



# West Wickham Allotments Ltd

[www.wwallotments.org.uk](http://www.wwallotments.org.uk)

## Newsletter – September 2023

From our Chairperson

Tony is en vacances (again!)

We look forward to hearing from him in the December Newsletter.



### Notes from the Trading Shed

There are big changes for Viv and me going forward as the company that has supplied us with composts, canes, bug sprays and soil improvers for many years is closing down at the end of October due to a death in the family. We're so sorry to see them go as we've built up a wonderful relationship over the years and they've offered us amazing support and encouragement. We think we've found a new supplier and have met with their rep, but life for us isn't going to be as straightforward as it has been as we're having to use different companies to keep us supplied with different things. We are definitely going to find that prices will change but, hopefully, not too much.

We're getting our potatoes from the same Scottish company as usual, but this time they will come direct to us. This will mean a price increase for plot-holders as we're having to pay for delivery this time. We'll be offering 10 varieties again and ordering the same 357kgs as last year so there will be plenty for everyone but sales will be first come, first served - if we run out we won't be able to get more. The price will be £1.50 per kg, up from £1.30 this year, which still represents incredible value. We'll get the list up in the Trading Shed very soon as you can begin ordering on 10th September. Varieties as follows :

Maris Bard; Pentland Javelin; Vivaldi; Wilja; Charlotte; Nicola; Cara; Desiree; Picasso; and Golden Wonder

We've ordered Autumn planting red and white onions, garlic, Broad Bean and Pea seed and they should be with us in late September. Paul has also ordered some Phacelia seed and he'll be explaining its use in his report. You'll be able to buy a small bag of it which will pretty much cover your plot once you've dug your vegetables.

The Fothergill's catalogues for your personal seed orders will be available in the Shed from the beginning of October and orders will have to be back with us by the middle of November, so that we can get the maximum possible discount - we're hoping for 40% again this year.

Thanks to the delivery team who turn up regularly to off-load the lorry, to the ladies (and they are all women) who handle sales on Sundays, and thanks to all of you for using the Shed and keeping it going.

## Liz and Viv

### Topical Tips from Paul

Tomato blight You might soon see signs of blight on your tomatoes. You need to act rapidly and removed the offending foliage and fruit. In the past, have sprayed my plants with aspirin (see below) mixed with a little washing up liquid - this helps the spray adhere to the leaves and stems. Use 500mg aspirin per gallon of water. This year I have sprayed them with the copper supplement available from the shop. If you don't want to spray your plants remove almost all the foliage. Last year I took off many fully formed fruits and ripened them indoors - they tasted fine. It is suggested that you place them in a drawer with a banana as this emits the ethene gas they need to ripen fast. I just place mine in trays under a bed! But those with blight will not ripen so you may as well discard them.



Ref: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/trouble-in-the-vegetable-patch-break-out-the-aspirin-it-nips-pesky-blight-in-the-bud-9349916.html>

Potatoes I am just digging up a few potatoes but am planning to leave the main crop in the ground. I did this last year and was eating them through to late February. For me this worked better than digging them up and storing in the garage where, inevitably, they started sprouting in early January. Here's a video about lifting and storing your potatoes.

Ref: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3N9WNBnjhwE>

Green manure As the potatoes come out I am left with beds of soil - what to do? Plant with over-wintering crops, cover with plastic or horse manure (in due course). For me it's an opportunity to enrich the soil with nutrients and improve its structure using green manure. It is totally natural, it provides excellent ground cover and keeps down weeds. It's so easy to use and needs no attention. Once this year's crop is removed just rake the soil over and sow the seed broadcast at a rate of about 1 gram per square metre - it doesn't matter if you go over! A variety of green manures can be bought at garden centres. I use phacelia because it is not a brassica (can be club root problems) and it digs in so easily. If you sow in September it will grow to about 45cm by March when you can dig it in two weeks before you use the ground. Note that you must not let it set seed, a pity as the flowers are rather beautiful and attract bees! You will see a substantial improvement in the crop you harvest from that area next season. The cost of green manure at garden centres is a bit of a 'rip-off'. The good news is that Liz has ordered 5 kg of phacelia seeds which will be **sold at a price several times less than that in garden centres**. The seeds keep from one year to the next. Why not give it a try?

Ref: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/howtogrow/9200394/Sow-a-patch-and-replenish-your-plot.html>

Raspberries The sooner you remove the canes which produced fruit this year, the more the canes for next year will develop. I found that weeding around the stems and putting down some weed control fabric seemed to increase yields, perhaps by helping to retain moisture in the soil. For the first time I also made an effort to feed the plants through the season.

Salads It's far from too late to sow lettuce, salad leaves and rocket. These will grow well into the winter months if you provide some cloche cover. My over-wintering favourite is the lettuce variety 'Winter Density'. It is incredibly hardy and has an excellent taste. You might also consider trying Perpetual Spinach.

Onions and garlic If you plant onion sets over winter, consider covering them with enviromesh which is available from the Trading Hut. Not only will it keep out the allium leaf miner (around September/November and March/April), it also provides a microenvironment in which plants seem to grow faster. It will not be long before the Association's seed catalogues are available - if you have not had great success with onions maybe try Ailsa Craig - these grow to quite a size, store well enough and have a good flavour. The thing about onions is that we could just go and buy a kilo bag in the supermarket for maybe 80p. But invariably these will be a little soft and lack a bit of flavour. Home growing of onions is a challenge, main easier with onion sets, but can I suggest you try growing from sets and seeds, use the harvest from the sets first then harvest from the seeds. Rest assured you will notice the difference in flavour between shop and grown onions - in fact it will be eye-wateringly obvious! Here's some info about onion growing. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/onions/grow-your-own>

So many courgettes or are they marrows?? I love a slightly spicy butternut squash soup. But always feel as though I could make better use of that vegetable, for example roasted or in stews and curries. So, I replaced the butternut squash in my soup recipe with courgettes/marrows - it works brilliantly. The recipe is below. It will make 6 starter sized portions of soup, or can be used as a base for a tagine and it freezes very well.

**Paul's Moroccan Marrow Soup** (*Is there no end to this man's talents? - Ed*)

Peel and remove pips from the marrows to give 800g flesh and chop. Add this to a pot with a good glug of olive oil. Add all chopped: 400g carrots, 2 sticks celery, 4-6 cloves garlic (you could also add an onion.) Add 3 bay leaves & 2 heaped teaspoons cumin seeds. Cover the pot, simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 2 level tablespoons tomato puree, cook with no lid for about 10 minutes, stirring regularly - you want the tomatoes to catch slightly to give a fried tomato taste - the mixture will darken from red to light brown. Add 1 heaped teaspoon each: ground cumin, ground coriander and paprika plus 1 heaped tablespoon fresh basil (or a heaped teaspoon dried basil). Cook for five minutes adding a little water if necessary. Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon sugar, a 400g tin tomatoes (or your fresh tomatoes), 2 good handfuls red lentils, 2 vegetable stock cubes and just enough boiled water to cover the mixture. Put the lid on and simmer for 1 hour. Let the pot cool a little then use a hand-blender to give a thick, smooth consistency (don't worry about the odd lump and dilute with a little vegetable stock if you want a runnier soup). Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper. Use what you want and freeze the rest according to your desired portion size (it will about 6 starter size bowls). A great way to use up marrows and a healthy option too! Hope you enjoy it!

Happy plotting!

Paul



## From the Secretary's desk

What is a mixed up summer this has been. I weed my plot before I go away and then in my absence it rains and everything takes off! The weeds seem to realise that I'm away and grow twice as quickly as any plants. Is this the same with you?

Did anyone notice the filming taking part in plot D4? Mike Glover is making a short film about a 10-year-old boy who, when his grandad falls ill, believes that maintaining the allotment will bring him back to health. West Wickham Allotments Ltd will be in the credits.

Thank you to Highwood Tree Services for supplying us with beautiful wood chippings free of charge. This has gone very well except for the hiccup when somebody placed rubbish at the site and a plot holder and a committee member volunteered to clear it up.

Talking of new things, isn't the new gazebo amazing? Ian and Peter have put in hours and hours of hard labour so that we have a place to shelter from the sun or the rain and where we will be holding the tea party in aid of St Christopher's Hospice on Sunday 10th September.

Also a thank you to Lynn and Peter for the wonderful bacon/sausage butties that we've been able to purchase once a month for breakfast - they were delicious. In the autumn, we will be setting up a work party to tidy the sit, if you will be available to help please let the Allotments' secretary know. [wwalsecretary@gmail.com](mailto:wwalsecretary@gmail.com)

As it is September, do look out for Elephant Hawk moth caterpillars. They are very striking as they are very large, with noticeable eye markings. These caterpillars are usually seen when they are looking for somewhere to pupate, they overwinter as pupae in fragile cocoons at the base of plants, in loose debris or just below the surface of the ground. So if you have some leaf litter at the base of your plants, please leave it there over winter.



Viv

## Social News

You will have seen the gazebo and new social space gradually taking shape. It might seem a long time coming to completion but in the history of the allotments it's one of our quicker actions. It was at the start of the year that Lyn suggested that the Committee do more to bring different plot holders together, especially as we have had a lot of new joiners this year. So she started doing the Social Sundays with bacon butties and coffees - Social Sundays will take a break after the St Christopher's coffee morning and resume next Spring.

When the plot on the corner became free the Committee decided it would be good to have a space to bring people together and a gazebo would be a good idea. Ian set off looking at options, in fact Ian's skills at sourcing materials - often for free, is the main reason the whole concept was affordable. Delivery of the gazebo was fun with the lorry unable to get on site but a bit of brute force got it up the hill and assembly was a bit more painful than expected. But it was worth it and the area has been well used. At the time of writing the flooring is being worked on, the benches have been given a fresh lease of life, a paved area for BBQs is going down and the general plot will be tidied up making it a space to relax and get to know other plot holders and we are looking at events that can be run there later in the year.

We have had a lot of new plot holders this year, welcome all. It's great to see a number of younger members and families and it's especially rewarding to see children getting involved with the growing of food and flowers on the allotments. However, just a reminder that the site has a number of dangers - the pond, the roads, brambles and stinging nettles to name a few. As such, children should be supervised when off your plot and a reminder to car drivers **the speed limit on site is 5mph**. Also, while talking about safety, can we remind everyone to lock the gates when you enter or leave the site.

Peter