

DIGGER'S DIGEST

Christmas message from WAHGA President, Harold Mitchell

As the end of the year approaches yet again most of us will be thinking back as to which crops grew well for us in the last season. Should we sow and plant the same ones or try something new? I will be trying the same main crops as before but will drop some of the multiple varieties that I have used in the past, I suppose really back to basics, a trend that possibly many of you may also be thinking about.

To most it appears to have been a pretty disastrous time, with a wet spring followed by an exceptionally hot and dry summer with much carrying of water in order to get some kind of result. However, we were advised that an allotment holder was pumping water from nearby tanks to fill paddling pools. This, of course, is unacceptable, and the person concerned was given fair warning. After taking no notice they were given notice to quit. It is not the wish of the Committee to resort to such action but when needs be we will. I would also point out that pumping or syphoning water to your own water butts is equally unacceptable. Please bear this in mind especially if we have another summer like the last one.

The Committee appears to be shrinking and we are in need three, four and possibly five new members to join. Steve Clark sadly died, Tom McCreath has departed Windsor for the sunny port of Southampton. John and Lesley Spence will be moving to the Bristol/Bath area a move which for them, is taking far too long. Cliff Partridge has also decided it is time to bow out as Hall Lettings Officer. The experience and expertise of all five

will be sadly missed. Frank Hovell has recently had to undergo surgery and is considering his position after serving the Association for some 35 years and Jane Kerr is also considering her options as she concentrates on gaining qualifications for her chosen career.

The Committee meets on the second Monday of each month between 7.30pm and 9pm. If you feel able to assist, please get in contact or volunteer at the AGM. The Committee has only twenty members and it is essential that we have that number or as near as possible.

Finally, may I wish you all a very Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and success in your gardening for 2019.

Annual General Meeting

A date for your new diaries, Friday 11th January at 7.45pm. Come along to the AGM at Gardeners Hall to find out what goes on in the Association. This is where our members have a chance to ask questions and raise any issues of concern. Your input is vital so please do attend. The bar will be open from 7pm.

Popular quiz night

The quiz night in November was a great success and raised an amazing £370 for Thames Hospice. Well done to everyone who took part and made it possible to give such a large donation. Many thanks to our quiz master, Dave Morris, who did a fantastic job and to Fran Hartridge who organised the whole thing, also to Graham Ashley and Denise Murray on the bar and to all the other helpers on the day. It was very popular event and we are planning to have more next year.

New Shed Managers



Alan Dommett
Maidenhead Road



Martin Pritchett
Fairground

Potatoes and seeds

Potato order forms are available from the trading sheds and on the website. We haven't requested as many seed potatoes this year, so if you want to be assured of your potato of choice, please place your order before they arrive in January.

Garlic, onions and shallots should also be in the trading sheds in January. There is no need to pre-order these.

Seeds are currently on offer at half price in the trading sheds while stocks last. New seeds will be available shortly.

Shed opening hours over Christmas

The trading sheds will be open on Thursday 20th December and will then be closed for just over two weeks, reopening on Sunday 6th January.

Talk for new (& newish) allotment holders

There will be a talk on Sunday 13th January at 10.15am in the Bar at Gardeners Hall. It will cover working effectively, useful tools and other tips for new and not-so-new gardeners. As usual, the bar will be open from 12pm, so why not stay for a pre-lunch drink and chat with other members.

The Rose Bar at Gardeners Hall is open every Sunday from 12pm to 2pm

Editorial Team changes

Many thanks to Phil and Lesley Upton for creating, writing for and editing "Diggers Digest". Sadly, they are not able to continue due to a busier than anticipated retirement. We wish them all the best for the future. Our thanks to Kay and David Eglise who have joined the editorial team.

All Change at Clewer Park

Tom McCreath was site supervisor at Clewer Park for 11 years but has recently moved away from Windsor. He leaves behind a thriving community of allotment holders. Tom also helped in the Trading Shed and was on the Management Committee. Our thanks to Tom for all his hard work for the Association.

New Site Supervisor

John Howton, Tom's successor, writes:

"I started at Clewer Park allotment more than ten years ago by sharing a plot with an old friend. He used to go away in the summer months and we went away for the winter which seemed to work well for a few years.



Eventually the allotment bug bit and my wife, Elizabeth, and I took on an overgrown plot adjacent to the shared one which had many established fruit trees on it - one of the main attractions. Being of a certain age I put in raised beds which are much easier to maintain. When we were away one winter our Spanish GP wrote us a prescription to keep us healthy. It said 'eat asparagus and globe artichokes' so that is what we specialise in.

A few years later another plot became available close by with newly installed raised beds. We couldn't resist the temptation. Part of the plot was an old dumping area and the remainder was overgrown but after about three years it has now been semi tamed and produces well. Surprisingly the soil is almost clay free.

Having been asked to take over the duties of site supervisor I hope I can contribute in the way that my predecessor Tom has done. He was excellent at the job and will be missed."

Best Allotment Winner

Alan Regale-Day talks about his allotment.



Q. Congratulations, how long have you had an allotment?

A. Thank you, we have had it for 3 years, this is our 4th. When we started I had just retired and wanted something to occupy my time. We began with one plot and then took on a second one at the beginning of 2018. We still feel like beginners with lots to learn.

Q. How much time does it take, and do you have anyone to help?

A. My wife, Chrissie, and I manage the plots between us. When we first started there was a lot of back breaking work to do clearing the plot but now we think we have it under control (except for the bindweed of course!!!). Now we probably average 10-12 hours a week over three days.

Q. What do you grow?

We have put 12 fruit trees in the new plot. Chrissie is the flower expert, so she likes to have flowers. We grow dahlias, chrysanthemums, tithonias (Mexican sunflowers) and roses. We were given a greenhouse and grow tomatoes and cucumbers, plus chillies and peppers in a cold frame. We have 3 varieties of potato, Pentland Javelin, Charlotte and Cara. Also, lots of soft fruit, raspberries, blackberries, black and redcurrants and, our favourites, gooseberries.

Q. What were your successes this year?

A. The sweetcorn plants were really good, and our rhubarb was excellent. Also, potatoes, tomatoes and beetroot. Our scarecrow seems to be a hit with our fellow allotmenters.

Q. Any disasters?

A. We bought plants rather than seeds this year and our parsnips were terrible. They look like something out of the Harry Potter films as they all had forked roots. I am told we should not replant parsnip plants so maybe that was the problem!! Will have to do better with cauliflowers.

Q. Do you have any tips for success?

A. Talk to other allotment holders for ideas and hints about what to do. Our allotment neighbours have been tremendous, thanks to you all for the help you have given us. We would recommend looking out for things you can recycle to use on the allotment. We were given a greenhouse and some raised beds. We brought an old shed from home and we have collected paving stones from various places. I feel a bit like Harold Steptoe from Steptoe and Sons!!!!

Q. What are your plans for next year?

We want to improve our parsnips and other root veg. We will probably try both early and late sweetcorn, so we don't get it all at once. We definitely want to grow beetroot. We haven't had much success with raspberries so need to try them again.



Allotments, a potted history

Have you ever wondered what on earth poles are? **David Eglise** explains, and describes how allotments developed.

The Allotments Act 1922 defines allotment gardens as '*an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent, which is mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables and fruit crops for consumption by the occupier or his family*'. Allotments are traditionally

measured in poles (perches or rods), a measurement dating back to Anglo-Saxon times. These days, the normal size of an allotment is 10 poles, equivalent to 300 square yards or 250 square metres, roughly the size of a doubles tennis court. It is considered enough land to grow food to feed a family of four, allowing for crop rotation, perennial plants and so on.

The origins of allotments in the UK

Allotments have been around for hundreds of years, but the system we know today started in the nineteenth century, when the “landless poor” were given land to grow food. This was desperately needed due to the rapid industrialisation of the country, and to the many thousands of families being evicted from their rented cottages and smallholdings when landowners cleared common land. There was no social welfare to turn to.

In 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act came into force. It required local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, to meet demand. Then after the First World War the Land Settlement Facilities Act 1919, aimed at assisting returning servicemen, made land available to all. The next most important change came when the Allotments Act of 1925 established statutory allotments that local authorities could not sell off or convert without Parliamentary consent.

Post-war Developments

The “Dig for Victory” campaign during the Second World War, and the privations of the post-war years, saw a rise in people taking up allotments to supplement rationing. At its height there were over 1.5 million allotment plots across the UK. The 1970s, with the three-day week and trade union unrest, caused a revived interest in “growing your own”.

Today, the desire for space to grow food locally for community reasons and for ‘taste

rather than quantity’ has brought about a steady demand for allotments. It is estimated that there are now approximately 330,000 allotment plots in the UK.

A challenging year on my allotment

Nabil Jafari writes: “It has certainly been an interesting season. The very dry summer meant spending a lot of time watering and less time for new projects. I usually have at least two new trials a year, but this wasn’t possible.

The courgettes did well, and the grapes were quite good, but I couldn’t develop the structure to support the fruits properly. It has been a great year for the chillies which felt so at home in the glasshouse. Maybe one day I’ll figure out the correct size pot for them. Sweet peppers have been good too, they share the cucumber polytunnel with my other seedlings. The sweetcorn (that Ginger sowed for me as he is an expert) was good again this year but watering was not easy as the heat was so intense in the polytunnel. I had to start very early in the morning. The outside sweetcorn, the melons and the main crop potatoes all suffered from lack of water. But the early potatoes were good. The fruit section struggled, there was probably half the normal plum crop. It is fantastic how nature looks after itself and drops fruit to protect the tree.

I guess we will all have to adjust to the warmer weather as the climate changes. As I plan for next year I will look at my seed stock and decide what to plant in the new season. I may find some seeds on my travels. It is so much fun learning about it all and the information you can get from other allotment holders is just marvellous. Plant swaps and seeds and the odd cup of coffee while we sort out the planet. Delighted to be part of the Association, we are so lucky.

WAHGA is the Windsor Allotments and Home Gardens Association Ltd

Visit the website for details: www.wahga.org.uk Winter 2018

This newsletter is written, compiled and designed by Caroline Jones, Kay Eglise and David Eglise.