

HUNTLEY & PALMER'S ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

newsletter



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Chairman's Chatter

Anyone know any good rain dances?

Apart from a former plot holder who originates from Sicily who told me he never watered his allotment as they did not used to water crops at home, so why would I water here? most of us have been watering our plot or garden to a greater or lesser extent recently.

Research by the University of Reading and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) tells us that the impact of climate change will include:

Rainfall

- An increase in the occurrence of prolonged periods without rain, especially in southern England - sound familiar?
- A continuing high year to year variability in rainfall

Temperature

- Average temperature is predicted to increase in all seasons across the UK
- Much of the UK could theoretically become frost free in the future

Wind and storms

- More extreme, more intense windy spells and storms

We can all relate to at least some of these predictions given weather in recent years. So we will need to do what we have always done - adapt to change and learn from each other about what works well, and what less so, which might not be what it was ten years ago.

We might need to consider that:

- Growing seasons might change and possibly we can plant over a wider period and still have success. Maybe an increased logic to sow successionally rather than sowing all of each crop at the same time.
- These changes in the seasons for your plants may not match the change in pollinators seasons, so there may end up being a mismatch if for example the plant flowers three weeks earlier, but the pollinator only moves by a week. I am sure it will sort itself out in the end - the plants need the pollinators, and vice versa.
- If we get fewer and less severe frosts in winter more bugs and pests might survive through to the next season - good for them, but maybe not for us.

Hopefully these changes will happen gradually so our approach to what we grow and how we care for it can evolve over time.

You can read the research here <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/climate-change> - there is a useful summary report as well as the fuller version.

Annual picnic and competitions

All members are invited to the annual picnic and friendly competitions to be held on Saturday 10th September 2022 between 12:30 and 15:00. There will be a range of competitions where the judging is done by everyone present, no external judges peering down their nose at my slightly wonky parsnips. There are more details below.

Note: We are holding a picnic this year as we did in 2021. Traditionally the September social event includes a BBQ, however, until we get significant rain we are respecting the Fire Service request not to have BBQs - they are already busy enough with all this dry weather.

The No-Dig Method of Cultivation

Having been moved off one of the plots which was infested with mares tail I found my new plot is infested with bind weed and although this is less of a problem to control it is still a big problem. I heard on a gardening programme that the no-dig method not only improves soil health, retains carbon and helps support a more sustainable garden with increasing biodiversity, it is also a very effective method of weed control including weeds such as bind weed, docks, mares tail and brambles.

In the no-dig method weeds are controlled by hoeing, hand weeding, contact weed killers, and the exclusion of light by the application of a thick organic mulch. The no-dig method provides a rich soil to grow in and is an excellent way to clear a weed infested plot. In principle if you avoid digging you will not be disrupting soil life i.e. important micro-organisms fungi and worms which help to feed plant roots.

For Weed Infested Plots

Cut tall weeds and foliage down to the ground and put on the compost heap. Cover the ground with some sort of light excluding material such as cardboard, do not use old carpet as these days carpet is treated with chemicals which could leach into the soil. Put down a deep layer of organic mulch e.g. home-made compost, well-rotted manure, leaves, straw, grass mowings or a mixture of all of them 15-20cm thick. Tread it down firmly so that light cannot penetrate down to the soil. Eventually it will rot down forming a nice crumbly friable soil from which the roots of perennial weeds are easily pulled out. Be patient as it will take time for the soil organisms to do their work - 6 months for annual weeds up to a year for the roots of perennials to be easily removed.

For Cultivated Beds

Apply at least 15cm or more of an organic well-decomposed mulch to your beds. You do not need to dig beforehand as the soil organisms such as worms rise to the mulch to eat and digest it, creating a rich and well textured soil. Firm it down. You can plant directly into the surface as normal. For sowing seeds as usual hoe and rake the compost surface to fine tilth and sow at the depth required.

On-going maintenance involves annual application of at least 5 cms of organic mulch. The lack of digging means that annual weed seeds will not be brought to the surface, so there should be less weed regrowth, as the soil improves i.e. richer and more friable the roots of weeds such as mares tail and bind weed should be easier to remove.

One other possible advantage of this method could be that it will improve the water retention of our light sandy soil, which in current weather conditions would be a bonus. Disadvantages could be the supply and cost of enough organic matter. I will have to learn to make better compost, but I will give it a go.

Sandra Christopherson

Plot 60

(Editors note: The guru of No Dig is Charles Dowding and you can find more information at <https://charlesdowding.co.uk>)



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Did you try the new mulch?

A number of plot holders at Culver Lane this spring bought bags of Apsley Farms Mulch which comes in a dump or tonne bag giving 730 litres of mulch. It is a bi-product of the farms anaerobic digester operation and is Soil Association approved for Organic Use.

As an alternative to a trailer load of animal manure would any members like to share their experience of it, good or bad, for the next newsletter.

Will you be buying it again?

Cookery Corner

Carrot & Beetroot Salad

If you have got a good crop of root veg - try this recipe for a tasty salad

Ingredients

- 350g/12oz carrots, peeled and trimmed
- 350g/12oz raw beetroot, peeled and trimmed
- 2 shallots, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp sherry or red wine vinegar
- 1 small bunch flat parsley, roughly chopped

Method

STEP 1

Peel and trim the carrots and beetroot, then coarsely grate both on a grater and wear rubber gloves or holding the beetroot in a piece of kitchen towel if you don't want pink hands! Alternatively, use a food processor fitted with a grating plate. Place the grated vegetables in a bowl, add the shallots.

STEP 2

Heat the cumin seeds in small pan until they are hot and smell pungent. Remove from the heat and scatter over the vegetables. Add the olive oil, vinegar and parsley, then toss well. Leave to marinate for at least 15mins before serving.

With thanks to the BBC food website.



Annual Allotment Association BBQ Picnic
Saturday 10th September 12.30 pm - 15.00 pm

Come and meet fellow allotmenters for a picnic this year and an alternative allotment show.

We will be holding our Bring Your Own Picnic towards the mower shed end of the allotment car park. The very dry weather has made a BBQ too risky. Please bring what you would like to eat and drink and a salad or sweet to share, as well as chairs to sit on. We will provide knives, forks, spoons, plates, napkins, plastic glasses.

We will have our marquee up and, as is traditional now, will be holding our usual fun competitions. These are judged and voted on by everyone present using your unique perspective.

The classes are as follows, registration is from 12.30 am - 1.00 pm and there are prizes.

Best Fruit or Vegetable

Pick what looks good on the day, we will provide a plate for your entry.

Best Box of Fruit, Vegetables, Herbs

Pick a selection of what you have grown and present it in a medium sized box

Best Bunch of Flowers

Pick a selection of your flowers and present in a vase.

Best Jam, vegetable cake etc

Make something with produce from your plot.

I look forward to spending the afternoon with you.

Richard Tredgett
tredgett@gmail.com



Allotment Jobs - month by month



Here are just some of the jobs you should be thinking about for the next 2 months.

A timely scene in the picture above - one which we have become all too familiar with over the last month or so. And it seems for some time to come.

I hope that most of your crops have survived. I have managed to grow some nice, pre cooked, crispy plants thanks to the very hot and sunny days. Just looking for a way to use them in salads!

Any planting plans for August and September will prove a further challenge with very dry and hard soil and little moisture but we allotmenters have coped with worse.

August

- * Plant your winter vegetables if you haven't already done so, and continue to sow salad leaves as required.
- * Think about planting ready for next Spring, sowing cabbage seeds directly into the soil.
- * And get ready for the Autumn and Winter, sow hardy spring onions, lettuce and radish - and plant those late season potatoes.
- * Tidy up your strawberry bed by removing all the dead leaves.
- * And maybe a summer prune for your apple and pear trees cutting this season's growth back by a third.
- * Harvest your surviving crops - cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, french beans lettuce, potatoes and the giant courgettes. Also sweetcorn and of course tomatoes.
- * Water Water Water

September

- * Hopefully a cooler September will mean that we have the energy to tidy up our plots. And prepare beds for winter planting.
- * Plant out onion sets, spring cabbage plants, and protect these and brussel sprouts and broccoli from the cabbage white butterflies and caterpillars.
- * Dig up main crop potatoes. When your peas and beans finish, cut to the ground but leave the roots in the ground to allow maximum nitrogen to re-enter the soil from the root nodules.



- * You will hopefully have lots of crops to harvest so make room in your sheds, garages and freezers for storing.
- * Soft prune your fruit trees and bushes.
- * Sow green manure on your empty beds to keep the soil covered over winter.
- * Hoe, weed and water where necessary.

Helping Each Other

As an allotment holder, I've always been reluctant to take much of a summer holiday without fretting about what's happening to all the plants that I've carefully sown and nurtured earlier in the year.

June to September are typically popular months for taking a holiday which of course coincides with some of the busiest and most important times of the year for us as allotment holders.

WWF becomes a top priority at this time (nothing to do with wrestling apart from with a guilty conscience!) but Weeding, Watering & Feeding.

A week or more away, especially with the current heat and lack of rain, can see much of our care and labour come to a disappointing and unrewarding end.

But it's not just holidaying that creates difficulty- sadly, there are times when injury or illness can result in a plot not getting the level of care and attention that we would normally give.

Following old sayings like 'A trouble shared is a trouble halved' and 'Many hands make light work', I wonder if you might be willing to offer to help out with the WWF demands to plot holders who are not able to tend their plot for more than a few days?

I believe that if just a few of us put our names forward to help in that way, the additional time and effort to what we do on our own plots would not be excessive.

If you'd like to register an interest in this type of mutual help, do email me at pbalchemy@yahoo.co.uk or phone or text me on 0787 7049 793.

N.B. Declaring an interest will only commit you to finding out more about how this might work!

Peter Burton

Plot 68