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Chairmans chatter

Well, what a summer that was!

I am guessing we all did rather more watering, mulching and plant care than we planned for across the summer and might be thinking how things might have to change in the future.

As we move into autumn and then winter many growers will be thinking about next year and what they will grow, or not grow. There are a few trends:

Crops that used to be solely the preserve of a greenhouse can be grown successfully outside.

I am not just talking about tomatoes that are increasingly very successful outdoors, whereas a generation ago they were predominantly a greenhouse crop. One plot holder managed to successfully grow aubergine, melons, peppers (both sweet and chilli) and watermelons outdoors this summer.

Some long-standing favourites coped less well with the summer we had.

Many plot holders told me at the picnic that runner beans had been poor this year, whilst others reported they came good part way through September.

Runner beans prefer cool, moist growing conditions and hot, dry weather can reduce

pod set. On our plot, however, the dwarf green beans have been great and this is what we are going to focus on next year for our bean crop.

Think about when to plant and transplant

New crops sown or planted, or transplanted when there is no rain will struggle. We need to learn to be flexible to avoid being committed to using a lot of water and time getting our crops going.

Seed catalogues are now available for 2027 (Suttons and its discount code are available for members in the Trading Shed) so while there is less to do outside why not start thinking about next year? A cup of tea and a trusty catalogue - anyone for a bit of plot planning?

Hurrah for allotments

Research by the European Commission found that including allotments in large urban spaces can help those conurbations cool locally by as much as 2.8° Celsius.

A study of 682 such areas across Europe found that having allotments provided a cooling effect on the surrounding region by an area equivalent to almost three times the size of those allotments.

Ideally, such thinking will be incorporated into the Government's plans to build many more homes. Given the summer we have just had; every little helps. You can read more about the research here:

https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/allotment-gardens-provide-cooling-benefits-residents-european-cities-2026-09-07_en

Ivy bees

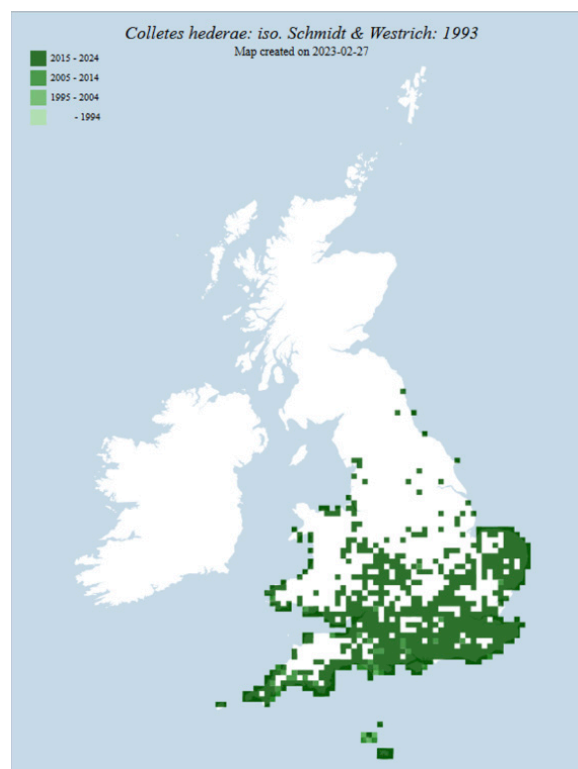
In September Culver Lane allotments site saw the annual emergence of Ivy Bees, *Colletes hederae*. Britain's only autumn bee, they feed exclusively from ivy, and time their emergence for when ivy comes into flower.

They are solitary bees (rather than nesting communally) but live in aggregations wherever they can find loose ground. They are among the Plasterer Bees: the hole each queen excavates is made waterproof and fungus-free by a cellophane-like substance applied by the bee using its tongue. Inside this chamber, an egg is suspended above a semi-liquid mix of pollen and nectar.





Ivy Bees at Huntley & Palmer Allotments.
Adjacent to plot 47 (7 Sept 2026)



Spread of Ivy Bees in 2023

They are not aggressive bees, nor do they have the powerful sting of honeybees, which have evolved to guard large combs of honey. Male Ivy bees emerge first and await the females. 'Mating balls' of males can then sometimes be seen rolling downhill, massed round a virgin queen. An interesting species, not scientifically described in Europe until 1993 (by Schmidt & Westrich, who recognised it as distinct from two related species) it reached Dorset in 2001.

The site, famed for huge aggregations of these bees is Barton-on-Sea, Hampshire, where their busy excavations in the Barton Sand beds can cause slumping in the erosion-prone low cliffs. Just think what we could do, if we all did our digging with proportionate energy.

Roy B on Plot 21, H&P allotments

Plastic sack recycling

In the shed we sell hundreds of plastic sacks containing various composts, manure and fertilisers each year. Some of these sacks get reused for storing your own compost of material awaiting composting or disposal of bad weeds like bindweed and mare's tail. Many are, however, likely to be "single-use plastic".

Nationally it is estimated that 100 million such sacks are sold each year and many end up going to landfill. If recycled they can be made into new sacks, other plastic sheet material or garden furniture.

We would like to do a trial by offering to recycle these bags and providing a collection station at the Culver Lane site. The key to success is that bags sent for recycling must be:

- Clean of the product that came in them. We suggest turning the bag inside out before recycling, which helps make sure you have removed all of its contents.
- Have NOT been used to store anything else like weeds, prunings or stones off your plot as these items will contaminate the plastic going into recycling
- Kept as dry as possible

How it works

- We have repurposed a Wokingham Borough Council wheelie bin to collect the sacks.
- This will be clearly labelled and placed near the former mower shed at the far end of the car park.
- We will monitor the suitability of bags collected - with your help we can make this work.

Thank you for your anticipated participation.



H&P Picnic

Around twenty-five members gathered for the annual picnic at the start of September, which featured a mix of socialising over a picnic lunch and friendly competition in four classes:

- 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

Voting was simply done by all present picking their favourite in each class – after tasting, in the case of best produce, made using a home or allotment grown, ingredient.

The day provided a great opportunity to socialise with fellow growers, share tales of both successes and disappointments in the season and therefore gather ideas for next year.



Some of the entries at the picnic.

Growing Broad Beans

A long-established staple of the vegetable garden, broad beans are easy to grow and one of the first crops of the year to harvest.

Beans grow best in fertile, well-drained soil in full sun. Prepare the ground by clearing, weeding and removing large stones. Dig in garden compost or well-rotted manure. Lining a shallow trench with newspaper or cardboard will help to retain moisture.



For an early start, sow broad beans indoors. Use deep pots or root trainers that are filled with moist, free-draining seed compost. Sow one seed per pot, around 5 cm deep, and keep them in a cool, bright place. Broad beans don't require high heat to germinate. This method is perfect for getting ahead of the season or if outdoor conditions are still too harsh.

If you have sown your broad beans indoors, then once the seedlings reach 10-15 cm tall, they are ready to harden off before finally planting them outside. Over a 7-14 day period place them outside for a few hours each day, gradually increasing their exposure to wind and temperature changes. To transplant, simply remove your seedlings from their pots and place them in larger pots or directly into your prepared ground.

Aquadulce broad beans can be grown through the winter. Prepare the soil as above and sow the seeds 3-4 in (75-100 mm) deep and 6-9 in (150-225 mm) apart in double rows. This enables them to establish good roots before emerging from the soil. This also discourages mice from digging down to have a tasty snack. Growing through the winter means that the broad beans should be fruiting before any danger of blackfly, which is usually mid-April onwards. Keep the soil moist as seedlings establish themselves and when they have grown, provide support for taller varieties, which will help to keep them upright.

Slow-cooked root vegetable soup

Use these, or whatever root vegetables you have, to make a hearty warming winter soup.

Ingredients

8 oz (225 g) peeled carrots, cut into 2-inch (5 cm) lengths
8 oz (225 g) peeled celeriac, cut into 2-inch (5 cm) pieces
8 oz (225 g) trimmed and washed leeks, halved and cut into 2-inch (5 cm) lengths
8 oz (225 g) peeled swede, cut into 2-inch (5 cm) pieces
1 small onion, peeled and roughly chopped
2½ pints (1.5 litres) stock made with Marigold Swiss Bouillon vegetable powder
3 bay leaves salt and freshly milled black pepper

Method

1. There's not much to do here once everything is peeled and chopped.
2. All you do is place everything in the casserole and bring it up to a gentle simmer, then put the lid on, place it in the lowest part of the oven and leave it there for 3 hours, by which time the vegetables will be meltingly tender.
3. Next remove the bay leaves and process or liquidise the soup in several batches to a purée, then gently re-heat, and serve the soup in bowls.

With thanks to Delia Online