



Chairman's Chatter

With everything that is happening in the world at the moment it seems a good idea to focus on positive and happy news for my Chatter of the front of this newsletter.

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Gardening is good for you

Research by a Japanese Professor found that as well as making you feel good, gardening at home or on the allotment has health benefits more widely.

We are all aware that more generally in the population, physical inactivity is a global public health problem that impacts on both physical and mental wellbeing. Taking physical activity such as gardening two or more times a week meets World Health Organisation targets for muscle-strengthening activities.

Research by the professor demonstrated that this level of activity reduces the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease (CVD), cancer and death. So even if you are into no-dig growing (and an increasing number of people seem to be) working in your garden could help you live longer.

You can read about the research here: <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2022/01/19/bjsports-2021-105061>

Wildlife garden update

Plot 37 at the Culver Lane site was never any good as an allotment – it is surrounded on two sides by trees that take every last drop of moisture from the ground. Over several years many plot holders tried and failed to grow crops on it. In 2019 therefore we agreed with Earley Town Council to make it into a wildlife area.

Firstly James installed three bee hives on the plot to help support the local bee population and also, as a side benefit, pollinate many of our fruit and vegetables. These have thrived in the last couple of years and been completely unbothered by lock down and such like.

The rest of the plot has now been planted up with wildlife friendly and native plants. The selection of plants was guided by Grahame Hawker the Earley town Council Park Ranger and on Wednesday 2nd March volunteers from the Earley Environment Group planted over fifty plants on the site. Of course, not all will succeed so future donations will still be welcome as the site grows and becomes another asset for the community.

My thanks to Grahame and the EEG volunteers and everyone who donated plants, we hope you enjoy the results.

Richard Tredgett

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Huntley & Palmer's Allotment Association AGM

We are pleased to invite you to the 2020 Huntley & Palmers Allotment Association AGM.

This will be held using Zoom on **Wednesday 16th March at 19:30**, Richard will send the link to this meeting with this Newsletter

All members are welcome, it would be good to see you there – after all, it is your Association so come along and have a say on how we are run.

The agenda includes:

- Officers reports
- Election of officers for the next year
- Debate on Trading Shed opening hours

If you are unable to attend but would like to offer your apologies please email us at handptradingshed@gmail.com

Cookery Corner - 2 for 1 Rhubarb Jam Recipes

Courtesy of Jean Hackett

Ingredients

- 4 lbs/2 kg rhubarb;
- 4 lbs/2 kg granulated sugar;
- 3 oz/75 g root ginger;
- juice of 2 lemons, or 4 tbsp. bottled lemon juice.

Method

1. Trim, wash or wipe rhubarb, and cut into 1"/2.5cm lengths. Put in large bowl, sprinkle with sugar, cover and leave overnight.
2. Pour into preserving pan, add lemon juice, bruise ginger and wrap in muslin before adding to pan, and bring it all slowly to the boil, stirring occasionally until sugar is dissolved.
3. Boil rapidly until jam sets when tested and fruit sinks to bottom of pan: try after 15 minutes. I turn off heat under pan, and drop some of mixture onto a cold plate; if a wrinkly skin forms after a minute or so, it's done. If not set, boil for another 2 - 3 minutes and test again.
4. Remove any scum with a metal spoon and leave to cool slightly. Put into warm sterilised jars and seal while warm.

This amount makes about 5 lb/2.5 kg of jam.

Ingredients

- 1lb 2 oz/500 g redcurrants;
- 1 lb8 oz/700 g rhubarb, washed, trimmed and cut into 1-inch/2.5-cm pieces;
- seeds from 1 vanilla pod, or 1 tsp. vanilla extract;
- 2lb 4 oz/1 kg granulated sugar;
- juice of 1 small lemon.

Method

1. Put redcurrants in saucepan over medium heat, add a generous splash hot water and heat until soft.
2. In preserving pan or large saucepan, heat rhubarb, vanilla seeds/extract and sugar over low heat until sugar has dissolved and rhubarb is soft. Strain redcurrants through fine sieve into preserving pan mixture, and add lemon juice.
3. Bring mixture to boil, and cook for 10 - 15 minutes before testing (it may take a little longer). Remove any scum with metal spoon.
4. Remove pan from cooker, and leave to cool for 20 minutes. Pour into sterilised jars and seal; set aside until completely cool before storing.

Note: According to the recipe, this will keep for up to 6 months, but we're still eating some from 2 summers ago, with no ill effects.

Seasonal Tips March/April

March can have some beautiful spring-like days, but don't be fooled as it can also turn very cold and frosts are still common this month. Be cautious and sow in pots and trays in a cold frame or greenhouse for earlier crops.

You can start chitting Potatoes although it is not essential to do this for maincrop spuds. ('Chitting' means making the seed potato sprout by putting it in a light, cool but frost-free place with most of the eyes pointing upwards; egg boxes are ideal for this).

Summer Cabbages and Lettuce can be sown indoors. Sow Broad Beans in pots inside for planting out later. Sow early types of Peas such as 'Meteor' outside under cloches. *Note:* mice and voles will eat pea seeds, try soaking them in paraffin before planting.

Plant Shallots, spring planting Garlic and early potatoes towards the end of the month. Also sow Herbs such as chives, coriander, oregano and parsley

Sow Tomato seeds in a propagator in the greenhouse. Keep the Tomato seeds and seedlings warm, not letting the night-time temperature drop below 50° F (10° C).

Weeds will start to grow more this month so it's time to bring out your hoe and dig out any perennial weeds before they take hold.

April means more daylight hours, the temperature rises and the risk of frost becomes less.

Under cover, keep sowing any tender vegetables you want to grow, such as aubergines, sweetcorn and melons. Don't forget to put in a few sunflower seeds.

Plant early potatoes in the first half of the month and maincrop by the end of the month

Carrots, beetroot, parsnips, turnips, spring onions, lettuce, spinach, and radish can now be sown outside.

Towards the end of the month pot on Tomato plants into their final containers or Growbags. Pinch outside shoots as they appear on cordon varieties.

Feed Raspberries, Strawberries, Gooseberries, Blackcurrants and Tayberries with bone meal or fish, blood and bone fertiliser.

Check for the first sightings of aphids in April and take the appropriate action. You can spray affected plants with soapy water containing diluted washing up liquid as an alternative to insecticides.

If you're growing strawberries, you'll need to protect them with netting to stop birds and squirrels from eating them.

Gleaning

Have you heard of gleaning? It's an early 14 century word meaning to gather and was applied to grains left in the field after harvesting. Urban gleaning can be carried out on allotments, with the permission of the plot holder, of course. In our case crops gathered can then be added to the fresh food crates that we put out each week during the late spring to autumn for Veg4Reading. Read about this organisation and where the food goes at:

<https://www.food4families.org.uk/Veg4Reading.cfm>

How can you get involved?

Do you ever have just too many courgettes to cope with, or too much soft fruit to pick, or rhubarb to eat?

To stop it going to waste I'm proposing that we set up a system where plot holders can email in to handptradingshed@gmail.com with their specific requests for crops to be picked.

Plot holders who have expressed an interest in gleaning can be emailed and if we have a fit, then the crops can be picked and donated.

What happens now? If you would like to be a gleaner, please email me and I will add you to the list. If you would like a crop gleaned, then get in touch when the time comes and we'll see if we can help out and surprise the Veg4Reading people with just how much we can give them.

Happy Easter

To all HPAA members