

# DIGGER'S DIGEST

WAHGA 2017 AUTUMN NEWSLETTER



## Editorial comment

**Welcome** to the autumn issue of *Digger's Digest*. Well, it finally rained and hopefully redeemed what was looking to be a difficult year. And for some it has been a bumper year, with certain crops thriving in the inclement weather, although others suffered. Read more in this issue. Also, congratulations to **Martin Pritchett** who won the 2017 Best Allotment Award. We will profile some of the winners in the next newsletter.

## The Editorial Team

**Trading shed news** John Spence writes: As we look forward to some dry weather in September, we will have supplies of bulbs and onion sets for autumn planting. We will also have hyacinths for indoor pots, and a small supply of hourglass vases for growing them hydroponically. We are always open to suggestions for non-perishable items to stock. Currently, we are trialling cabbage collars that are used when planting out to prevent access from root fly, and we now have propagator lids to go with matching 14in seed and gravel trays. We are stocking 40-litre bags of potting compost that are easier to carry than the heavier bags. The August rain proved the downfall (!) of many of the traditional outdoor tomato varieties as they succumbed to blight. We have been stocking seeds of blight-tolerant tomatoes, such as Lizzano and

Fantasio, for the past few years. Last year, a new blight-resistant outdoor variety called Crimson Crush appeared. At the time of writing, my Crimson Crush are still going strong. I do think it is advisable not to grow blight-susceptible tomatoes with the blight-resistant ones.

**Late nights on the allotment** Most of us are only likely to be using our allotments in daylight hours. However, recently there have been complaints from local residents about late-night noise and light disturbance on allotments. To address these concerns, the Committee has decided to make it clear exactly when the sites are open. Allotments may be used every day from sunrise through to 10pm. At other times, allotment holders should only be on a site if they have specific permission from either their site supervisor or a member of the Committee to be there. Generally, we would ask all allotment holders to respect the peace of our neighbours.

## Best Allotment Competition

The **2017 Best Allotment Competition** was judged by the Allotment Secretary and the President at the end of June. The judges look for plots that make good use of the available space, have a diverse range of produce, and are tidy and free of weeds. The winner of the Best Allotment was **Martin Pritchett** from Fairground.

In joint second place were **Armando Mennone** from Bolton Road and **Alan Wellstead** from Spital. The winner of the Best Small Plot was **Urszula Bira** from Maidenhead Road and the Best Newcomer was **Sarah Sealey** from Fairground. Congratulations to all the winners. We will be interviewing some of those who were successful in the next issue of *Digger's Digest*.

### 2017 – year of the bean?

In the summer issue of *Digger's Digest* we highlighted the effects of drought and how to care for your crops during long dry periods. Well, the rain eventually came and the sun shone, producing some amazing results for some and despair for others. A brief survey of the highs and lows of the season at the Maidenhead Road Trading Shed showed that the biggest failure this year was outdoor tomatoes, which suffered from blight. Runner beans fared well, and this year has been exceptional for French beans, with some reporting excellent yields. Strawberries and broad beans also thrived.

**Clewer – a multicultural site** There are nine WAHGA allotment sites and each one has its own character. In 2001, when Tom McCreath took over an allotment, Clewer Park on the Maidenhead Road was described by the Council as a 'Leisure Garden'. It had 18 allotments and the rest of the site was completely overgrown. It had been part of the grounds of



**Tom McCreath at Clewer Park**

a manor house called Clewer Park House dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 2007, Tom became the site supervisor and started the process of clearing the ground and creating more allotments. Today, there are 85 allotments and a thriving and multi-national community of allotment holders. These include people originally from China, France, Italy, Peru and Poland. All these individuals introduce new ideas and crops.



For example, a French allotment holder grows beans and squashes in an igloo arrangement of canes (see picture above), with flowers in the

middle of the igloo. There is also a school allotment, which was featured in last winter's newsletter. It has a shed painted with colourful designs (see picture below). The whole site is full of flowers and is very varied and interesting. There are regular deliveries of manure and bark chippings for mulching, paths and soil improvement, and there is a huge compost heap managed by one of the allotment holders.



In November, the allotment holders hold a bonfire party with a firework display organised by two aeronautical engineers. Around 100 people attend and they have fish and chips delivered to the site. There are also other smaller social events through the year. As a result, people on the site know one another and work together to keep the site looking neat and tidy. If you are interested in being a site supervisor, please contact the Allotment Secretary, Don Hartridge, by email at [allotments@wahga.org.uk](mailto:allotments@wahga.org.uk), call 01753 855754 or talk to him at St Leonard's Road trading shed.

**How to prune fruit trees** The key to keeping fruit trees attractive and productive is annual pruning in winter. Different fruits can be pruned

in different ways, but there is a simple three-step process that works for the vast majority of fruit trees, including apples, pears, quince, peaches, cherries, apricots and plums.

Sharp tools make life easier.

**Step 1: Clean up** Start by pruning away any wood that is dead, damaged or diseased.

Are sprouts coming from the base of the trunk? If so, remove them. How about suspiciously straight sprouts growing from some of the main branches? These should be removed as well.

With all these clean-up cuts, it's important to prune the branches back flush to the larger limb they're growing from – make sure you don't leave small stubs.

**Step 2: Thin out**

The goal of thinning is to allow light and air into the canopy, which boosts fruit production and reduces problems with pests and disease. First, remove any branches that grow downward, or toward the centre of the tree, or that cross paths with another branch.

Once these are out of the way, stand back and take a look. The goal is to have evenly spaced branches splaying out in a pleasing, fractal-like pattern from the centre. Do you see places where multiple branches compete with each other? If so, thin out all but one branch, retaining the branch with the healthiest appearance and best crotch angle (roughly the 2 o'clock or 10 o'clock angle from the centre of the tree).

Next, continue to thin the tree until there is a good 6-12 inches of air space around every branch. The smaller the branches are, the closer they can be to each other.

As with your clean-up cuts, all thinning cuts should be made flush to the branch.

### Step 3: Prune back

The last step is the easiest – you're basically giving the tree a haircut.



**Haircut time: pruning improves growth**

The idea is to prune back the outermost growth of the tree so the branches become shorter and thicker as they grow, rather than long and gangly. This keeps them from snapping under the weight of the fruit, but fruit scientists will tell you that it also causes the tree's hormones to activate growth lower in the canopy, making for smaller, more fruitful trees. Pruning back means cutting off 20 to 30 per cent of last year's growth. You can distinguish last year's growth from two-year-old growth by the wrinkly ring of bark encircling each stem. Depending on the vigour of the tree, this may be anywhere from 2 inches to 4 feet back from the tip of each

branch. Unlike the previous steps, these cuts will be made part-way into each branch. Exactly where you make the cut is important, too. Prune each branch back to a point a quarter of an inch above a bud that faces the direction you want that branch to grow in the coming year.

**By Brian Barth. Reprinted with permission of Modern Farmer.**

### Don't forget quiz night!

The WAHGA quiz night, hosted by Dave Morris, will take place on Friday 20 October at 7.30pm in Gardeners' Hall. There is a maximum of six people per team and the entry fee per person is £2. We ask everyone to bring along a plate of finger food to share and the bar will be open.

**Enter the 'super slug'** An 'army' of extra-large slimy invaders could soon be landing on your allotment. A 6-inch-long Spanish slug has arrived on UK shores that is immune to regular doses of slug pellets! *Arion vulgaris*, the Spanish 'stealth' slug, is a super-hybrid that can survive all weather and can eat 20 slug pellets before dying. It also has a voracious sexual appetite and is breeding with our native British slug, resulting in the hybrid. Leslie Nobile, from the University of Aberdeen, said our native species could be bred out of existence because the 'super slugs' produce more offspring than British slugs. Keep your eyes open!

**WAHGA is the Windsor Allotments and Home Gardens Association Ltd.**

**Visit the website for details: [www.wahga.org.uk](http://www.wahga.org.uk). Autumn 2017.**

**This newsletter is written, compiled and designed by Caroline Jones, Lesley Upton and Philip Upton.**