

HUNTLEY & PALMER'S ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

newsletter



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Chairman's Chatter

Can you help solve a mystery?

I have written before about new bugs and critters that are often imported to the UK by our love of importing plants from overseas. The latest one comes with a bit of a mystery - where is it at this time of year?

The large or giant willow bark aphid lives primarily on willow, sallow or poplars. They have also been seen occasionally on apple, apricot, peach and quince plants as well. Sightings are usually seen from May onwards - but there is no understanding of where they are at this time of year. As a result help is sought to better understand this bug.



The giant willow bark aphid looks like this and hundreds can gather on a plant. Their body can be 5 - 6 mm long and they feed by sucking sap from the bark and excrete a sugary liquid called honeydew.

This can make the plant and the ground below it sticky, and is often fed on by wasps and flies.

It is not believed that the aphid damages the plants they settle on - although we might be understandably concerned if 100s appear on a valued plant.

You can read more about the aphid here <https://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity/large-willow-bark-aphid> including how to report any sightings.

Going off grid

In common with most of us at home the cost of electricity for the Trading Shed has increased considerably - more than trebling in our case. As a non-profit organisation we would have had no option but to pass this increased cost on to our members by increasing prices in the trading shed.

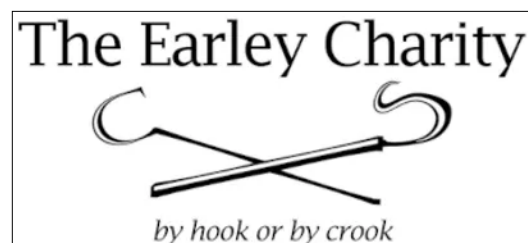
Following some great research by Brian Hackett, our Treasurer, we came up with an option to take the shed off grid. We have installed solar panels on the roof and new low energy lights to be powered by the solar panels and the battery they feed into.

This is quite a change from the old mains powered lights and the changes will take a while for us all to get used to - including our shed volunteers. We are still connected to the grid at the moment but hope to disconnect soon - and start saving the almost ten pounds a week the connection costs us.

We are grateful to The Earley Charity who gave us a grant to install the solar panels and new lights. My thanks also to Brian Hackett and Peter Wynn who helped with the installation of the panels and lights. If you have any feedback then please get in touch with me or talk to the volunteer in the shed.

Richard Tredgett

tredgett@gmail.com



News from the Shed

Volunteers wanted

The world of compost is moving on with the ending of composts that include peat from 2024 for amateur use. This means that the compost industry is changing and offering new products.

We have been given a free bag of our main suppliers new peat free compost to try out with our members. We are looking for four volunteers to take a free sample of ten litres and try using it alongside their usual compost. We would like to know if you would buy it over what you usually use or not and the reasons why. If you would like to take part, please email handptrading@gmail.com

Free Pallets

Are any members interested in free pallets? Trevor Wilson at East Reading has a contact who will deliver 30 - 40 pallets at a time to the Culver Lane site. Please email handptrading@gmail.com to let me know how many pallets you would like.

Does your lawn need some love ?

Last summer's long hot dry spell was not kind to garden lawns and they may still be recovering. If you need to start again then your Trading Shed can help as follows:

- Grass seed with Rye Johnsons loose £3.20 per 500g - used for harder wearing areas like paths and where families play
- Grass seed without Rye Johnsons loose £4.60 per 500g - gives a finer lawn

If you need a different amount of grass seed our volunteers can weigh that out for you and price it accordingly. If your grass just needs feeding or a little help with the weeds or moss we stock the following:

- Scott Evergreen Mosskill with Lawn Feed treats 80sqm - £8.55
- Lawn Sand by the 25 kg sack - £10.45
- Elliott's Lawn Weed, Feed & Mosskiller 20 kg sack - £26.05
- Maxicrop Moss Killer & Lawn Tonic 500 ml - £4.15
- Scotts Lawn Weedkiller Weedol 250 ml - £5.05

Come and see our volunteers in the shed to stock up on your grass care products.

Julia



Allotment Jobs - month by month

Busy busy busy. There is so much to do at the moment! Most of us will have seed trays everywhere, hoping for some sign of life to appear. You will want to get your tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and chillies sown now, as well as the 101 other flowers and veg you sow from seed. And there's plenty of digging over to do too.

Jobs for March

- * Time to finish off the digging, tidying up your plot and preparing seed beds.
- * You may want to cover the beds with black plastic or cloches to warm up the soil for sowing later in the month.
- * Plant out your onion and shallot sets & early potatoes in the middle of the month.
- * Plant out asparagus crowns and Jerusalem artichoke tubers.
- * In your warmed soil, sow beetroot, early peas, leeks, parsnips and carrots.
- * Prune apple and pear trees and gooseberries and currants.
- * Tidy the strawberry patch, adding a dressing of compost. Also feed fruit trees and bushes.

Jobs for April

- * Keep your eye out for late frosts and protect your plants.
- * Sow broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, chard and salad plants.
- * Watch out for greedy mice if sowing peas - they love them so keep them protected. Any that do survive are then a tasty snack for the pigeons so they will need further protection from them.
- * Sow French Beans and Sweetcorn under cover if you haven't already started them indoors.
- * Protect against slugs and snails.
- * Weeding!

Julie (Plot17)

Cookery Corner

Pile-it-high orange and rhubarb meringue pie

The flavour of orange zest does something quite magical to the flavour of rhubarb, and this light, fluffy meringue pie is a perfect dessert for late spring.

Ingredients

For the meringue

- 3 large egg whites (minimum)
- 6 oz (175 g) golden caster sugar

For the pastry (or cheat and buy from the shop)

- 1½ oz (40 g) softened butter, cut into smallish lumps
- 1½ oz (40 g) softened pure lard, cut into smallish lumps
- 6 oz (175 g) plain flour, plus a little extra for rolling out

For the filling

- 1 lb 8 oz (700 g) rhubarb
- grated zest and juice of 3 oranges
- 3 oz (75 g) golden caster sugar
- 3 large egg yolks
- 3 tablespoons cornflour

Instructions

1. Begin by making the pastry: rub the fats into the flour and add enough cold water to make a smooth dough that leaves the bowl clean. Then wrap it in a polythene bag and leave it in the fridge for 30 minutes to rest and become more elastic.
2. Meanwhile, wash and trim the rhubarb and cut it into chunks, place in a shallow baking dish and sprinkle in the grated orange zest, followed by the sugar.

3. Take the pastry from the fridge, roll it out to a round on a lightly floured surface (giving it quarter-turns as you do so) and use it to line the tin, pressing it up a little way above the edge of the tin. Next, prick the base all over with a fork and use some of the egg yolks to paint all over the base and sides to provide a seal.
4. Put the tin on the pre-heated baking sheet on a high shelf in the oven and place the rhubarb on the lowest shelf. The pastry should take about 20-25 minutes to brown and crisp, and the rhubarb about 25-30 minutes to become soft. Then remove them from the oven.
5. While you're waiting for that, you can pour the orange juice into a small saucepan. Use a little of it to mix the cornflour to a smooth paste in a bowl, then bring the rest up to simmering point. Next, pour the hot orange juice on to the cornflour mixture and pour the whole lot back into the saucepan. Whisk over the heat with a small balloon whisk till it becomes very thick indeed, then remove it from the heat.
6. Now strain the cooked rhubarb over a bowl, then add the rhubarb juices and the remaining egg yolks to the cornflour mixture and, still whisking, bring it up to the boil again. Remove from the heat, tip the strained rhubarb into the bowl and stir the cornflour mixture into it.
7. Now, for the meringue, put the egg whites into a large, roomy, clean bowl and, using an electric hand whisk, beat them until they reach the stage where, when you lift the whisk, little peaks stand up and just slightly turn over. Next, beat the sugar in, 1 tablespoon at a time, whisking well after each addition.
8. Pour the rhubarb mixture into the pastry shell, then spoon the meringue mixture over, making sure that it covers the edges of the pastry with no gaps. Then just pile it on top.
9. Place the pie on the centre shelf of the oven, at the same temperature as before, and bake it for 25 minutes or until the outside of the meringue is golden. Remove it from the oven and leave for about 2 hours before serving.

With thanks to Delia Smith's website