

HUNTLEY & PALMER'S ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Newsletter



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Chairman’s Chatter

How healthy is your soil? Difficult to tell maybe without working it for a while and seeing what grows. We can all stand and look, maybe pick up a handful and knowingly rub it between our hands. Here is another approach:

Scientists at Nottingham Trent University have found a way to measure the health of soil by listening to it. The theory is that:

Noisy soil is generally healthier because it contains a greater range of bugs and worms busying around. These organisms alter and improve the structure of soil by passing nutrients between one another and creating an environment that is well ventilated and diverse.

These webs provide food, fibre and clean water for people – topsoil is where 95% of the planet’s food is grown.

By using a science they have called “bioacoustics” they can listen to how much movement there is in the soil and therefore assess its health. This can be used to measure the health of soil both in the fields (pun intended) of agriculture, and nature conservation. Scientists love to be able to quantify things, and this means they could measure the health of your soil.

You can read an overview of it here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/19/scientists-wildlife-sounds-underground-species-soil-aoe>

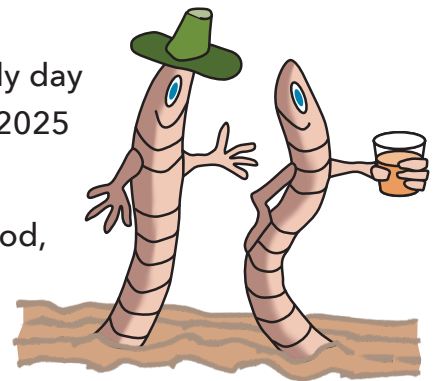
or there is a full PhD paper "Bioacoustics as an applied tool in ecological research and biodiversity conservation" on the Nottingham Trent University website.

A quaint, if different, English day out

In a not unrelated bit of news, if you want a completely silly day out next year then pop the date in your diary for the May 2025 Blackawton International Festival of Worm Charming.

A friend went this year and had loads of fun with music, food, drink and, of course, lots of worms. Read all about it here:

<http://www.wormcharming.co.uk/>



It has been running since 1984 and raises money for the local air ambulance.

H&P AGM

Thanks to everyone who attended the AGM on 7th April.

Here we reviewed the running of your association, understood the finances and elected your committee for the next year. In response to questions from a member there was a discussion about the annual membership subscription.

After some debate and explanation that we have to be a membership organisation to avoid paying tax, it was agreed to keep the annual membership fee at £1.50; the best value allotment association membership fee in the area.

Richard Tredgett tredgett@gmail.com

Bees at Culver Lane

I am pleased to report that Malcolm has taken over the beehive spot at the north end of the Culver Lane site and is busy setting up his hives there. We are pleased to have bees on the allotment site as they help to pollinate so many flowers, fruit and vegetables.

Malcolm reports that a question he is often asked is what to do if you see a swarm of bees. Here are two answers, depending on where you see them:

● **Reading and District Beekeepers' Association**

Have an informative website and details of beekeepers currently looking for a swarm can be found here:

<https://www.rbka.org.uk/index.php/swarms>

● **Wokingham and District Beekeepers' Association**

Also have a great website, including how to check that your swarm are honey bees, and not another species:

<https://wdbka.org.uk/swarms/>

Save the date

Huntley & Palmers Allotment Association Picnic

All members are invited to the annual picnic and the usual friendly competitions to be held on Saturday, 31st August 2024, 12:30 - 15:00. There will be a range of competitions where the judging is done by everyone present, so no external judges peering down their noses at my slightly wonky parsnips.

Green Fair

Saturday 3rd August 10:00 - 15:00

Earley Town Council's annual Green Fair is a community event held on the grass area at the Beech Lane end of the Maiden Erleigh nature reserve. It features many stalls by local community organisations, many with a green or environmental slant. Entry to the Green Fair is free although you do have to pay for the ice cream!

Come and take part

We have a stall at the green fair to publicise the benefits of having an allotment and to encourage people to join the association. If you could spare an hour or two to help by talking to people and about allotments then please get in contact by e-mailing Richard on handptradingshed@gmail.com and he will be in touch. **Hope to see you there.**

Crop rotation

The principle of crop rotation is to grow specific groups of vegetables on a different part of the vegetable plot each year. This helps to reduce a build-up of crop-specific pest and disease problems and it organises groups of crops according to their cultivation needs.

You can read more about crop rotation on the RHS website – always a good and trust-worthy guide to all things growing.

YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
<p>PLOT 1</p> <p>Broad beans French beans Runner beans Peas</p>	<p>PLOT 1</p> <p>Broccoli Brussel Sprouts Cabbage Calabrese Cauliflower Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Swede Turnips Chard Spinach Rocket</p>	<p>PLOT 1</p> <p>Potatoes Tomatoes Chillies Capsicums</p>	<p>PLOT 1</p> <p>Beetroot Carrots Garlic Leeks Onions Parsnips Celeriac Celery</p>
<p>PLOT 2</p> <p>Broccoli Brussel Sprouts Cabbage Calabrese Cauliflower Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Swede Turnips Chard Spinach Rocket</p>	<p>PLOT 2</p> <p>Potatoes Tomatoes Chillies Capsicums</p>	<p>PLOT 2</p> <p>Beetroot Carrots Garlic Leeks Onions Parsnips Celeriac Celery</p>	<p>PLOT 2</p> <p>Broad beans French beans Runner beans Peas</p>
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<p>PLOT 4</p> <p>Beetroot Carrots Garlic Leeks Onions Parsnips Celeriac Celery</p>	<p>PLOT 4</p> <p>Broad beans French beans Runner beans Peas</p>	<p>PLOT 4</p> <p>Broccoli Brussel Sprouts Cabbage Calabrese Cauliflower Kale Kohlrabi Mustard Swede Turnips Chard Spinach Rocket</p>	<p>PLOT 4</p> <p>Potatoes Tomatoes Chillies Capsicums</p>

The following can be put anywhere in the rotation:

Cucumber, Courgettes, Lettuce, Radish, Squash or Sweetcorn

Any spare mini-trees?

Thanks to the local squirrels we often find young trees growing on our allotments or in the garden. Great at planting them, it seems squirrels often forget that acorn or, even on some lucky plots at the Culver Lane site, Walnuts. Please don't just pull these mini-trees up in frustration – they can be grown on to make trees as the expression “Mighty oaks from little acorns grow” reminds us.

At the moment native trees are needed to be planted out in Redhatch Copse by the new Earley Town Council Park Ranger, Ashley Prior. A number of Ash trees in the woods have succumbed to Ash Die Back and that is going to leave large gaps in this wonderful, small, local woodland. It is just off Collins Drive in Earley, on land adjacent to what was the University of Reading's Sibley Hall of Residence. Ashley will determine what to plant and where, so we can't offer him the wrong tree.

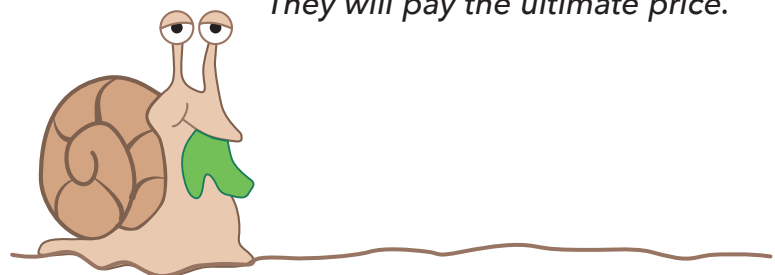
If you have a mini-tree that you don't want, then please pop it in a spare pot and drop it into the trading shed. Richard will look after the trees and arrange for them to reach Ashley at the right time.

Scene of the Slime

If there is one thing the wet spring brought it was lots of discussion about slugs and how they make gardening that bit harder. Here is a poem by Paul Curtis who was obviously on the wrong end of a slug invasion.

*Now yesterday I planted out
My annuals in a bed laid out.
I went to take a look today
But find my annuals gone away.
What evil in my garden walks?
All I see are marigold stalks.
Now I see the trails of slime
I know who did this awful crime.
Not creepy crawlies or even bugs
But evil little snails and slugs.*

*You cannot poison them they say
That isn't nice, there's another way.
Grit or eggshell on the trail
Or little cups of beer or ale
But I'm not one to treat them nice
They will pay the ultimate price.*



Recipe - Raspberry Cake

Make this summery cake with seasonal fresh raspberries. A dusting of icing sugar offsets the red of the raspberries.

Ingredients

125 ml sunflower oil, plus extra for the tin

175 g self-raising flour

175 g caster sugar

125 ml 10% fat Greek yogurt

3 eggs

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 lemon, zested

200 g raspberries

For the decoration

Icing sugar, to dust

100 g raspberries (optional)

Method

- Heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/ gas 4. Oil a deep, 20 cm loose-bottomed cake tin and line with baking parchment. Combine the flour and sugar in a bowl. Set aside.
- Mix the oil, yogurt, eggs, vanilla extract and lemon zest in another bowl. Tip in the flour and sugar mixture and fold in until smooth. Gently fold in the raspberries and bake for 30 - 40 mins, or until a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean.
- Leave to cool in the tin for a few minutes, then cool completely on a wire rack. Dust lightly with icing sugar and serve topped with more raspberries, if you like.

Will keep for up to three days in an airtight container (not in our house it won't) .

With thanks to the BBC Good Food Website

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com>