

DIGGER'S DIGEST

Welcome to the 2016 Summer Newsletter – or **Digger's Digest** as further newsletters will now be known! Congratulations to Louise Fetigan, who wins a £10 voucher to spend in any of the Trading Sheds for her very apt name. We had a good response to our new Q&A section introduced in the Spring Newsletter, so this issue contains more of the same. Also in this issue, Frank Bush from Maidenhead Road shares his thoughts on his allotment. If you would like to contribute to further newsletters, send your comments to newsletter@wahga.org.uk Have a productive summer.

Caroline Jones
Editor

NEWS UPDATE

Fete countdown

It's just a few months until the WAHGA Fete on 3rd September, with outside performances planned from the Staines Lammas Band, the Lady Morris dancers and a local jazz band. There are no horticultural exhibits this year, so in the hall there will be Scottish dancing and Tai Kwando demonstrations plus stalls for the various groups that use the hall to tell us about what they do. We also hope to do some craft activities for children. If you are willing to help with this or have any ideas please contact Caroline Jones on 01753 861037 or by email on mail2cj1s@gmail.com Around the hall there will be lots of fun things for children too, including a bouncy castle, a coconut shy and 'splat the rat'. Stalls from local individuals and organisations will

feature honey, basket weaving, plants, fuchsias and The Thames Valley Hospice to name but a few. Plus of course a tombola, face painting, an art exhibition and the shed will be open for sales advice. It would not be an allotment show without excellent local produce from the allotments of our society, and we are asking allotment holders to grow an extra row of vegetables, and/or fruit to make this occasion a success. All profits from the Fete will be donated to Thames Valley Hospice, so you will be contributing to a very good cause.

If you want a break from all the activity you can relax with tea and cakes, ice cream or a nice cool beer and something from the barbecue while you watch the entertainment. Understandably, to make the Fete a success we do rely on the help of our members. There are lots of ways you can help. First, by donating produce, cakes, scones and tombola prizes for the relevant stalls. Second, by helping with setting up, dismantling or running a stall. If you are able to help with any of these in any way, please contact Kay Eglise on 01753 862742 or by email on keglise@aol.com

Thefts from allotments

Tools and equipment have been stolen from the sites on Maidenhead Road and Clewer Park, and in both cases fences were broken down to gain access. These incidents are happening more frequently and it is clear that determined thieves will get into the sites no matter what measures are taken to prevent them. The thieves are using bolt cutters and are targeting items of high value. Tenants who have had something stolen are asked to report their losses to the police individually as the police will only take action on this basis. Any equipment should be marked to help identify owners in case the items are recovered. Ideally, do not keep anything valuable in sheds on your allotments. Remember to take your gate keys with you when you visit your allotment so the gate can be locked when you enter and leave.

Trading Shed tips

Now that the warmer weather has arrived it's OK to sow beans and peas outside. We have a selection of runner beans, dwarf French beans and climbing French beans. You'll need canes to support your climbers, and there are canes of 3ft, 4ft, 5ft, 6ft and 8ft lengths in both sheds, and 10ft canes in the Fairground trading shed. Your brassicas (cabbages etc) are easy prey for pigeons unless you protect them. We have reasonably priced anti-bird netting in 2m, 4m, 6m and 8m widths. This netting is claimed to have a 10-year life and it's a great improvement on the green plastic netting.

Don't forget to feed your plants. Growmore is a general-purpose granular fertiliser suitable for raking into the soil before planting. We also

sell liquid feed for your tomatoes and osmocote tablets for your pot plants. Do visit the Trading Sheds and if we haven't got what you want please ask. Helpers are needed at the shed next to Gardeners Hall, St Leonard's Road, for one Sunday morning in four. If you are interested, contact John Spence at sheds@wahga.org.uk or speak to John or Don Hartridge at the shed.

Neighbour-friendly bonfires

Allotment holders are reminded that there is a complete ban on bonfires on allotments during the months of June, July and August. However, at other times of the year it is also important to think about what is being burnt, if the conditions are suitable and whether a bonfire is really necessary. Composting the material yourself or taking the material to the Council's recycling facility is a much better option, particularly for green materials.

Here are some guidelines:

- * **Only burn dry, woody material.**
- * **Shake off as much soil as possible.**
- * **Do not burn any materials that are green or wet.**
- * **Do not burn any polythene, plastic or rubber.**
- * **Avoid bonfires in wet or windy conditions.**
- * **In light winds check the wind direction is away from properties.**
- * **Douse the fire with water before you leave to make sure it is out.**
- * **Never just leave a bonfire unattended.**

ASK OUR EXPERTS

In this issue, Harold Mitchell and Graham Ashley give their opinions and advice on bean seed germination.

Q I had problems getting my French and runner bean seeds to germinate in April and May in an unheated greenhouse. Were the night temperatures too low?

A It was cold in early April and May, but that alone should not have been a problem. I do not know how you set your seeds and in what containers, but I find that individual 3-inch pots work best. Half fill the pots with compost pressed down firmly, then place a seed in the compost so that the concave part, which is where the growth starts, is downwards. This ensures that any water drains off. The compost needs to be damp, not soaking wet, otherwise the seed will rot. If there is no seed when you check the pot, set some mouse traps! Some people sow their seeds in trays, but I do not like doing this as you can end up with matted roots when transplanting. I do not have a date of when I sowed my runner beans, but like you they were in an unheated greenhouse (not all germinated but by sowing more than I needed I have enough).

Harold Mitchell

An alternative solution

We normally start ours on the windowsill, above the radiator, and then move them out to the greenhouse or conservatory when germinated.

Graham Ashley

MY PLOT



In this issue, Frank Bush, a member for over 20 years, shares his thoughts and advice.

Q How many years have you had your plot?

A I've had my allotment on the Maidenhead Road site for the past 20 years. I have a self-maintained half plot (6.4m).

Q Why did you get an allotment?

A Exercise – and the real taste of fresh fruit and veg! I've always been a 'sporty person', but keeping an allotment is just as tough as running a marathon.

Q How do you think allotments have changed over the years?

A One of the biggest changes is the popularity of raised beds. They appear on TV and in magazines, but they are not the definitive answer to your plot.

Q What do you think makes allotments so popular?

A Are they so popular? Just look at the plots that have gone to grass. The younger generation don't seem to have time to maintain a plot. I've seen plots taken over by new members who you see for two or three weeks and never again. The problem with this is that usually their three weeks' 'work' produces better results than mine!

Q What crops grow best – and worst – on your plot?

A Runner beans grow best. The worst are carrots and Brussels sprouts. I use a variety of runner bean called Prizewinner. They were a free packet of seeds and I have been using them for the past ten years, taking seeds each year from the crop.

Q So you save your own seed?

A Yes, from my runner beans and also my climbing French beans.

Q What are the major problems you find on your plot?

A First, vandalism! Second, weeds. Third water. There is no answer to the first or second. But the lack of a hosepipe water supply to those members who are not fortunate enough to be close to a water trough makes upkeep extremely difficult – especially for the older members, and the new ones. I understand that certain allotments in Maidenhead do not have any hosepipe restrictions and can use hosepipes subject to the usual fee. The Race Course Allotment supplies its own water via a borehole to the water table. I appreciate that, in the past, some members may have left soak hoses on all day in warm weather causing a high water-rate usage and the Council taking these measures, but there must be another solution.

Q What were your most successful crops last season?

A Runner beans! For potatoes try Sarpo - they are amazing. I have been growing this variety for three years. They originate from eastern Europe

and are blight resistant. My crops have been really good, and slugs and snails seem to hate them.

Q Do you use blood, fish & bone, chicken manure pellets, lime, nettle feed or comfrey feed?

A I use lime, chicken manure pellets and Growmore granular.

Q Do you grow fruit on your plot?

A I grow raspberries, strawberries and Tayberries – a hybrid variety that grows like crazy. It's a cross between a blackberry and a red raspberry.

Q Which crop have you been most pleased with?

A Sweetcorn - it's fairly easy to grow and brilliant cooked or raw.

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

A My uncle told me, 'Look after the edges and the middle will look after itself'. Don't get a plot that is too big to manage taking into account the amount of time you will need to maintain it. Using a rotavator is fine if you have a relatively weed-free patch. But if you want the best results, it's all down to hand digging to remove bindweed and couch grass. You'll never eliminate them, but hand digging and weed killer allow you to try to get 'to the root' of the problem. Rotavating just buries the problem.

WAHGA is the Windsor Allotments and Home Gardens Association Ltd
Visit the website for details: www.wahga.org.uk