

HUNTLEY & PALMER'S ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Newsletter



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Chairman's Chatter

Another growing season where the weather is influencing how things are going - and I don't just mean the pesky slugs.

Annual picnic

We look forward to seeing you at the annual H&P members picnic on Saturday 31st August 2024. Last year forty of us gathered on a scorching hot day to chat, share good ideas and moan about the trials of gardening and running an allotment. As well as the social element there will be friendly competitions where you can enter your produce and also see what others have grown and are showing. More details inside this newsletter.

Launchpad spare harvest donation

Normally at the start of July we would have begun the donation of spare crops to the Launchpad operation to help those less fortunate than us in our town. This is only just starting now, a month later than previous years due to the relative late start to harvesting our crops. This delay has been the same both at Culver Lane and Reading Road allotment sites. For more details of this very worthwhile scheme see inside.

Peat-free compost

There have been a number of issues with the move to peat-free compost. This is a learning experience for most of us and inside we have a detailed response one member got from a manufacturer of peat-free compost. From this we learned that:

- We need to start to think of compost as a living product - not just inert organic matter dug out of the ground for our use
- As such it needs the stock to be managed on a first-in first-out basis like we do in our trading shed
- It needs to be kept dry if the fertiliser is to be available when you sow or plant in it.



The good news is that the way we operate your trading shed means that the compost we sell is in the best possible condition. Thanks to member Pete for his research and for sharing the response he received from Melcourt, makers of peat-free compost, as sold in our shed.

Richard Tredgett tredgett@gmail.com

Annual picnic

All members are invited to the annual picnic and friendly competitions to be held on Saturday 31st August 2024 between 12:30 and 15:00 at the Culver Lane allotment site.

Last year 40 members attended, brought a picnic to enjoy and chatted and shared experiences with fellow growers, as well as taking part in some friendly competitions.

The competition 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, or all of these categories. 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 can be provided to display fruit or vegetables, if required. With the produce category the good news is that we get to taste the entries so we can judge which is best.

Judging is between 13:00 and 14:00 and is by everyone present. The winners will then be announced - prizes will be awarded as well as the fun of taking part. No need to book, just turn up and join in on the day.

Vegetable families

In the June newsletter there was a guide to crop rotation but sometimes it is difficult to know which vegetables come under the same category and can be planted together. As an aid these can be divided into nine major family groups. It's important to know this for establishing and maintaining your allotment. By using crop rotation you will help to prevent the build-up of pests and diseases. Never follow something of the same group in the same place in any one year.

Beetroot family

Beetroot
Spinach
Swiss Chard
Spinach Beet

Potato family

Aubergine
Pepper
Potato
Tomato

Carrot family

Carrot
Celeriac
Celery
Fennel
Parsley
Parsnip

Onion family

Garlic
Leek
Onion
Shallots

Miscellaneous

Sweetcorn
Lambs Lettuce
New Zealand Spinach
Purslane
Phacelia
Grazing Rye
Buckwheat

Marrow family

Cucumber
Courgette
Marrow
Melon
Pumpkin
Squash

Pea and Bean family

Alfalfa
Broad Bean
French Bean
Runner Bean
Clover
Fenugreek
Lupin
Pea
Tares
Trefoil

Daisy family

Chicory
Endive
Jerusalem Artichoke
Lettuce
Salsify
Scorzonera

Brassica family

Broccoli
Brussel Sprouts
Cabbage
Calabrese
Cauliflower
Kale
Kohlrabi
Mustard
Oriental Brassicas
(e.g. Pak Choi,
Chinese cabbage)
Radish
Swede
Turnip

Learning more about peat-free compost

Member Pete recently had an e-mail exchange with the makers of Melcourt peat-free compost, that we sell in the shed, after he had some poor results with it. I think the response he has kindly shared might help us understand a little more about this new style of compost:

“When there are problems with SylvaGrow it is most often due to people being sold old compost. It troubles us greatly that the product leaves our yard in excellent condition but if it isn’t stored appropriately by the garden centre, the result can be a compromised nutrient content and poor results in the garden.

We are working hard to educate the garden centre buyers that unlike peat composts which are microbially inert, most peat-free media are based on composted materials and as such therefore, carry an active microbial population. It is this that is the reason for the shorter shelf life compared to peat and it is by no means only our product that is affected.

You may be interested to know that the growing media industry is looking to produce some generic information about the principal differences between peat-free and peat-based media and storage will certainly figure largely in that.

Two years ago, we amended our fertiliser additions in order to lend more shelf life - you may have noticed the small grey granules, which are a controlled release fertiliser, but we have to be mindful that the nutrient levels have to be appropriate for both the customer that uses the product the week it was made, as well as those using it many months later. And not only that, some will want to raise seedlings in it whilst others would like to plant a fruit tree in a large container.

It is a big ask for one formula to cater for all of these scenarios, but ‘Multi-Purpose’ compost is what the garden centre industry demands. And if the product is allowed to become prematurely wet, this will cause the fertilisers to become more soluble than they should at an early stage, which again negatively affects performance.

We are as passionate about our products as I expect you are about your garden so it really matters to us that the material going into the bags is fit for purpose. We haven’t altered the specification but do bear in mind that our raw materials are natural and although we go to great lengths to ensure consistency batch to batch, there is always the possibility of slight variation.”

The good news is that the bags of peat-free composts that we sell from the trading shed:

- Are stored indoors in our shed so it stays dry - so the fertiliser does not get activated too soon.

- The stock turns over very quickly - we typically have fresh deliveries once a month, or more often at busier times.
- We are learning to rotate stock so even though it moves quickly, it is first in, first out.

As well as our great prices and friendly volunteers, you can see another good reason to buy your compost from our Trading Shed. None of the garden centres I have visited (purely for research purposes) store their compost indoors, unlike your trading shed.

Autumn Planting - Spring-Flowering Bulbs

This autumn we will be stocking the following species, they will be delivered earlier than usual, possibly from early August.

Narcissi

Tête à Tête	Multi-headed, yellow trumpets, height 15 cm, flowering time March/April.
Hillstar	Multi-headed bicolour, lemon yellow with white halo, height 25 cm, flowering time March/April.
Sweetness	Fragrant, golden yellow, height 40 cm, flowering time March/April.
Pueblo	Fragrant, multi-headed bicolour, white petals and lemon-yellow cup, height 30 cm, flowering time April/May.
Quail	Fragrant, yellow, multi-headed, height 25 cm, flowering time March/April.

Species Tulips

Little Beauty	Red with purple base, height 10 cm, flowering time April/May.
Peacock Mixed	Mixed colours, height 20 cm, flowering time March/April.

Species Crocus

Ard Schenk	White, height 8 cm, flowering time February/March.
Cream Beauty	Fragrant, soft cream, height 8 cm, flowering time February/March.
Goldilocks	Fragrant, golden yellow, height 8 cm, flowering time February/March.

Iris - Dutch Types

Black Beauty	Almost black with a yellow eye, height 45 cm, flowering time June.
Lion King	Bronze/gold, height 50 cm, flowering time June.

Red Ember Red with purple and brown tones, height 45 cm, flowering time June.

Dutch Mixed Assorted colours, height 45 cm, flowering time June.

Autumn Planting - Onions, Shallots and Garlic

We will be getting these a little later than usual in October.

Onion Sets

Senshyu Yellow, Japanese variety, globe shaped, mild flavour.

Radar Improved Japanese variety, resistant to bolting, stores well.

Shallots

Griselle Banana shallot, multiplies well to give a good crop of long bulbs with grey skin and purple/pink flesh, strong flavour with spicy taste.

Garlic

Elephant Garlic Mild flavour, yields very large bulbs, excellent for roasting or in salads.

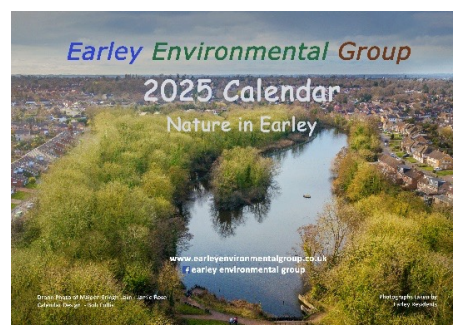
Topadrome Soft-neck, white skin with white cloves, early harvesting.

Germidour Soft-neck, mild flavoured, violet cloves.

Thermidrome Soft-neck, medium flavour, pure white, early and high yielding

2025 Calendar

The 2025 calendar, produced by the Earley Environmental Group, is now available in the Trading shed. If you have not seen it before, this is now the sixth edition of the calendar that features pictures of local wildlife taken by residents and submitted to the Group. The 2024 calendar even featured a picture of fungi taken on the Culver Lane allotment site.



The calendar is just £6 and in previous years has proved to be very popular. Last year they sold out so don't be slow in snapping one up from the Trading shed.

Helping Launchpad with any spare crops

Launchpad is a local charity set up to support those less fortunate who end up homeless in Reading. It also works to help prevent local people from becoming homeless. You can read more about the organisation's work on their website:

<https://launchpadreading.org.uk/>.

A part of what Launchpad does is to help feed its clients. To this end, a fine group of volunteers at Reading Road allotments manage several plots growing crops. These are used to create and provide tasty meals at Launchpad 135, their work and life skills centre, teaching clients some easy and healthy recipes they can then replicate at home.

If you have any surplus crops (and who hasn't regretted quite how many courgette plants they grew) then please donate them either at the Reading Road site or on the table outside the tools shed at Culver lane.

For the avoidance of doubt, this is the table by the wooden shed - not to be confused with the wooden table outside the trading shed which is the sharing table.

Earley Green Fair 2024

The Allotment Association took a stall at the Earley Town Council Green Fair on Saturday 3rd August with the aim of promoting the allotments and the trading shed. We had many conversations with gardeners and prospective allotment holders and hope to see many of them in the trading shed in the coming weeks and then as plot holders.

The event had to be abandoned by so many stall holders last year due to heavy rain so the pleasant weather on Saturday was very welcome.

The Mayor, many Council Staff Members and Councillors, past and present, were there mixing with the visitors. The Council had done a good job of re-invigorating the day by including a more diverse mix of stalls. There were even free games including quoits and Jenga for children to enjoy.

The Rotary Round Table did an excellent job of providing tea and coffee and the Pizzatron van supplied us with pizzas. There was, of course, an ice-cream van as well.

All-in-all, a very enjoyable and successful day.

Julia Tredgett

Beetroot & feta pasta recipe

Beetroots seem to be doing well this year (fingers crossed) so try this healthy vegetarian recipe to enjoy this colourful crop.

Ingredients

2 large beetroots, peeled and roughly chopped into chunks

1 tbsp olive oil

2 onions, finely chopped

4 celery sticks, finely chopped, celery tops kept separate

4 carrots, peeled and finely chopped

1 small bunch of basil

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

400 g pasta

75 g low-fat crème fraîche

100 g feta cheese

Method

- Put a large pan of salted water on a high heat, bring to the boil and add the beetroot chunks. Boil for 5 mins, then transfer the beetroot to a plate using a slotted spoon. Set the pan of cooking water aside.
- Meanwhile, put the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat, then add the onions, celery and carrots, and cook for 8 mins until softened. Finely chop the basil stalks and celery tops, then add to the pan along with the garlic, and fry for another 30 seconds.
- Tip the pasta into the pan of beetroot water and simmer for 13-15 mins (depending on what pasta you're using) until just cooked but retaining a little bite. Drain, reserving 200ml of the pasta water and tip the pasta back into the pan.
- Meanwhile, put the beetroot with half of the fried veg into the bowl of a food processor with most of the basil leaves and the crème fraîche, then blitz until smooth. Gradually add the reserved pasta water to loosen until you have a thick mixture.
- Stir this sauce through the pasta along with the remaining fried veg and some seasoning. Divide between bowls, crumble over the feta, then scatter with the remaining basil leaves. Grind over some black pepper, if you like.

With thanks to the BBC Good Food Website

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com>
