



West Wickham Allotments Ltd

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter – March 2020

From our Chairman

Hello, my name is Tony; I was elected as Chairperson in December by the Board and Committee.

We had a very successful nibbles and drinks get together just before Christmas. Since then, a mild winter and a very wet spring makes me wonder - is it climate change or just the British weather?

Welcome to all our new plot holders. Keith and Liz have been very busy and have a great array of goods waiting for you in our shop.

A draft copy of our new lease has been received and, after checking, it has been sent back to the Council for the next stage in the procedure; once signed it's valid for twenty years.

If any of you want to come in for a chat I'm in the Trading Shed most Sundays.

Tony

Notes from the Trading Shed

Here we are, March already, daffodils appearing earlier than usual, sun shining today but it is only 3 degrees. February wetter than usual, definitely "Fill dyke". Things can only get warmer and better - we hope!

We have new seed packets for sale and we have reduced some which are left-over to clear.

Spring planting onion sets, both red and white, plus shallots and garlic are available now and have been selling well.



If you haven't pre-ordered seed potatoes, we do have a good selection for sale at only £1.20 per kilo. We range from first and second earlies to main crop. Our best-seller is Cara which seems to do well for everyone who tries it and it's delicious!

We had some broad bean seedlings on offer last Sunday - they flew out! Keep your eyes open for more plants as they become available. Currently, we have some bay bushes to sell.

We have produced some information, see below, about the various soil enhancers and fertilisers that we sell; we hope you find this useful.

If there is anything that you feel we could provide, please do speak to either Liz or to me.

Keith

SOIL ENHANCERS AND FERTILISERS plus chemical make-up NKP which is Nitrogen, Potassium and Phosphates

BONEMEAL – ORGANIC. A mixture of ground animal bones and slaughterhouse waste.
A slow release phosphate fertiliser

CHICKEN PELLETS – ORGANIC. A low nutrient fertiliser. No chemicals.

EPSOM SALT - Magnesium sulphate 10% magnesium
Use to correct magnesium deficiency in soil and as a foliar feed

FISH BLOOD AND BONE - Organic based, same nutrient balance as Growmore but a slower release

GROWMORE - Developed by HMG during WW2 NPK 7:7:7 Part of the "Dig for Victory" campaign used for tired soil or as a general fertiliser. INORGANIC

LIME – INORGANIC. Calcium Carbonate. Neutralises excess acidity in soil, provides calcium
This is not a substitute for fertiliser.

POTATO FERTILISER – INORGANIC. A high potash granular feed. NPK 6:10:10

Q4 - Organic based all purpose fertiliser NPK 5.3: 7.5: 10

ROSE FOOD - NPK 5: 5: 10 Contains trace elements to prevent leaf drop and discolouring. Useful all round fertiliser

SULPHATE OF AMMONIA – INORGANIC. NPK 21:0:0 Fast acting source of nitrogen and sulphur for vegetable crops

SULPHATE OF IRON INORGANIC. 20% Fe Mainly used for moss control

SULPHATE OF POTASH – INORGANIC. NPK 0:0:48 Provides both potassium and sulphur
Use for flowers, shrubs, vegetables, fruit trees; can be used as a liquid feed or raked into soil
Not for sale to under 18 year olds

SUPERPHOSPHATE – INORGANIC. NPK 0:17.5: 0 High phosphorus content. Promotes strong root growth and healthy crops

LAWN FERTILISERS

SPRING AND SUMMER LAWN FOOD - Promotes active growth NPK 12:6:6

25Kg treats approx. 700 sq m

AUTUMN LAWN FOOD - NPK 3:12:12 Provides Autumn nourishment to encourage early Spring growth.

25Kg treats approx. 400 square metres

FEED WEED AND MOSSKILLER - NPK 10:2.1:7 plus 8Fe Triple action lawn fertiliser, weed killer and moss killer

Topical Tips from Paul

A few tips for the next few weeks.....

Plants from WWAL

Once again, we shall be selling a wide range of plants at the Trading Hut throughout the season on a first come, first served basis. You will find some unusual varieties and some old favourites. Our plants will cost a fraction of the price of those sold by online retailers and garden centres.

Ian Netherstreet and I are already planning the schedule. Last year, plant sales made nearly £400 which was re-invested in our site and facilities - could we make it £500 this year! More news to follow.

Potatoes

Whether you got your potato tubers from the Trading Hut or elsewhere, don't be in a rush to get them into the ground. Some people like to 'chit' potatoes before planting - there are mixed views on the effectiveness of this process. There is agreement though, that planting too early does not advantage the grower, as tubers sown a fortnight later at higher temperature in a less waterlogged soil will (hopefully) catch up the earlier ones. Potatoes appreciate a soil containing well-rotted compost/manure and some high phosphorus fertiliser. Covering early potato plants with fleece will help protect them from frost damage until you decide to earth them up. It is tempting not to weed between rows but certain weeds (notably chickweed, fat hen, groundsel and mayweed) can be a store for nematodes which can cause discoloration of the tuber's flesh. You may want to keep a few tubers of salad potatoes back for sowing at the end of July - these will give you new potatoes for Christmas! Here's an interesting read on potato growing

<https://www.love2learnalotmenting.co.uk/how-to-grow-potatoes>

Onions

If you are a first-time onion seed grower, try starting your seeds off in a 12-15 cm deep tray almost full of damp, sprinkling them generously on top and then covering with 0.5cm more compost. When the seeds germinate, they won't look so good, flopping around and not upright. Don't worry, that's normal! When they are about 5cm tall move them to a greenhouse or cold frame and grow on until they start to straighten up (maybe 10-12 cm high). Then transplant to the growing positions, 10-12 cm apart in rows which are 25-30cm apart - this makes weeding easier. Follow the same method for banana shallots - Zebrune variety gives onion-sized bulbs which store superbly and which pack a punch. But note, if you don't cover the plants with insect mesh (available in the Trading Shed), the onion leaf miner may come and lay eggs at the base of the stems in April-May and October-November. When the maggots hatch out, they 'mine' through the leaves increasing the risk of disease, often ruining the entire crop.

Celery

Celery is an essential ingredient for soups, stews and pasta dishes. It's one of those items I always seem to forget when shopping. I've solved this by chopping the stems into 15cm lengths and freezing them. Celery is a pretty easy crop to grow; choose a self-blanching variety such as *Golden Self Blanching* or *Greensleeves* (note: I don't find the *Giant Red* crops that well). Sow indoors then prick out the tiny seedlings into grow-modules, 24 to a tray. Carry on the seeds indoors and don't worry if they look a bit feeble. After hardening-off, plant out in mid-May arranging the plants in a block and with a raised border of soil. Celery loves water so just fill up the 'moat' you have created with water every few days, add some plant food and you will succeed. We hope to sell celery plug-plants this year.



Peas

Last year my neighbour had the best crop of peas I have ever seen on our allotments. Forget about rows, these were grown in an enclosure about 1m by 1m, covered with insect mesh, thus forming a beneficial micro-climate. I didn't see any supports - the plants held themselves up. The variety was *Hurst Green Shaft*.

Digging time and Green Manure

The rain has eased up so now's the time for digging. The soil may be heavy, so little and often is sensible for those of us with dodgy joints. Once you have dug the soil, try not to compact it by walking on it but instead operate off floorboards or decking boards.

Did you try green manure? If so, it needs to be dug in just below the soil surface 3-4 weeks before you sow seeds as decaying green matter can inhibit germination.

Q. What job would you give to a serious Australian? A. *Gravedigger!* That's awful....

Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



Tips by Lawrence D. Hill (1963) written in the style of Thomas Tusseruu (1524-80)

If you have in your drawer since Candlemas day,
All the seed packets you daren't throw away,
Seed catalogue cometh as you it does end,
But look in ye draw before money you spend.

Throw out ye parsnip, tis no good next year,
And scorzonera if there's any there,
For these have a life that is gone with ye winde,
Unlike all ye seeds of the cabbagy kind.

Broccoli, cauliflower, sprouts, cabbage and kale,
Live long like a farmer who knoweth good ale,
Three years for certain, maybe five or four,
To sow in their seasons they stay in your drawer,

Kohl-Rabi last with them and so does Pak Choi,
the winter 'Cos lettuce" to sow in July,
But short is the life of the Turnips and Swedes,
Sow next year only, enough for your needs.

Mustard and Cress for when salads come round,
Sows for three seasons, so buy half a pound,
Radish last four years, both round ones and long,
Sow thinly and often they're never too strong.

Last year's left lettuce sows three summers more,
Beetroot and spinach-beet is easily four,
But ordinary spinach, both prickly and around,
hath one summer left before it wastes your ground.

Leeks sow three Aprils and one hath gone past,
And this is as long as ye carrot will last,
Onion seed keeps till four years hath flown by,
But sets are so easy and dodge onion fly.

Store marrows and cucumbers, best when they're cold,
Full seven summers' sewings a packet can hold,
Six hath ye celery that needs a frost to taste,
So has celeriac before it goes to waste.

Broad beans, French ones, runners sown in May,
Each have a sewing left before you throw them away,
And short peas, tall peas, fast ones and slow,
Parsley and salsify have one more spring to sow.

Then fill in your form your seedsmen doth send,
For novelties plenty, there's money to spend,
Good seed like good horses are worth the expense,
So you pay them your pounds as I paid my pence

So now you know

I am hoping to include in the Newsletters some Allotment memories from past and present plot holders. As many of you know, Marian Sanderson had two plots on our site for many years and was a great Chair of the Committee, also arranging Garden Visits for plot holders. She has moved to the coast and I am sure the following will raise a smile from many of us who enjoyed the visits. Ed.

I have always enjoyed visiting gardens, big or small and most gardeners are open to new ideas for plants, garden designs etc. Unfortunately, my husband does not share my enthusiasm so I always had to find a friend to accompany me on any garden visit. I mentioned this at the Allotment wondering why no one ever organised a coach trip to a garden. You can guess the reply – “What a good idea, why don’t you organise one”!!

That was the beginning of many lovely visits to a variety of gardens in the South of England; there was a very loyal band of allotmenters who came on every trip along with friends to help fill the coach if there were spare seats. In fact, they were the ones who first asked when the next trip was planned. Wherever possible I tried to plan two visits on each trip and ones that were of contrasting garden styles. We travelled almost to the South Coast at times and once up into Essex to visit the RHS garden at Hyde Hall and Beth Chatto’s wonderful garden – the latter being a great favourite.

Merriments in East Sussex was, I think, the first we visited – a small garden centre with a garden behind which serves as a showcase for the plants they sell. It was beautiful - full of colour and ideas. The Sussex Prairie Gardens were interesting and the owners took the trouble to open just for us in the morning to tell us about their inspiration for the garden and how everything had developed.

Our trip to Pashley Manor was timed to coincide with their Tulip Festival but unfortunately the Spring of 2013 had been cold and damp so many of the tulips were well behind flowering time. However, there were enough to make our visit worthwhile and the grounds, complete with beautiful sculptures, are always worth seeing. That day we continued to Sissinghurst where Non-National Trust had paid admission charges but on arrival we found that all entrance fees had been reduced in celebration of their anniversary. I tried to get a refund for some of our group but the staff were very reluctant to do so and only offered vouchers after my strongly worded letter of complaint!

Some of the trips were an adventure in themselves. Initially, we use a local Coach company but changed to another after a series of mishaps – a coach developed a fault which involved us having to return to their depot and another taking an age to get to our second garden of the day, much to our bewilderment as it was so close to the first one. The driver suddenly realised he was driving to the coast where he had a holiday home! We decided to change coach companies but I began to suspect we were still jinxed as on the next trip, when just a short while after leaving Hawes Lane, Keith told me that they were burning-up with heat at the back and something needed to be done! We opened all the roof vents and when I complained to the Company I was told I should have stipulated we needed a vehicle with air conditioning. This cost more but we decided it was definitely worth it for any future outings.

Although arranging trips each year took a great deal of time and organisation I enjoyed it very much; it meant I visited a number of gardens I would never have seen in the company of friends and garden lovers.