

WAHGA NEWSLETTER WINTER 2012



EDITOR: DAVID HICKMAN



Welcome to the Winter Edition. It's been a very tough year weather-wise but now we've got the chance to curl up somewhere warm and hibernate! This edition contains some reflections on the year, a seasonal recipe, a feature on an unusual vegetable and the latest news from your Association. We also pay tribute to Jeff Ayres (pictured, second from right and see final page) who has left Windsor after many years of dedicated work for WAHGA. If you'd like to contribute to future editions or to give feedback please email davidhickman@waitrose.com

Keep up to date between newsletters by going to the website: www.wahga.org.uk

Highland Fling at the Hall

A group of around forty dancers assembled at Gardeners Hall one evening in late November for an excellent Scottish Country Dance. Anne Montminy was the "Caller", ensuring that everyone knew the moves and collisions were avoided! Everyone brought along a plate of food for the buffet; one member produced an extraordinary Allotment cake featuring decorations of vegetables and a slug - very topical! We are hoping to have another dance in February; contact Lesley (01753 831863 or membership@wahga.org.uk) if you are interested, or keep an eye open for posters and



details on the website (www.wahga.org.uk)

WAHGA Quiz team are champs again

Our congratulations go out to the WAHGA "Mamas and Papas" quiz team who won the Hospicecare quiz at Datchet during October. The WAHGA team consisted of David and Fenella Munt, Peter and Lesley Cheeseman, Don and Fran Hartridge and John and Lesley Spence.

In praise of Kohlrabi



For those of you who are bored with growing regular cabbages (and some other brassicas) I suggest you consider the Kohlrabi, a much under-rated vegetable. The German name translates as cabbage turnip. It's easy to grow compared to cabbage - for example it's not so prone to attack from cabbage whites and the caterpillars they leave and slugs don't seem to like it as much as some other vegetables. Another advantage is that Kohlrabi grows quickly (unlike most other brassicas) and is pretty dependable. Ours have flourished on our allotment this year unlike some of their neighbours! Also they don't take up much room compared with their bigger brothers like Brussels sprouts and purple sprouting broccoli. The edible part of the Kohlrabi is a swollen stem which is a bit like a turnip in shape. It tastes rather like broccoli stems but has the nickname "vegetable apple" because of its crisp texture. Colour-wise some varieties are purple (like the one pictured, above), white or others like the one I grew this year are green.

The other great thing about this vegetable is that you can eat it in three different forms. It's lovely eaten raw as part of a salad - a bit like coleslaw or maybe mixed with apples. It's also very nice roasted perhaps with some garlic. Finally it makes a really tasty soup especially if you like to add curry powder or other spices.

Grow your Kohlrabi from seed from March onwards - the temperature needs to be a minimum of 10°C for germination. As they grow quickly, consider doing successive sowings of a small number of seeds a few weeks apart to avoid the usual glut problems we all suffer from! The crop is ready to harvest when the bulb reaches the size of a tennis ball but watch out as they can grow much, much bigger if left. The record weight for a Kohlrabi was apparently 44kg (over 90lbs!) by a grower in Alaska - this must have been under glass. Like other brassicas, Kohlrabi like firm soil so for most of us in the Windsor area we benefit for once from having our heavy clay soil.

Do have a go and why not let me know how you get on next year.

David Hickman

If you have a suggestion for an unusual vegetable to feature in our next Edition please contact the Editor.

Allotment Secretary's Report

This year has been a difficult one for gardeners. The excessive amounts of rain during the early months made it difficult to prepare the ground and get crops planted. This situation demonstrates the benefit of preparing the ground in the autumn and winter months. Now is the time to dig and let nature do its work.

It has also been a challenging year for the Association on the lettings front. More new tenants have fallen by the wayside than I can recall previously. It is quite dispiriting for those volunteers who prepare plots for tenants, to see them revert back to a wild state through neglect. If a tenant intends to give up, it is most important that we are notified at the earliest opportunity so that the plot may be recovered with the least effort. Because of the difficulties encountered, the committee decided that new tenants will be on a probationary period when they take a plot so that their progress may be monitored.

All allotment holders are requested to remain diligent and vigilant. Close and lock gates where appropriate and politely challenge strangers on sites. In this way we can help to minimise problems on the allotments.

Don Hartridge

News from the Trading Sheds

Now is the time to be planning your purchases for the next growing season. That patch you've carefully dug over and weeded won't stay weed-free if neglected. If time is short, cover it with our black plastic sheeting to stop the weeds re-appearing. Protect your tender shrubs from the frost with our white fleece material, only 30p/metre. We have invested in display stands for the rolls of material we buy in bulk. New products on rolls include fruit cage netting from Tildenet in 2m to 8m widths, and permeable ground cover 1m wide, typically used for planting strawberries.

There is still time to place an order for seed potatoes. These will be delivered in February together with onion sets. Talking of onion sets, we stocked them for autumn planting this year and they sold like hot cakes. I will order more next year, also garlic for which we've received several requests. I see reports from the professional growers that they had a poor season, as did we, and there have been some crop failures which may result in some products not being available next year.

As many will have noticed, we stocked Dobies seeds at the Fairground Trading Shed this year. This will be expanded to Maidenhead Road next season. We will continue to package the large seeds (peas and beans) ourselves, but the rest will come from Dobies. Catalogues are available in the sheds (or on the Dobies web site), if you have any particular request let us know.

Trading Shed Opening Times: Over the winter period the Maidenhead Road trading shed will be opening later on Sunday mornings, from 9am rather than 8 am, until the potato orders arrive in mid-February.

Over the Christmas period, both trading sheds will be closed from 20th December to 3rd January inclusive, reopening on 6th January.

John Spence

An appreciation of Jeff Ayres

Jeff first came on the scene at the Fairground trading shed early in the 1970s. At a time when operations weren't too successful or efficient, he gradually took charge, opening three times a week, Saturday (since deliveries were made on Saturday morning then), Sunday and Thursday. He was always there to unload deliveries by hand, that being the only way then – no pallet truck in those days. At potato order time the potatoes arrived in 1cwt bags, were weighed up and bagged in the air raid shelter and collected from the door. Jeff was always a favourite with the old ladies who called in to see him and buy their ounces of this and that. In those days we sold cat and dog food, as well as garden implements and equipment.

Copies of Jeff's potted history of Windsor allotments are available in the trading sheds (donation to Thames Hospicecare appreciated). He helped build the original compound, being just the right height to put the nuts and washers in the roofing bolts!

He was soon co-opted on to the committee and was involved, with others, in the sale to the Council of part of Spital allotments which became the Royal Free School. Jeff also had connections with the Royal Free Singers through his wife who sang with the choir.

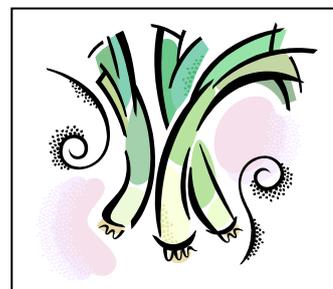
We would like to thank Jeff for his unstinting support of the association and wish him well in his new home on the south coast.

Ted Bailey

A Delicious Seasonal Dish: Leek and Potato Frittata

Ingredients:

15g Butter
450g Potatoes, sliced
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 Leek, sliced (onions could be used instead)
50g Fresh thyme, chopped
6 Eggs, beaten
100ml Milk
Salt and Pepper



Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C, gas 5. Line the base and sides of a 20cm round cake tin with greaseproof paper and brush with melted butter.
2. Boil the potatoes until tender, drain well.
3. Fry the leek and thyme in the oil until soft and just turning golden.
4. Put alternate layers of potatoes and leek in the prepared cake tin.
5. Beat eggs and milk together and pour over the vegetables.
6. Bake for 35-40 minutes until golden and firm.
7. Turn out, peel off greaseproof paper.
8. Serve either warm or cold.

Lesley Spence