

DIGGER'S



DIGEST

Welcome to the Autumn issue of *Digger's Digest* and thanks to members who contacted us with their comments on the new format and content. If you have any ideas, questions or advice that you think would be of interest to members, please contact

newsletter@wahga.org.uk.

Congratulations to all prize-winners in this year's **Best Allotment Awards** - full details in this issue. We have profiled **David Peacock**, winner of the Best Small Plot, and **Margaret** and **James Waite**, Best Newcomer winners.

Caroline Jones
Editor

Trading Shed Update

By the time you read this you will be flocking into the trading sheds to **pay your annual rent and subs!**

Hopefully, this will coincide with deliveries of autumn-planting bulbs, onions and garlic, although owing to the weather this year the delivery of garlic may be late. We have on order small packs of bulbs similar to last year, including crocus, hyacinth, narcissus, tulip, anemone, iris, allium and snowdrop, at just £1 a pack. In the search for varieties of garlic that grow well in our environment we hope to have two new hardneck varieties from Eastern Europe, called **Lyubasha** and **Topinky**, as well as the softneck **Early Purple Wight** that we have had in previous years. Several growers have noticed that their leeks and onions have been attacked by the **Allium Leaf Miner**.

Signs of infestation are the presence of little brown pupae in

your leeks when you cut them open. Apparently there is no cure, only prevention, which consists of covering the plants when the flies are active and laying eggs in **March/April** and **September/October**. You can use fleece or insect mesh to cover your leek plants, both of which are sold in the trading sheds. We now have 3.6-metre-wide insect mesh that can also be used to cover brassicas or any other veg that are susceptible to flying pests. Don't forget to buy your **Aquadulce** broad bean seeds for November sowing. They are in the sheds now. If there are any seed varieties that you would like to see in the sheds let us know. You can find all that's available on the Dobies website (www.dobies.co.uk).

Best Allotment Winners 2016

The **Best Allotment competition** was judged by the Chairman and Allotment Secretary who looked at how effectively the allotments were filled with crops and their diversity. The judges also looked at plot neatness, tidiness and weed control.

Best Allotment: 1st Paul Woodrup, Bolton Road.

2nd Kay Knowles, Fairground.

3rd Nabil Jafari, Maidenhead Road.

Best Small Plot: 1st David Peacock, Maidenhead Road.

Best Newcomer: 1st Margaret and James Waite, Bolton Road.

Meet the Winners!

We've had a 'bumper' year at the Rio Olympics – and here are three more winners, albeit on a more practical basis! First, **David Peacock**, winner of **Best Small Plot**.

Q. How long have you had your allotment? A. I took the allotment on in

December 2012, so four growing seasons, although for the first two years it was mostly preparing the raised beds and planting a few crops.

Q. Do you tend your allotment on your own?

A. I currently tend it on my own. Now most of the hard work is done, perhaps this will change!

Q. How much time do you spend at your allotment each week? A. I try to visit 2-3 times a week between April and November and spend at least 1 hour there.

Q. What were your best successes this year?

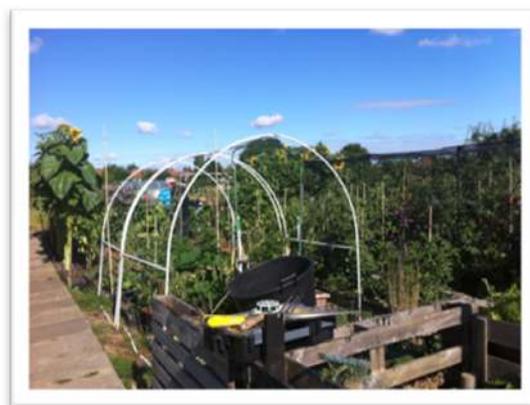
A. My raspberries (summer and autumn fruiting), sunflowers (Kong F1) and Pattypan squash. The last is a mystery as I never bought the seeds – I think they were in a packet of courgettes.

Q. What's the best bit of advice you've been given?

A. Working as a volunteer in the shop you pick up lots of tips. One useful piece of advice was to plant onion sets in the autumn on ridges/mounds of soil to avoid waterlogging.

Q. Why did you decide to take an allotment?

A. I've always enjoyed gardening, particularly growing vegetables, inspired by my late mother. I only have a small garden at home so an allotment is ideal – fresh air, peace and quiet and a VERY friendly community.



David's plot has now been transformed

Q. What advice would you give to someone new to allotments?

A. Persevere! It's hard work at the start but the best strategy, in my opinion, is to take it in stages and not try to get the whole plot organised at once.

Q. Do you think that WAHGA could help new allotment holders more? If so, how?

A. Having a new plot rotavated before you start (if needed) is a great help (thanks, Ginger!) and there are also some talks arranged for new allotment holders. Perhaps there could be a 'buddy system' linking a new allotment holder to a more experienced gardener. Overall, WAHGA seems to be extremely well managed with fantastic support/facilities.

Q. What do you find most difficult about your allotment?

A. I suppose it is getting started if you have a bare piece of land. Then there is the watering during the summer months.

Q. Do you use pesticides or do you take an organic approach? **A.** Slug pellets are the only pesticide I use, but sparingly. As regards feeding, I use Maxicrop and the tomato feed from the WAHGA shop.

Q. What plans do you have for your allotment next year?

A. I want to rearrange my raisedbed system and incorporate more organic matter. The frame I obtained from a friendly allotment holder (donation to charity!) could be turned into a polytunnel. Perhaps I'll just cover it with netting and use it to grow lots of peas. To add extra interest, I'd like to add extra arches with climbing plants.

Q. Do you do anything to attract bees and other insects to your plot (such as planting flowers or putting up bug boxes)? **A.** I grow bright orange Californian poppies (annuals) and *Verbena bonariensis*. Bees/hoverflies seem to love these. My sunflowers (Kong F1) also attract the bees and I remove the seed heads as they form, leaving them for the birds during autumn and winter. As regards bug boxes, it's certainly something to research via the internet and to consider for next year. After all, we are invading their territory!

Our second interview is with the husband-and-wife team of James and Margaret Waite (below), who won the **Best Newcomer Award**.



Q. How long have you had your allotment?

A. We took on our first half plot in May 2015 and then took on an adjoining half in October 2015.

Q. Who does what on the plot?

A. We share things out between the two of us, with James doing the heavy digging and a lot of the watering and Margaret raising the seedlings and doing most of the planting.

Q. How much time do you spend at your allotment each week?

A. As much as possible during the growing season. We live nearby and tend to pop over every day.

Q. What were your best successes this year?

A. We are very pleased with our pumpkins (Dobie's Justynka). The French beans (Thompson and Morgan's Nomad) have cropped heavily and we've been surprised by the success of our tomatoes (Gardener's Delight and Shirley).

Q. What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

A. Keeping the weeds down by covering the unplanted areas with black polythene.

Q. Why did you decide to take an allotment?

A. A friend offered Margaret some rhubarb. They went to pick it from his plot and that led to us thinking that we'd like to grow our own fruit and veg.

Q. What advice would you give to someone new to an allotment?

A. Be enthusiastic about what you want to grow and then tackle digging and weeding (and improving the soil if needed)!

Q. Could WAHGA do more to help new allotment holders?

A. WAHGA have been very helpful. One idea might be to offer a mentor to those who haven't had any experience of growing fruit and veg.



James and Margaret's plot

Q. What have you found most difficult about your allotment?

A. The initial ground preparation and getting out the roots of bindweed and other persistent

perennial weeds. However, it's well worth making the effort.

Q. Do you use pesticides or do you take an organic approach?

A. We are organic as much as possible, but do admit to taking a spray to the asparagus beetles on one occasion!

Q. What plans do you have for your allotment next year?

A. We've ordered more blackcurrant and redcurrant bushes and strawberry plants. We rather overdid the potatoes this year and won't be planting so many again and will try other varieties. We'll plant pumpkins, courgettes and various beans. Plus the brassicas, onions, salad crops... the list is endless!

What can you do to help? Did you know that the Association is run by volunteers? This includes the Management Committee, the allotment site supervisors, those who run the trading sheds and the people who manage Gardeners Hall. All these individuals give their time freely, but people leave and replacements are hard to find. Currently, the Committee has at least two vacancies and there are four allotment sites without Supervisors. Without more help, particularly with the physical work, it will become difficult to keep things going. If you would like to get involved or want to know more, speak to a Committee member at one of the Trading Sheds, call Lesley Spence on 01753 831863 or email membership@wahga.org.uk.

WAHGA is the Windsor Allotments and Home Gardens Association Ltd

Visit the website for details: www.wahga.org.uk

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