

May2019

Issue 6



Chairman's Chatter

I hope you are enjoying the spring and getting busy sowing, planting and growing. It is great to see lots of people on their allotments and meet and welcome new friends as new starters get to grips with their plot.

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Huntley and Palmers Allotment Association AGM

Thanks to all those who attended the AGM. As well as agreeing all the usual necessary business the meeting agreed that:

Your trading shed would open additionally on Wednesday evening 18:00 – 19:30 throughout April and May as these are busy months. Contrarily in July and August which are much quieter we will only open on a Saturday morning, being closed on a Sunday morning.

The Wednesday evening openings are proving popular – some folks come on their way to their plot and others drop in on the way home from work. Come and see us and get the stuff you need and maybe a free tea or coffee to go with them.

We will look at the association buying a polytunnel for communal use at the Culver Lane site. We are currently in discussion with the council about this and debating both the tunnel and the shelving that would go inside it.

And finally, (as they used to say on the nine o'clock news):

A British seed company is selling a "Brexit Survival Kit" for £24.99 to help people grow their own vegetables in case of food shortages after Brexit.

The packs contain 12 "easy to grow" and "nutritious" seed varieties, including spinach, broccoletti, and dwarf peas, and are designed to allow for food to be cultivated and harvested throughout the year.

Paolo Arrigo, founder of London-based importer Franchi Seeds, said the kits also come with full instructions, so anyone from beginners to seasoned allotmenters will be able to grow produce.

Mr Arrigo told the i newspaper: "It started out as a joke – we had had a few drinks and we thought it would be funny. We did it as a laugh to start off with, and then it just took off.

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Seasonal Tips - May/June

May is always looked forward to as the first month of summer but it also marks the end of the spring. It is a month when we can get caught out by mini droughts and heat waves or damaging frosts, cold winds with heavy rain or hail, so be prepared to take steps to protect plants if it is necessary.

May is probably the last month for sowing Brussels sprouts if you want them ready by the end of the year. The same goes for cauliflowers and cabbages. Sow them indoors or out, depending on the weather.

Plant in pots or trays under glass, Dwarf and climbing French beans, runner beans, sweet corn, outdoor cucumbers, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, outdoor cucumbers – all which can be planted out next month.

Continue to sow main crop peas, mange touts, and snap peas outdoors, protect young seedlings with cloches, nets or plastic bottles.

Carrots, beetroot, swedes, and turnips can now safely be sown outdoors. Use insect mesh to protect from carrot fly.

Cut asparagus regularly to maintain the supply. See below for further information.

Earth up potatoes when shoots are approx. 20cm tall, pulling the earth up to form peaked rows, to prevent cold damage and stop tubers turning green.

June

June is the last month for sowing many crops as we pass the longest day and head downhill again.

Plant out brassicas, broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and cabbage as soon as the young plants have made four or five true leaves.

Leeks should be transplanted when they are about 6"-8" tall and pencil thickness.

Make holes using a dibber the depth of the leek, place one leek per hole and fill with water to the brim. The soil will fall back in when the holes have drained.

Outdoor tomatoes can also go into their final position, they should be 15-23 cm (6-9 in) tall, with the first flower truss just showing. Move them to a cold frame to condition them or move them back into the house at night for a few days before they go into the big wide world.

Japanese onions planted out last autumn will be ready, only take what you need for one day, these onions do not store well.

Put some straw underneath the developing strawberry fruits to keep them off the soil and try to avoid watering overhead to reduce any problems with mildew.

Put up poles for runner and climbing French beans.

Watch out for slugs and snails if the weather is wet.

Spotlight on Asparagus



Slightly different this issue, a selection of uses for asparagus. If you are lucky enough to have an asparagus bed on your plot, how and when to harvest those tender green shoots.

The season is short, 6-8 weeks, starting May-June, so if liked, make the most of it.

From early May you will need to harvest asparagus every other day and then as it gets warmer every day. A spear can grow 15cm or 6" in a day when the weather is right.

Using a sharp knife with a serrated edge, cut the asparagus spear cleanly 2-10cm below the ground, taking care not to cut the crown of the plant.

Asparagus does not keep for very long after it's picked, to store asparagus, using string, tie the spears in a bundle and place in a cup of water. Keep about an inch of clean water in the cup.

Steamed asparagus with butter or hollandaise sauce is the traditional way of eating this vegetable. Steam on the hob or in the microwave. But it can also be roasted, grilled, deep fried in tempura batter.

It can be made into soup, added to omelettes, risottos, pasta, quiches and salads.

Start the day with this simple dish, boiled egg with Asparagus soldiers.



Slug pellets

As you may have read or heard in the media the debate about old style slug pellets has reached a conclusion with an announcement late in 2018 by DEFRA

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/restrictions-on-the-use-of-metaldehyde-to-protect-wildlife>

This means that after 30th June 2019 we, like all other retailers, cannot sell you metaldehyde based slug pellets. This is because of the risk and harm caused to wildlife especially birds. From this date you then have just twelve months to use them up before their use becomes illegal after 30th June 2020.

We in the shed have sold these metaldehyde based slug pellets to members for many years. In addition, for the last three years we have also sold the more modern pellets that are based on Ferric Phosphate. Be assured that Ferric Phosphate based slug pellets will remain legal after 30th June. These new style pellets are often labelled and sold as pet & child friendly.

This seems a good time to remind you that we sell slug pellets loose as well as in pre-packaged containers and buying in this way is a much cheaper way to buy them. Our SluXX Slug Control Pet and child friendly – Ferric Phosphate sold Loose from our blue barrel for refill are sold at 75p per 100g.

As all types of slug pellets are considered a poison, please be aware that either sort of slug pellets if sold loose MUST be sold by refilling a container labelled as containing slug pellets. Please do not ask our volunteers to sell you slug pellets to refill any other container or in a bag, as a refusal can sometimes offend!

The list of slug deterrents is a long one, encourage predators, nematodes, beer traps, coffee solution, seaweed, both fresh and powdered (on sale in the shed), hair and pet fur or lint from the tumble dryer, slugs get tangled up in it, these will all kill slugs.

To deter slugs, copper tape, egg shells, sand, wood chips, horticultural grit (on sale in the shed), growing plants like mint, rosemary, thyme, parsley, garlic and sage, is great for checking slugs around your plot.

A few new ideas that could be tried, sliced cucumber in an aluminium pie dish, the scent caused by the chemical reaction with the aluminium keeps slugs away.

Mix white vinegar and water in a spray bottle at a ratio of 2 parts water to 1 part vinegar and spray the slugs. This will kill slugs on contact and they can then be added to the compost.

Use with care however, as vinegar can and does kill plants.

Dates for your diary

Earley Green Fair

This fun event for all the family is being held on Saturday 3rd August 2019 at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, Beech Lane, 10am -3pm

As usual, lots of local groups will have stalls so it's a great opportunity to find out more about the 'green' organisations in the area.

HPAA will be there, where we will be showcasing the Culver Lane Allotments and the Trading Shed.



Annual HPAA BBQ

This year the annual BBQ will be held on the Culver Lane Allotments site on Saturday 31st August 2019, 12.30pm – 3pm. This free event is open to plot holders of both Culver Lane and Reading Road Allotments.

BBQ's, 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.

Also during the afternoon in the marquee there is a produce show, entries on the day. Among the categories are best fruit or vegetable, best box of 6 vegetables, best container of flowers and best food item made from plot produce. These will be judged by everyone present on the day.

Please join us for this friendly get together, a great opportunity for plot holders both old and new to meet.