

# HUNTLEY & PALMER'S ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION



## NEWSLETTER

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### Chairman's Chatter

#### Happy New Year to you all

I am sure most of us are dodging the coldest, wettest days of the winter with an activity called 'planning for this year's planting' This can involve a seed or plant catalogue, a notebook and a large mug of tea (other drinks are available) and can, in some cases, last many hours.

#### Some help from people who know

If, like me, you accept that you don't yet know everything about growing and caring for plants then you might want to try the new RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) app called RHS Grow. It contains much information on how to start, grow, feed and harvest a wide variety of

crops. Whilst this information can also be found on their website, you might find the app more convenient if you are next to a plant and wondering how to care for it. As with many free apps, you may be pestered to upgrade to the paid version that offers a number of extra bells and whistles but the basic, free, version worked well for me.

#### Something new for a new year?

Once you get the hang of sowing, planting, growing and enjoying you may get the urge to try something new or more adventurous. If you want to do that, maybe by

trying to choose by colour or time of year to start growing then take a look at a new seed supplier: She Grows Veg <https://shegrowsveg.com/> who offer items that are a little different. Other seed suppliers are of course available, including those in our trading shed, but it is worth looking at this site.

Finally, let's spare a thought for allotment holders over the river at the Henley Road Allotment site. Their whole site is expected to be taken back by the council to extend the Henley Road burial site. We all know how attached we can become to our allotment or garden, and how another piece of land, offered somewhere else, will not feel anything close to a fair swap.

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## Annual General Meeting

Our AGM is an annual event where your committee report back on how your organisation is run. It is also your chance to ask questions, provide feedback or suggest how things could be different.

The AGM is booked for **19:30 Wednesday, 16th April, 2025** in the David Fuller Room at Radstock Lane, Earley, RG6 5UL - opposite the Earley Town Council offices.

*We look forward to seeing you there.*



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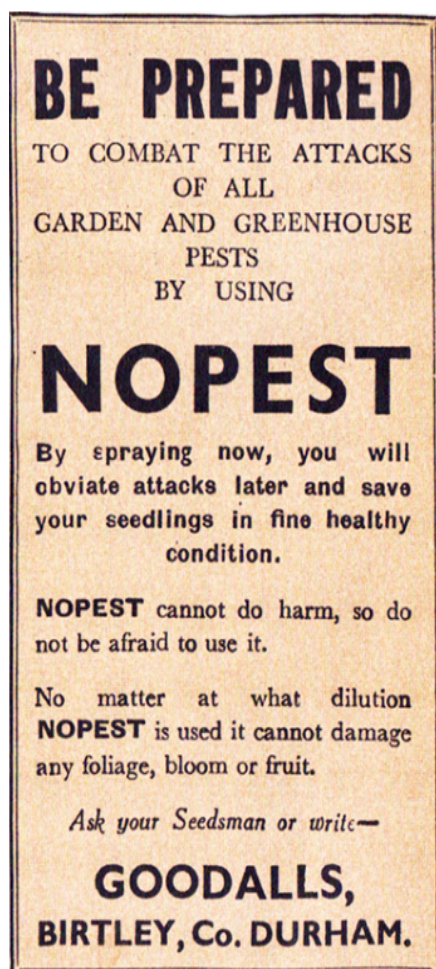
## Changes in Gardening Over time

One of the gifts I received at Christmas was a copy of *My Garden Diary, 1936*. The diary had been completed by its original owner so I set about reading it. Unfortunately, try as I might, I could not decipher the handwriting; which was very disappointing.

However, at the beginning of each month was a Garden Guide for that particular month and these proved to be very interesting and useful. The advice given was set out under the same headings for each month: The Order Book, Sow Now, Plant Now, Prune Now, Cuttings and Layers, Sprays and Fertilisers, and Other Reminders. After reading the guides I decided it might be interesting to compare the advice given then to what is given today. I used the RHS monthly magazine 'The Garden', which, although full of advice, special features and a questions and answers page, does have a 'More to do this month' section, which I have used to make the comparison.

This article is not going to be long enough to make a direct comparison with each month but I have managed to get a feeling for what the main differences are.

The general gardening routines such as when to sow seeds when to take cuttings, when to divide plants are very similar e.g. in January, both suggest that you sow sweet peas under glass or move deciduous trees and shrubs. In June, both suggest you sow biennials and support herbaceous perennials. The main differences appear to be in the care of the environment and protection of the soil and wild life.



From *Garden Work for Amateurs*, 1934

In January the 'Diary' is suggesting you finish spraying, with tar oil winter wash, all orchard trees except nuts. Lime wash or spray with caustic soda old fruit trees and dress newly dug soil with lime. The 'Garden' does not mention any of these but it does suggest you clean bird feeders with a mild disinfectant to prevent the spread of Avian Flu and to make a dead hedge to provide shelter for wild life. It also suggests you avoid walking on the soil to prevent compaction. I must admit I was somewhat horrified at the thought of spraying caustic soda around the garden and can only imagine that they are talking about a very dilute solution.

In May both publications are suggesting very similar jobs in terms of which seeds to sow, plant and thin out, the differences are in the use of sprays and fertilisers. The 'Diary' is as follows: Prepare insecticide for use against green and black aphids, rose maggots and sawflies etc. Dust onion beds with soot and lime or spray with insecticide to ward off onion fly. Use nitrate of soda in small quantities to stimulate growth in established green crops, autumn sown onions and young fruit trees after the fruit has set.

'The Garden' focus is on using water wisely. Whether to mow your grass or leave areas to grow longer, flower-rich grass to provide habitat for native wild life but keep mown paths, where you need them, for access. Keeping on top of weeds, regular hoeing adding mulch between rows to keep weeds down and retain moisture. Get slug hunting at the first sign of damage by picking off and destroying any you find, and to control numbers by encouraging predators such as birds, frogs and ground beetles.

Reading *My Garden Diary, 1936* has shown me just how much gardening practices have changed over the years in terms of the concern for the environment. Some of these changes have been forced on us by government legislation regarding the use of

pesticides and fertilisers. Others have been as we become more aware of Global warming, and the loss of wild life.

Sandra Christopherson

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## **Seed swaps - get something different in the ground this year**

Reading Food Growing Network <https://www.readingfoodgrowingnetwork.org.uk/> is a community group in our town that aims to:

- Promote locally grown food in Reading.
- Enable the food growers in Reading to share resources and buying capacity e.g. for seed and manure purchase or plant swaps.
- Facilitate the exchange of information and ideas.
- Provide advice and support to new and existing growers.
- Promote the expansion of sustainable, local food production.
- Celebrate local food together at the Reading Town Meal and other events.

To achieve these aims one of the things they offer is a regular seed exchange. Here you can donate and receive a wide range of seeds including varieties you won't find in the Suttons (or many other) catalogues. Their current stock list is available here:

<https://www.readingfoodgrowingnetwork.org.uk/SeedSwap.cfm>

Last time I looked they had over 300 different seeds available - most donated by people who had grown them locally; increasing the chance they will work on your plot or garden.

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## **Trees for our local nature reserve**

A huge thank you to everyone who donated trees in the last year - at the end of November thirty-eight trees of many different species were handed over to Ashley Prior, the Earley Town Council Park Ranger. These trees have been planted in the nature reserve at Maiden Erleigh Lake to fill gaps caused by woodland management, humans or mother nature.

Here are this year's donated trees.

The scheme will be running for the next year and this is how it works:

1. You find a young tree growing somewhere you don't want it - say in the middle of your carrot bed





2. You dig it up and pop it in a pot (there are usually spare ones on the racks in the car park at Culver Lane) with a little soil or compost
3. Leave it on the swaps table outside the Trading Shed
4. Richard looks after it until November next year and then hands them over to Ashley, the Park Ranger, in time for the annual tree week run by the Tree Council: <https://treecouncil.org.uk/>
5. Ashley and the volunteer team plant them in the Maiden Erleigh Nature Reserve where you can visit them for the next one to two hundred years!

With thanks to all the local squirrels and birds that collect tree seeds, bury them on your plot or in the garden, and then forget where they left them!

## Huntley and Palmer's Trading Shed

These potatoes, onions, shallots, peas, beans and garlic will be available when we re-open in January 2025 with pre-booked time slots for ordered potatoes during the first weekend. Onions, shallots, peas, beans, garlic and gardening supplies can be picked from the shelves by yourself. We will send out order forms in the New Year.

Come and join us or renew your membership, which is still the best value in town at £1.50 per year.

We will be stocking our best sellers again, as well as some new-to-us varieties suggested by our customers.

Potatoes	1 kg - £1.10, 3 kg - £3.10
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### First Earlies

Red Duke of York	Deep red and more vigorous than Duke of York. Wonderful flavour. Good for chipping, baking, roasting and mashing.
Foremost	Russet skin colour. Good scab resistance. Boils well. Bakes well. Waxy
Swift	Very early. Short Stems and good in pots. Good disease resistance.
Organic Colleen	High disease & pest resistance. White tuber. Bountiful early harvest.

**Main Crop**

Desiree	Red skin colour. Fairly waxy. High Yield. Drought resistant. Boils, bakes, roasts, chips and mashes well.
King Edward	Part red skin colouration. Good flavour. Boils, bakes, roasts, chips and mashes well.
Maris Piper	Uniform in shape and size. Good yield. Good flavour. Boils, bakes, roasts, good chips and mashes well.
Picasso	Stunning red eyes. Massive yields. Mild taste. Stores well. Some resistance to blight. Boils, bakes and roasts well. Waxy.
Cara	Red eyed, high-yielding and disease resistant. Stores well, good all rounder.
Java	Improved Sarpo Mira variety. White flesh, good for all round use. Disease resistant.
Heidi Red	Red skin and flesh which retains colour on cooking. Waxy tubers good for Salads and Boiling.

**Salad**

Charlotte	Reliable, high yielding. Waxy long light-yellow tubers. Good flavour. Boils well.
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**Onion Sets      250 g - 70p**

Stuttgart Giant	A flat shaped yellow skinned set with good yield and keeping properties. Plant in February. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
Sturon	A round onion which stores well and has high yields.
Turbo	A glove shaped type with good yield and keeping properties. Slow to bolt and strong growing with golden yellow skin.
Red Baron	A red skinned flat-round onion. Good in salads. Plant later. RHS Award of Garden Merit.

**Shallots      500 g - £1.55**

Golden Gourmet	Yellow with a mild flavour. Good for pickling and can be planted from February onward. RHS Award of Garden Merit.
Red Sun	Perfect for salads, mild with good storage characteristics.

<b>Garlic</b>	
<b>Price TBA for one clove</b>	
Cledor	Soft-neck. An improvement on an old French variety 'Rose du Var'. Produces round white bulbs with strong skin and great flavour. Harvest late Jun- Aug
Flavor	Hard-neck. An Italian pink type, produced in France, that matures late July. Store well once opened.
Picardy Wight	Traditionally smoked in France due to its longevity. It will keep to May the following year.
<b>Elephant Garlic</b>	
<b>£2.05 for one clove</b>	
Elephant	Elephant Garlic cloves produce big bulbs and big fat cloves. You grow it just like you would any regular garlic.  Each clove at planting turns to around 4 cloves at harvesting.
<b>Runner Beans</b>	
<b>125 g - £2.60</b>	
Enorma	Short-jointed plants producing an enormous crop of very long, smooth, slender beans of excellent shape and colour. RHS Award of Garden Merit winner.
<b>Climbing French Beans</b>	
<b>45 Seeds - 60p</b>	
Blue Lake	Produces an abundant harvest of pencil-thin stringless green beans with a fine sweet flavour from early summer and then the last few pods can be left on the plant to dry for white haricot beans to store. An heirloom variety from 1885.
Cosse Violette	A bean that thrives in warmer weather, when runner beans struggle to set and produce beans. Striking lavender flowers and purple veined leaves. Producing a heavy crop of beautiful deep purple tender and stringless pods which turn dark green on cooking. Pick regularly to produce crops from July to October. Protect from frost and provide support as for runner beans. Good for freezing.
Sunshine	A warm sunshine-loving bean that excels in production over runner beans that can fail to set and produce beans. An attractive variety producing stringless, reliable high-quality crops. The pods have a sweet mild flavour. Picking every few days will enable cropping to last from July to October. Good for freezing. Protect from frost and provide support as for runner beans.

Blue Lake,  
Cosse Violette,  
Sunshine

An equal mix of these three varieties that look stunning growing together. Producing tender stringless pods from July to October with regular picking. Protect from frost and provide support as for runner beans. Good for freezing.

**Broad Beans 125 g - 85p**

Masterpiece  
Long Pod

Excellent length of pod and table quality. A fine green seeded broad bean and excellent for deep freezing. RHS Award of Garden Merit winner.

**Broad Beans 125 g - 75p**

Aqua Dulce

A long podded, white-seeded tasty board bean that's early to mature. Recommended for autumn and winter sowings throughout the UK for the earliest crops the following spring and summer.

**Peas 125 g - 75p**

Kelvedon Wonder

Thin-shelled pointed, narrow pods in pairs. Heavy yielding and of fine flavour. It is also resistant to mildew and suitable for March-July sowing. RHS Award of Garden Merit winner. Early variety

**Peas 125 g - 95p**

Meteor

A very hardy, dwarf variety which will crop well even in exposed locations, also ideal for containers. One of the first to crop in the season with a superb flavour. Very versatile for spring and autumn sowings.

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## Pumpkin, ricotta and rosemary tart (vegetarian)

This is a light main course if eaten with something on the side - a tumble of shredded fennel and cauliflower with a dressing of lemon juice, olive oil and balsamic vinegar would be mine - but it also makes a good lunchbox addition too. It doesn't matter whether you use pumpkin or butternut squash, but make sure you slice the flesh no thicker than ½ cm.

Serves 6

### Ingredients

Puff pastry 1 x sheet, 325 g, measuring about 35 x 22 cm

A little beaten egg

Pumpkin or butternut squash 650 g

3 tbsp olive oil



**For the filling**

250 g ricotta cheese

200 g full fat cream cheese

4 tbsp, grated parmesan (or vegetarian Italian-style hard cheese)

1 egg yolk

2 tbsp, chopped rosemary

**To finish**

A little, grated parmesan (or vegetarian Italian-style hard cheese)

Olive oil

**Instructions**

Set the oven at 180°C fan / gas mark 6.

- Unroll the sheet of pastry and place it on a baking sheet lined with a piece of baking parchment. Score a rectangle about 2 cm in from the edge - don't go right through to the parchment. This will form the "hollow" for the filling. Brush the edges with the beaten egg and bake for 10 minutes until puffed up and lightly coloured.
- Remove the skin and seeds from the pumpkin or butternut squash - you should be left with roughly 450 g of flesh. Slice thinly, each piece no thicker than ½ cm.
- Warm the olive oil in a shallow pan, place as many of the pumpkin slices as you can into it - even with a large frying pan I can never cook them all at once - then let them cook over a moderate heat for about 3 minutes till lightly coloured. Turn and lightly brown the other side, then transfer them carefully to a plate and do the next batch.
- For the filling, put the ricotta in a bowl, add the cream cheese, grated parmesan and egg yolk. Add the rosemary and a few grinds of the pepper mill, then mix well.
- Remove the pastry from the oven. Score the rectangle again and push the inner pastry down with the back of a spoon to form a shallow hollow. Spoon in the filling and smooth it out to the rim. Place the pumpkin slices on the surface, sprinkle a little parmesan and trickle very lightly with olive oil.
- Bake for 25 minutes till golden, the filling slightly puffed and fragrant. Leave to settle for 10 minutes before slicing and serving.

*With thanks to Nigel Slater*

## Growing onions from sets

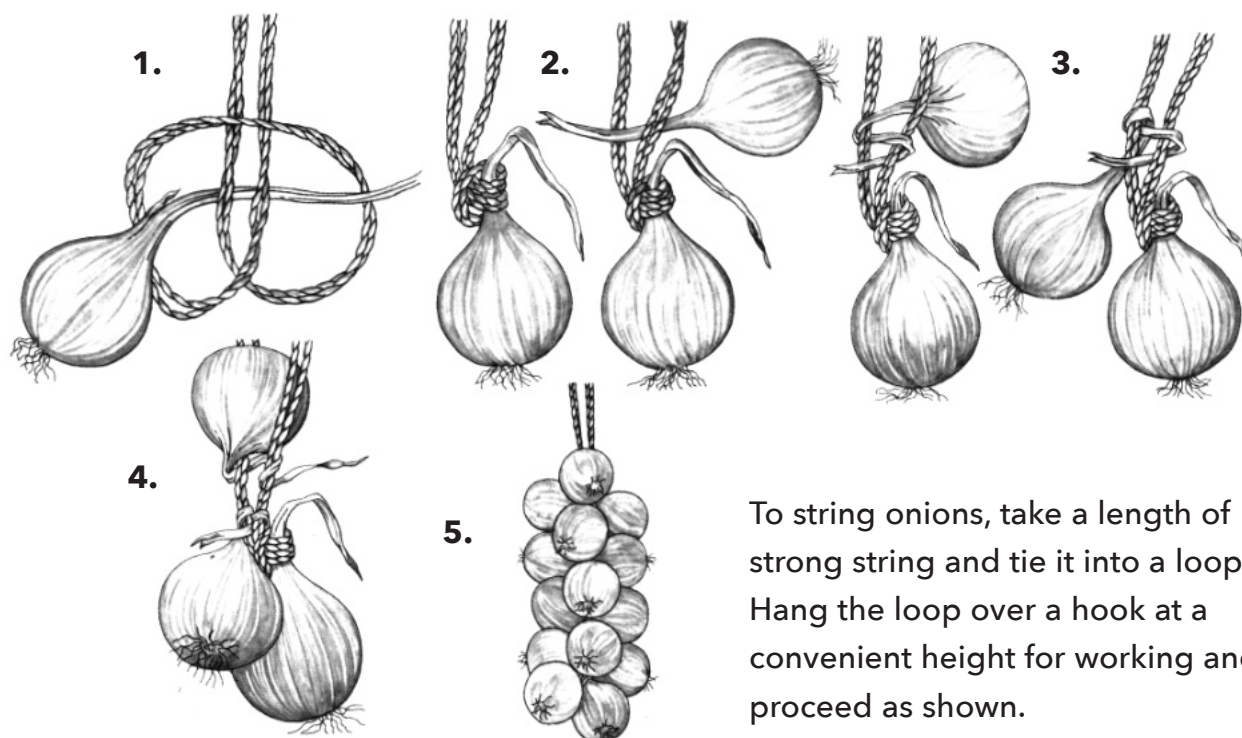
Do not manure the ground for sets, but apply an organic fertiliser ten to fourteen days before planting. Onions need firm soil.

Plant in March/April. The bulbs should be of a fairly uniform size about 1 cm (1/2 in) in diameter. Any much smaller are not worth planting because they will not grow into decent-sized bulbs. Before planting trim the old dry stems of the bulbs, but do not cut back into the flesh of the onion or it may rot. The purpose of this trimming is to leave less purchase for birds trying to tug them out of the ground, as they will. Plant the sets just deep enough for the tips to show. Do not force into the ground as this will damage roots and don't be tempted to plant more deeply, even to cheat the birds. Plant about 15 cm (6 in) apart, in rows 30 cm (12 in) or more apart. Make the soil firm around them.

Onions need watering in their early growing stages but do not like sitting in wet soil so do not overwater. Stop watering as soon as the bulbs begin to ripen in late July or August. Using a fine mesh for protection from allium leaf miner, leek moth and onion fly is a good idea. An occasional liquid seaweed feed encourages good growth.

Regular hand weeding is essential as onions do not grow well when competing with other plants. Although tempting, hoeing can disturb the onions roots.

In a dry summer the leaves will topple on their own. In a wet one you may have to help by gently bending the leaves over. The onions should be harvested in mid to late summer when they are of good size and the leaves have shrivelled, turned dry and yellow.



To string onions, take a length of strong string and tie it into a loop. Hang the loop over a hook at a convenient height for working and proceed as shown.

# Solving compost problems

*Some simple steps to help your heap*

Making your own compost is satisfying and a sustainable thing to do to improve the health of your allotment or garden. Nutrients that come from decomposed plant matter such as kitchen scraps, prunings, grass clippings and leaves all rot down in time, which turns this waste into something useful. This rich, dark, crumbly organic matter feeds plants, improves soil structure and helps retain moisture.

However, sometimes things can go wrong. If your compost heap or bin is less than sweet smelling, this guide may help to resolve some more common problems.

## Weeds

Avoid adding roots of perennial weeds such as bindweed or dock, which have the capacity to regenerate. Additionally, don't add weeds that have gone to seed, since these will germinate in great profusion when you spread the compost later.

## Dry and dusty

There's an imbalance of green (fresh, leafy) material to brown (dry, woody) materials. Getting a roughly equal mix of both is the key. Adding in moist green material such as grass clippings will help. Water your heap to moisten it in dry weather.

## It doesn't seem to be rotting down

Typically, to make good compost takes from 6-24 months. Turning the heap will mix the ingredients and introduce vital air that micro-organisms, worms and fungi rely on to break down the organic matter. This can be done with a fork or aeration tool every few months and will speed up the rotting process.

## Rats or mice

Rodents may be attracted by the shelter or food that compost heaps provide. Avoid adding cooked food or protein-rich waste such as avocado, pumpkins and beans. Prevent them tunnelling from below by positioning a layer of fine metal mesh at the base.

## Slimy or smelly

The mix is too wet. To counter this, mix in carbon-rich material such as woody prunings (finely chopped up or shredded), or autumn leaves. If these aren't readily available, torn-up paper or cardboard is a good alternative to balance excess moisture.