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Chairmans chatter

Seen any slugs lately? Almost certainly the answer somewhere in your garden or on your allotment has been a loud "yes"

If the quote, attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson in the 1800s, "Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door" was true at the time, and for many years after, then the same might apply to gardeners these days about a 'solution' to their local, not very friendly, slugs.

There are all sorts of ideas offered to solve the problem of slugs eating our crops and plants - and we sell a few in the allotment trading shed.

SLIMERS - thinking BIG about slugs

The Strategies Leading to Improved Management and Enhanced Resilience to Slugs (SLIMERS) research project, led by Harper Adams University, is working to help farmers predict more accurately where slugs are most likely to appear on their farms so they can use slug-control chemicals more selectively.



A team of twenty-eight Slug Sleuth farmers and agronomists collected field data to help researchers better understand slug behaviour, and last year (sorry too late now) the public were invited to send by snail mail (surely slug mail?) examples of slugs found across the country. The one slug they didn't want sent in was the leopard slug that, along with moving fast to eat your plants, also eats other slugs

The work enabled Prof. Keith Walters and his team at Harper Adams University to develop and validate a model predicting where slugs are most likely to be found in arable fields.

You can read about the project here: <https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/news/212352/hightech-project-helping-farmers-battle-slugs-enters-latest-phase>

In the meantime, slug pellets, Strulch, a yogurt pot of beer sunk in the ground, or whatever approach you prefer, might be the best plan.

Trading shed news

As we enter the summer period a reminder that the Trading shed is open on Saturday only during the months of July and August. This reflects the reduction in sales and our volunteers having other things in their social diary at this time of year.

Sunday opening will resume on the sixth of September. We will then continue to open on both Saturday and Sunday until the end of November; when we close for the winter.

In the autumn we will have the usual supplies for planting and overwintering:

Spring flowering bulbs

We aim to stock a range of Crocus, Iris, Narcissi, packs of Warm Cutting Garden Collection and for indoor showing, Amaryllis

Autumn planting shallots

We will have bagged supplies of Jermor shallots

Overwintering Onions

There will be a choice of Autumn Champion, Radar and Senshyu

Garlic

French and Elephant garlic for autumn planting

We will let you know when these items have arrived and are available to buy.

Culver Lane site issues

It's a busy time of year on any allotment site and Culver Lane is no different. A few things to be aware of please:

Chain on the vehicle gate

Please use the full length of the chain so that there are enough links available for people to bring the lock to their side to open it. When the full length has not been used in the recent past, people have been trapped as they can't turn the padlock to see and set the number.

The sharing table has recently had a wide range of items left on it - some with little or no connection to growing or gardening in its widest sense. New signage requests that: **Please only leave gardening or allotment-related items on the table.**

If it is still there after a couple of weeks please retrieve it and find another way to pass it on to a new owner.

If you have other items to pass on we recommend Freegle - it is free and the person who wants your unwanted item comes to collect it - simple. Their website is:

<https://www.ilovefreegle.org/explore/ReadingFreegleUK>

Not being able to look after your allotment

Sometimes life gets in the way of enjoying your allotment and maintaining it to the high standards we all aspire to. This may be your own poor health, family issues or work expecting you to be somewhere away from Reading.

If this happens, please let us know to reduce the chance of a letter from Earley Town Council when they do their monthly inspections. Peter Burton accompanies the council on these inspections on behalf of the allotment association and is happy to explain that work, for example, have sent you to Timbuctoo - but only if he knows.

Peter can be contacted by email at pbalchemy@yahoo.co.uk. He also displays the date of the next inspection, which can be useful to know, on the council notice board (located near the toilet block as you enter the site).

Days out

Two events you might want to note in your diary and then take part in:

Earley Town Council Green Fair: 10:00-15:00, Saturday, 1st August 2026

This annual event promotes local environmental and wellbeing organisations giving you a chance to meet and talk to their volunteers or staff.

The fair takes place at the end of the Maiden Erleigh nature reserve, where it adjoins Beech Lane in Lower Earley, and is open from 10:00 – 15:00. Entry is free. The Allotment Association will have a stall publicising itself and promoting allotments and gardening more widely. If anyone would like to help on the stall please email Richard at handptradingshed@gmail.com

Our annual picnic - 12:30-15:00, Saturday, 5th September 2026

Held at the Culver Lane site this is our very friendly annual social event where you bring your lunch, something to share and meet with fellow members to discuss your successes of the year, bemoan those crops that disappointed and prove that we gardeners are never happy with the weather.

There are four competitions that are open to all, and judged by all attending so please plan an entry or four and expect to take part in the judging. The classes are as follows:

- Best individual fruit or vegetable
- Assorted fruit or vegetable varieties in a box or basket
- Best container of flowers
- Best produce made using a home or allotment grown ingredient

We hope to see you there, it will be a great chance to meet with like-minded people, friends you already know and those you have not met yet.

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 where they buried 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 saying 'Mighty oaks from little acorns grow' reminds us. There are also significant advantages to having trees grown locally rather than importing them, along with all sorts of pests that can go on to damage our valuable tree population.



If you have a mini-tree that you don't want, then please put it in a spare pot and either pop it into the trading shed or leave it on the sharing table outside. Richard will look after the trees and arrange for them to reach the Earley Town Council nature reserve wardens in time for planting in our local nature reserves during national tree week.

July / August Jobs

Herbs - drying

Harvest young healthy leaves. Spread out in a single layer in a warm, dark place. Turn them several times and when dry store in air-tight containers.

Reviving

If mint is looking tired and not growing well then cut it back to ground level. Water well and there should be a new crop ready in 6 to 8 weeks.

Keep picking fresh herbs to encourage their growth and keep the supply going.

Onions

Harvest onions when the foliage is yellow and is collapsing. Lift them carefully with a fork to avoid damaging the roots. Dry thoroughly in an airy place and when the skins are dry store in nets or trays.

Potatoes

Carefully dig up the first early or salad potatoes. eat straight away for best enjoyment. If they are still quite small then leave them in the ground for a bit longer.

Homemade plant feed

Cut and compact either comfrey or nettles in a container with a lid. Try to get as many leaves as possible in it then fill up with water. Let it rot down until it is dark brown in colour. It will be rather smelly!

Strain off the liquid and dilute about twenty parts water to one of feed before using on your plants.

Fast-growing crops

Pick runner or French beans, courgettes regularly. Frequent picking will encourage continuous growth and will help to keep the supply going.

Salad crops

Make use of gaps in your plot by sowing quick growing crops such as rocket, radishes and lettuce. Grow in small batches to prevent a glut and keep the harvest going.

Tomatoes

Take out any side shoots (the ones that appear at 45° between the main stem and the leaf stems). This will allow the plant to put its energy into the fruit. Feed with a high-potassium fertiliser such as a comfrey or nettle tea or use a commercial one such as Tomorite.

Pinch out the growing points when they reach the top of their supports.

Put that hose away

Let established lawns go brown during dry spells. They will usually recover quickly once rain starts. Avoid routine watering, especially with mains water.

Watering wisely



This year we are experiencing an exceptionally dry and hot spring and summer. Conserving water whilst watering your garden or allotment is both environmentally responsible and can save money. Here are effective strategies to help you do this:

- **Water at the right time**

Early morning or late evening is best when it is cooler, which means less evaporation. Avoid midday watering as the sun and heat cause quick evaporation, which will scorch plants.

- **Use the right method**

A rose on your watering can may make the soil look moist but will only penetrate it by a few millimetres. This encourages shallow root development, which then causes more stress in plants and makes them less drought tolerant. Watering without a rose and directing the water to the base of each plant may take a little longer but will get much-needed water down to its roots, producing a stronger plant.

Using a watering can instead of a hose in your garden is more controlled and reduces overwatering.

Applying a mulch (e.g., bark, straw, compost) after wetting the soil will retain moisture and suppress weeds.

- **Localised watering**

Getting water deep down encourages stronger root growth and reduces evaporation and run-off. Sink a fairly large plastic flower pot in the ground so that its rim is level with the soil next to plants. By filling this with water it will keep the soil moist below ground level getting it to where the plants need it.

- **Harvest rainwater and use grey water**

Install a water butt and collect rainwater from roofs or sheds. For non-edible plants you can use grey water (e.g. from baths or washing vegetables). This is safe if the soap used is mild and biodegradable.

- **Improve soil structure**

Add organic matter (compost/manure) this helps to retain soil moisture. Avoid compacting the soil by reducing treading or by using raised beds.

● **Be selective about what you water**

Prioritise new plantings and thirsty crops (e.g., cucumbers, tomatoes) and group plants with similar needs together. Choose drought-tolerant plants that thrive with less water.

● **Measure and monitor**

Check the soil moisture before watering by using your finger. If it feels moist a finger-depth down it probably doesn't need doing.

Don't overwater – many plants do better with less frequent, deeper watering.

Hedgehogs



My name is Shweta Saikumar and I have recently started renting of one of the communal raised beds at the Culver Lane allotments. I also run Herbie Hedgehog Rescue (charity No. 1203949) out of my home. It is a charity helping with the rehabilitation of sick or injured wild hedgehogs. After recovery, they are released back into the wild to carry on with their lives. We release an average of 150 hedgehogs every year.

In the past I have taken in hedgehogs from allotments, which seems to be a good place for them to thrive with all the variety of insects they can find.

The most common reasons for hedgehog admissions are strimmer-related injuries and those caught in netting. If you ever find a hedgehog in your allotment or garden during the day, it is almost certainly in trouble.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for help on 07598 794442 if you find a sick or injured hedgehog. Please put the hedgehog in a tall cardboard box with tea towels and keep it indoors before contacting me.

Checking for nesting hedgehogs in overgrown areas before strimming will save their lives. Raising any form of netting a foot above ground will enable them pass through without getting entangled.

For more information on helping hedgehogs please do follow me on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1BnWmG5tVV/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Or visit my website www.herbiehedgehogrescue.com

Thank you, Shweta Saikumar

Courgette loaf cake

If you like carrot cake but fancy something a little different try this - a great way of easing a courgette glut:

Ingredients

1 large courgette, trimmed and grated (you'll need about 200 g grated courgette)
175 ml vegetable oil
125 g soft, light-brown sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp vanilla bean paste (or the same quantity of vanilla extract)
275 g plain flour
½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 lemon
200 g icing sugar
100 g unsalted butter, softened, plus extra for the tin

Method

- Tip the grated courgette into a clean tea towel and squeeze out all the excess water. Set aside.
- Butter a 900g loaf tin and line with baking paper. Whisk together the oil, brown sugar, eggs and vanilla bean paste. Add the flour, baking powder and bicarb, and fold everything together before stirring in the grated courgette.
- Spoon the batter into the prepared tin and bake for 55 mins-1 hr until risen, golden and a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean. Leave to cool in the tin for 10 mins before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.
- Peel long, thin strands of curly zest from the lemon using a citrus zester. Juice the rest of the lemon.

Put the butter in a bowl and beat using an electric whisk until smooth. Spoon in half the icing sugar, and beat until well combined. Beat in the remaining icing sugar and the lemon juice. Spread the buttercream over the cooled loaf cake, then sprinkle over the lemon zest to finish. Slice to serve.

With thanks to Olive Magazine website