

HUNTLEY & PALMER'S ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

newsletter



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Chairman's Chatter

Part way through going peat free

The government is going to introduce a ban on the sale of peat and peat containing products in the retail horticultural sector by the year 2024. In anticipation the committee has decided to implement this now.

Peat bogs are a vital asset as they provide a habitat for many animals not found elsewhere, they act as giant carbon sinks so helping the fight against climate change, they regulate water flow and reduce the chance of flooding downstream and they can be

thousands of years old containing layers of historical data.

The problem for gardeners is what to use as an alternative. According to the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) peat free composts are easily available and have improved in quality in recent years. Peat free composts contain blends of various materials such as composted bark, coir, wood fibre and green compost mixed with inorganic materials such as sharp sand, grit, rock wool and perlite.

- Wood based materials - these provide excellent drainage properties and a low pH

- Coir - a waste product, good water holding properties and fine and course fibres to hold air in the pores. Does not hold nutrients well. Has to be transported many miles so has quite a high carbon foot print.
- Green compost - Local authorities and some private companies will collect and compost green waste. These tend to have a high nutrient content and a high pH making it an excellent soil improver/mulch. To use as a potting compost must be mixed with other ingredients eg straw waste.
- Home made garden compost - using home made garden compost, leaf mould, inorganic materials such as loam and sand. This has the benefit of being free, no carbon foot print but difficult to standardise pH, moisture retention, available nutrients and to ensure it is weed free. Best avoid using for seed sowing as it would be very difficult to sterilise.
- Loam based compost e.g. John Innes - the traditional John Innes compost does contain peat but peat free versions are now being introduced.

Peat free compost can be used in a very similar way to peat compost however the watering and feeding requirements may differ so follow any advice or instructions which may be written on the packaging. Peat free composts tend to hold water for longer and not be quite as free draining as peat compost so require watering less often and not quite so much. It is also now possible to buy peat free sowing compost as well as multipurpose, the seed compost will have been milled to give a finer tilth.

My personal choice is to use John Innes seed compost for sowing seeds, that is those I don't sow directly into the soil.

- Mix a third John Innes No 2 mixed with two thirds peat free multipurpose peat free compost for potting up and potting on.
- Mix a third John Innes no 3 with two thirds peat free multi purpose compost for planting pots of permanent planting.
- For plants such as Blue berries which prefer acidic soil I would use John Innes ericaceous compost.

With thanks to Sandra Christopherson for this briefing on the move to peat free compost.

See further on in the newsletter for the results of the trials by several volunteers using our new peat free compost.

And finally

If you thought allotments were only good for growing fruit and vegetables, think again. A local councillor in Rugby, Warwickshire wanting to stand for election in the local elections in May this year found she did not meet the "local residence" test needed to stand in her electoral ward of choice.

Moving house seemed too much work - so she registered her allotment which was in the ward - and it was allowed after much head scratching by the Electoral commission who said:

because of the way the legislation is framed, this could include an allotment, providing there is a legal agreement in place for the land and has been for the previous 12 months.

Her tending & using the allotment counted in this way. It worked, and the councillor was re-elected on 4th May.

Richard Tredgett

tredgett@gmail.com

Vacancy - secretary needed

After several years service John Laws is standing down as the H&PAA secretary and membership secretary.

We are looking for a new volunteer to take on this role and support your organisation.

Duties would include:

- Taking minutes at about four committee meetings a year, usually on a Wednesday evening at the allotment when weather allows or failing that by zoom
- Taking minutes at the annual AGM
- Keeping records of members so we can report membership subscriptions in the accounts and keep in touch with our members

If you are interested please talk to Richard Tredgett

Annual H&P picnic - save the date of Saturday 9th September

All members are invited to the annual H&PAA picnic and friendly competitions to be held on Saturday 9th 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 (pew).

The categories will be:

- Best fruit or vegetable
- Best box of six vegetables
- Best container of flowers
- Best produce using a home or allotment grown ingredient

You can enter any of the categories you wish. Please bring your entry to the marquee between 11:30 and 13:00 to register it and receive a number (all entries are anonymous). Paper plates will be provided to display fruit or vegetables.

Judging is by everyone present between 13:00 and 14:00 and the winners will then be announced. As well as the fun of taking part prizes will be awarded.

Peat free Compost trials

Several members accepted the challenge in the last newsletter to test the range of peat free composts now sold in the trading shed. Their findings are reported below:

Rob Hine tested both the EcoGro and Homebase peat free composts and reports:

I have been testing the composts on offer from the Trading Shed and here is what I have discovered so far.

Appearance and texture - The Homebase appears to be claggy and rather wool-like in its appearance but with crumbling between the fingers breaks down into a more manageable texture.

The EcoGro is much more soil-like and makes filling pots an easier task.

Tomatoes - The Homebase wins hands down. My plants are bigger, healthier and with good root growth. They have grown quite well in the EcoGro but are smaller and appear nutrient-depleted after just a few weeks.

Brassicas - The EcoGro produces reasonably good plants and the Homebase is not noticeably better.

Lettuces - The EcoGro has produced good, healthy plants.

Chillies and peppers - The EcoGro seems to work well and its slightly better drainage helps too.

Broad beans - Grown from seed in deep-root trainers using EcoGro they had very good roots, dark green colour and appeared sturdy.

Flowers - A mixture of the two composts has produced some good results for flowers and rocket.

Peter Wynn tested the new EcoGro peat free compost:

I find sieving the compost with a fine sieve (seed type) gives a good indication of the make up / composition of a compost.

Pros - I found no evidence of twigs etc or debris you often get if municipal waste has been used e.g. plastic. The overall texture was fine and very consistent.

Cons - Peat free composts are generally bulked out with wood pulp. The wood pulp in this compost was fine but was white showing no sign that it had started to degrade. I do wonder if once it starts to break down, it will pull nitrogen from the compost.

Growing performance - Comparing seedlings potted on with trial compost and well known proprietary compost, I found very little difference.

Conclusion - I would be reluctant to use for seed compost but happy to use for other applications depending on retail price.

Our thanks to Rob and Peter for their research and report back.

Another save the date - Sat 5th August Green Fair

Every year Earley Town Council organise a Green Fair - a gathering of local community and environmental groups at the Beech Lane end of the Maiden Erleigh Nature Reserve. Typically there are about forty stalls and we have one of them to promote gardening and allotments as well as membership of the association. It is a very relaxed event with people happy to chat about their organisation, pass the time of day or just enjoy an ice cream in the sunshine.

If you fancy coming along, and could spare an hour or two to join our stall and chat to people about the fun in growing things please get in touch with Richard - it will give him a chance to wander around and see the other stalls.

Cookery Corner

Strawberries in raspberry puree -

Ingredients

- 1 lb (450 g) firm strawberries
- 8 oz (225 g) raspberries
- 2½ oz (60 g) icing sugar, sieved
- 5 fl oz (150 ml) double cream, whipped

Method

1. Hull the strawberries, but don't wash them; just gently wipe them with a piece of damp kitchen paper.
2. The raspberries should then be pressed to a pulp through a nylon sieve and mixed with the icing sugar. Now arrange the strawberries in a bowl (a glass one would show off the attractive colour of this dish), and sit the bowl on some ice cubes that you have arranged in the bottom of another bowl.
3. Mix the raspberry purée into the strawberries, then just before serving top with the whipped cream.

With thanks to Delia Smith's website.

Website review

We have now had our website <https://hapaa.org.uk/> for a couple of years. On it you can find:

- Information about our association
- Details of what is available in the trading shed
- Back copies of this newsletter
- Links to many other useful organisations
- A form for people to contact us

If you have suggestions for what else might be on the website please get in touch - you could take a look and then use the contact us form - or have a chat when you are next in the shed, or over a bite to eat at the picnic in September.