raising flour

200ml milk (ideally full fat)

1 Set the oven to 180C/350F/gas mark 4. Lightly grease a 2-litre ovenproof dish.

2 Place the rhubarb in a heavy pan with the orange juice and 3 tbsp of the sugar. Stir and simmer gently for 5–10 minutes until the fruit is partly cooked but still holds some shape, and has released lots of juice. Place a sieve or colander over a large jug. Pour in the rhubarb and juices and set aside to cool.

3 Beat together the butter, the remaining sugar and the orange zest. Add the egg yolks one at a time, beating after each. Gradually mix in the flour, 150ml of the reserved rhubarb juices and the milk, alternating each one and mixing well

after each addition. Whisk the egg whites to soft peaks and fold into the batter.

4 Spread the rhubarb into the base of the prepared dish and spoon the batter on top. Bake for about 30 minutes, or until the top is firm and golden. Leave to settle for 10 minutes, then serve immediately with custard, ice cream or whatever takes your fancy.

Serves 6



Trading Shed

A New Service to Members

A shed member used our new system of ordering some raffia at cost price, from our suppliers' catalogue and I ordered a couple more hanks in, to see if this is something we should stock regularly. 50g for £2.45. If there is something you would like to buy, tools, or specialised supplies etc, please ask for the 'Orange Book' and we'll place your order at cost price for delivery in early May.

New to the Trading Shed

Our March delivery has been made to the shed and among the supplies is something new for us. We are now selling Maxicrop Organic Seaweed Plus Complete Garden Feed NPK 5:2:5 for £5.25, in addition to the popular Maxicrop Original Seaweed Extract.



Two Popular Regulars

Our J Arthur Bower's Compost, 50 L for £4.50, started selling well on Saturday alongside the peat free New Horizon compost, 60 L for £6.30. We are gradually selling more and more of the peat free, which is great news.

Have you considered?

We have Intercrop Green Manure seeds in the shed, which are suitable for planting alongside your crops. These clever clovers will fix nitrates and make them available for crops such as, brassicas, leeks and sweet corn. They will improve the soil structure with their roots, act as a weed suppressant and retain soil moisture. A pretty good idea to cut down on the weeding and watering.

Best Sellers

We are selling more varieties of seeds these days and some have been selling particularly quickly. Sweetcorn varieties F1 Goldcrest and F1 Swift are the most popular followed by Crimson Crush Tomatoes, A blight resistant variety, White Gem Parsnips and Telegraph Improved Cucumbers. All are 25% off the Suttons marked price. Don't forget, if you order them yourself using the code **GS1149E** you will get 35% off, but pay a delivery charge of £1.99.

Free Tea and Coffee

If you catch us between customers, don't forget that we offer free teas and coffees and we can offer you a seat to enjoy your drink.

Revised Shed Opening Hours

It was agreed at the AGM this week to open on Wednesday evenings between 18:00 and 19:30 in April and May to help those members who may work or have other commitments on Saturday and Sunday. This balances with the decision to only open on Saturdays in July and August as this can be the quieter months of the year in the shed.

Remembering Sheila Lumbar

On Saturday 9th March, plot holders were joined by Sheila's husband and daughter, Peter and Sharon, in unveiling the plaque in memory of Sheila that is affixed to the bench outside the Trading Shed.

Sheila and Pete were well known on the allotments, until they gave up in 2017.

One of Sheila's greatest contributions was the regular cleaning of the toilet, for which I am sure everyone much appreciated.



Pete and Sharon enjoying the sunshine

Manure supplies

I am repeating this notice for those of you that might not of seen the January issue of the Newsletter,

This is a popular time of year to top up the organic matter in your soil which is often achieved by adding well-rotted manure.

Manures are strictly speaking derived from animal faeces, urine and bedding, typically straw but sometimes wood chips or hemp fibre.

Manure can be 'fresh' straight from the farm or stable, or it can be well-rotted. The latter is much more hygienic and easier to use, but the former can be richer in nutrients.

Any manure with recognisable straw or wood chips is best stacked and allowed to rot for a season, ideally under cover or at least covered with a plastic sheet to exclude rain.

A source we have used for a couple of years now is Mick whose mobile number is 07769 876908.

Mick is based in the Hurst area and he is happy to deliver a load of between three and four tonnes for **£30**.

If you are wondering what three or four tonnes of manure looks like please see below which was a delivery Pete and Chris had delivered last autumn.

Pete is modelling for scale:



Pete has given permission for this photograph to be used.

Some folks share a load which reduces the amount of wheelbarrowing you need to do to spread it around your plot or garden as well as halving the price per person.

Volunteers Required

Since the last newsletter I have become aware of two opportunities to use your gardening and growing skills to help others. One is in the west of our catchment area and the other in the east.

Hillside Community Allotment, Lower Earley

This is a community garden located in Hillside Primary School on Rushey Way in Lower Earley. The group currently has about ten local volunteers who began the project in 2016, and have made good headway with establishing the site and growing crops. They are keen to develop what they do and really would love to have more people involved to bring ideas and share the work.

If you want to know more and are interested in joining the team then please contact Anita on 07989 210217 who will be happy to tell you more about the scheme and how you might get involved.

Growing vegetables for Launchpad

A number of volunteers at the Reading Road allotment site have taken on the task of growing crops to help the local Launchpad charity.

Launchpad provide both advice and practical support for those who are homeless in Reading. Part of the support provided by Launchpad is teaching their clients to cook for themselves using cheaper and healthier ingredients. This is done using food grown by the volunteer team at Reading Road

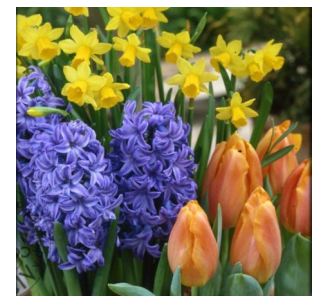
Additional volunteers are needed to help share this worthwhile work, if you can help at Reading Road then please contact Scott Golding on sgolding01@btconnect.com who will be happy to tell you more about the scheme.

Thank you.

Mowers

There are now three motor mowers and a strimmer for use by the Culver Lane plot holders. Two mowers and the strimmer are kept in the shed by the car park and the other one is in the shed on the vacant plot at the far end of the site. If you do not know the code for the padlock, ask in the trading shed, the same code opens both padlocks.

They are all in working condition and were filled with petrol last weekend. If you use the mower/strimmer or find they are out of petrol, could you please email david.pelling1@ntlworld.com, he can then make sure they are refilled.



Happy Easter