

HW&DAA NEWSLETTER

Editor: Heather Jenne hjenne@blueyonder.co.uk 0117 973 3451 Date: July 2008
Correspondence to : Registered Office, 2 Kennel Lodge Road, Bower Ashton, Bristol BS3 2JT

Summer 2008

Mike Stephens

(our past President) - a Tribute

Mike's sudden and unexpected death from cancer in December caught us all by surprise and there was insufficient time to pay due homage to him in the Christmas Newsletter. The following is an attempt to address this.

Mike spent all of his adult life in and around Bristol. For many years he was a stevedore on the Avonmouth docks where he learned to apply leverage to move impossibly heavy loads and to operate, repair and maintain machinery. Although he was not an engineer by training, his inquisitive nature and intelligent application made him someone to be consulted whenever an engineering or structural problem emerged. He was still in employment running a depot of a national company when he became ill late in 2007. His many hobbies included rowing (he rowed for Bristol), pub quizzes, Second World War tanks and guns and other weapons, and visiting First World War sites

in France and Belgium. Indeed, he was by way of being an authority on this last interest, spending many happy days with Kath visiting battle sites. He took on allotments on Bower Ashton and Alderman Moore - he loved experimenting with new varieties of produce and led the way in growing the unusual. He was co-opted onto the Association Committee and very soon found himself Secretary. Mike was always the first one to raise his hand and offer to help out at anything! Unfortunately, at that time the President/Chairman who had tried to run the operation as a one-man-band,

discovered that he was mortal and retired. The Association could easily have been wound up at that time had it not been for Mike stepping into the breach. Somehow he managed to let plots, send out the bills, collect the dues and run the Association stores, as well as tending his own allotments. And, as always, helping others to succeed. Oh; he was also holding down a full-time job! I have absolutely no doubt at all that had it not been for Mike's fantastic dedication to the Association, it would not exist today. The committee has approved the purchase of a seat to be placed alongside that of May Grimes beside the Old Brick store on Alderman Moore's, with a suitable plaque in recognition of the contribution Mike made for all of us. A quiet and unassuming man; he was a giant among allotmenters.

Bob Franks

Chairman's Comments

Contaminated Manure

It has been reported that gardens and allotments throughout the country have been suffering abnormal growth to plants grown on land treated with manure inadvertently contaminated with weedkiller residue. Typical symptoms include cupped leaves and fern-like growth on susceptible plants. The shoot tips become pale, narrow and distorted, with prominent veining on the foliage and general stunted growth, leaving most crops unusable. Pictures and advice on RHS website

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0708/Weedkiller-manure.asp>

Susceptible crops are mainly potatoes, tomatoes, beans, peas, but also some other vegetable and salad crops. Also delphiniums, phlox and roses.

The damage is caused by hormone-type weedkillers, approved for use on grassland to kill broad-leaved weeds, which work by causing such excessive growth that the plant exhausts itself. The active ingredient aminopyralid is the culprit and Dow AgroSciences' products - Banish, Forefront Halcyon, Pharaoh, Pro-Banish, Runway - are involved.

The chemical binds strongly to plant material which, when used in bedding or grazed by or fed to cattle and horses in feedstuffs such as silage or hay, can pass through the animals without breaking down. As the manure / straw / hay / silage decays, it is then released, and affects broad-leaved plants. Eventually the chemical is broken down by soil bacteria and should all be eliminated by the following year. Unfortunately, it doesn't break down in stacked manure as quickly and should be left for 2 years or more before use.

However, as these weedkillers are widely used in agriculture and can be grazed by livestock within seven days of application it is very unlikely that there is any risk to pets, children or the environment from contaminated manure.

The latest advice from the RHS (July 12th) is 'don't eat affected crops. To speed the breakdown of the weedkiller by the soil bacteria, dig or rotovate the contaminated ground several times between now and autumn. Dig affected plants into the soil rather than composting them, or bag them up and put out with household refuse. Next year it will be safe to grow edible crops on affected

soil and to harvest fruit.' They advise returning the manure to the supplier to spread on grassland. This is obviously impracticable for us but, if you decide to contact the vendor of the manure regarding the matter, remember that he/she may not have sprayed fields with the weed killer, but have bought in hay or silage or bedding from others who had.

Three members have reported problems arising from a batch of delivered cow manure from Charlie Bloyce, Long Ashton. 01275 392 260 - but it must be stressed that most of his batches have caused no trouble. Charlie has been informed and is trying to isolate the batch concerned. He hasn't used the chemical or products on grazing land (though he has used Forefront round the yard in the past). He does however buy in bedding and is contacting the supplier to find out more.

The Little Grange Riding School (delivered bagged) has given an assurance that they do not spray their fields, they create their own silage and use bark chips as bedding. They have plenty of manure. Tel 01934 832 558.

The other vendors of horse manure are collection only, so members should satisfy themselves at the time of collection as to whether the grazing, hay, silage or bedding could have been contaminated.

First Year Awards

The Association awards Stores Vouchers to members who are judged to have made exceptional progress with their plots in their first year. I have much pleasure in announcing the following recipients:-

KL2:- 7B, Roy Lucas. 20, Sally Hardy

KL1:- 44A, Sheran Beard

Bower Ashton: - 32A, Margaret Schindler

White City - 14, Jenny Wakenshaw

33, Brian Yaldron

Alderman Moores - 188A, Simon Flowers.

198, John Gregory. 224, John Smith

Well done everyone. Vouchers will be in the post very shortly.

Grant Applications - Update

The application for the B&Q grant for materials to provide for water collection from all sheds has not been successful this year. We will try again in 2009. A separate application for a grant of £51,480 from the Lottery Fund via "Local Food" for the enhancement of our water systems (mains, troughs and outlets) has reached the second stage for consideration. We are likely to know the outcome later this year.

Additional Land - Update

The extra land at Alderman Moores is scheduled for housing, but the Council seem in no hurry to develop it. It is 'difficult' for developers. When the plans are made public, we intend to seek a portion of the land to provide for allotments. The land between White City and the railway is currently being evaluated by soil tests. This autumn is the likely time of its disposal by British Rail, together with a larger area on the other side of our White City Site. We have persuaded BR to have the developers offer to the Council the piece we might want as allotments (we would then lease it from Bristol City Council). Meanwhile BR has erected new fencing around areas that abut our site, to stop trespassers from breaching our defences.

In Memoriam

It is with deep regret that I report the deaths of two dedicated gardeners:

Phil Smethurst (Alderman Moores) grew the most incredible vegetables in his poly tunnel and had an immaculate plot. He was a well-respected exhibitor at produce shows around the area and designed the winning display at the last Bristol Allotment Fair (part of the Flower Show) in 2006 (there being none held in 2007 and 2008). A most dedicated, kindly and helpful member, Phil was always willing to share ideas in his unassuming manner - "you might try this", "that might work". His North country twang will be sorely missed. Our condolences to Denise who may keep his plot going with some help from friends.

Richard Middleton, known as "Midi" (Alderman Moores) eventually succumbed after a brave battle against cancer. A dedicated gardener, Midi enthused friends and family and got them going into gardening. He had plans to keep bees, and took over and cleared a small plot for this purpose, with the exemplary thoroughness born of his naval training. Unfortunately the cancer treatment deferred this budding apiarist, and this oh so positive man was counting the days when he could revisit the project, when a sudden deterioration resulted in his death. His widow Joanne will be maintaining their other half plot in his memory.

Bob Franks

FREECYCLE - an ideal place to look for something you need for the allotment.

Freecycle is a network of people who offer and request a variety of goods for free. Typical offers may include furniture, tools, vehicle parts and manuals, plants and surplus fruit and vegetables, children's clothing, kitchen accessories, top soil, sand, pallets and bricks.

Personally, I've received a small greenhouse frame and gardening tools, numerous plastic plant pots, and a french antique bed - to name but a few. I've offered surplus strawberry plants, empty jam jars (very popular in season), ceramic tiles, an old bicycle etc. What I really like about freecycle is that I don't feel I have to hoard things that might come in useful one day because I'm now confident that I can collect such items readily from others when I actually do need them. I've freed up various corners of my house and feel less cluttered. The best bit is that those people collecting my surpluses are so delighted and I've received lots of appreciative emails.

To find out more you need to access the internet and choose which group to join. For those living in BS3, I recommend the Ashton/Bedminster/Southville group, which is very active. For further information see uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/freecycleashtonbedminstersouthville/

Dorothy Greaves White City

From your Editor

Website

Bob Corfield, our webmaster, posts new items frequently, including problems that have cropped up, eg contaminated manure. If you are on our email list, he will also alert you to any significant new posts. So it is worth checking out our website on a regular basis, say every 3 or 4 weeks, and also making sure Bob has your email address (link via the website). We currently have about 20% of the members' email addresses – send in some more!

Also, remember that you can post ads for selling things (allotment-related and non-allotment related) on the notice board.

No Backache Digging!

Our chairman reports that his sprung spade / fork / sod turner is absolutely brilliant – it reduces the physical effort so much, that he can dig twice as much as before and has no backache. Ask him for a demo! However, a new one comes at a price - £110 in stainless steel - but you can find them second-hand.

Stores News

We can hardly keep up with the demand for the good value multi-purpose compost – there is now a good stock in. Also a good selection of seeds – you can still sow late beetroot (eg Crimson King), swede, late carrots (eg Autumn King), dwarf French beans, runner beans, spinach beet, winter cabbage, kale and other brassicas, late lettuce, radish, and green manures. Don't forget HWDAA gift vouchers for your keen allotmenting friends!

AM New Store opens SATURDAY, SUNDAY and WEDNESDAY 10.30 - 12.00

Bower Ashton Store opens Sunday and Wednesday 10.30 – 12.00

Rats

Slight change in who to contact about rat problems. Bait boxes on Bower Ashton are now dealt with by Ron Pedley 922 1601 Alderman Moores - Brian Gorrigan 963 4811 KL1, KL2, White City, Meadows – Peter Sinclair 963 8366

It is important that you tell Brian, Pete or Ron the exact location where you saw the rat, so that the boxes are effectively placed.

Potato (and Tomato) Blight

Watch out for signs of late blight on potatoes (and tomatoes) – leaves with dark brown-black blotches, causing them to curl up and wither. Sometimes there's also a whitish bloom. The infection starts on the leaves then travels down to the tubers turning them into a slimy mass. See images on the website. It is

caused by a fungal infection and spreads rapidly in warm damp weather. You want to stop spores produced on the foliage from reaching the tubers, so pick off the infected leaves (if you've got it really early), or cut down the top growth – but whatever you do don't put the leaves and stems on the compost heap or leave them on the ground, as the spores will continue to infect the soil. **TAKE THEM OFF SITE AND BIN THEM.** It affects outdoor tomatoes more than indoor ones and seems to spread very quickly. Act fast to remove infected plants completely.

There is also another, less serious, form called 'early potato blight' in which the potato leaves have yellow and brown blotches more toward the middle of the leaf rather than the edge. To limit its effect, pick off the leaves and take off site.

Courses

RHS level 2 Certificate in Horticulture – excellent broad theoretical course with some hands on work – can be taken at 3 places starting Sept 08:

* Filton College (based at Bristol Zoo Education Centre, Clifton) 08452013749

* City of Bristol College (Ashley Down Centre) tel: 3125584

* Bristol University Botanic Gardens (waiting list) tel: 3314906

Organic Growing for Allotments: City of Bristol College (Ashley Down centre) – Wed evenings + Sat mornings starting Jan 2009 – discounts for allotment holders.

Filton College and City of Bristol College also offer other horticultural courses.

SEASONAL RECIPE

Courgette Soup (thanks Tony and Mavis)

450 gms Courgettes

450 ml Veg stock or stock cube

225 gms Full fat soft cheese (a 200 gm Sainsburys pack (not flavoured) will do).

1 teaspoon of mild curry powder

1. Wash, top and tail courgettes, chop them into small chunks, then boil them in the stock for 6 min.

2. Blend the mixture with a high speed blender until a fine liquid, stir in the pack of soft cheese, add the curry powder, serve immediately.

Wonderful !

Seed Saving Special – Part 1

(adapted from Real Seed Catalogue instruction leaflet) for more information at www.realseeds.co.uk

Seedsaving is easy. People have done it for thousands of years and, only in the last century, has it been taken over by professionals. Hopefully, this introduction will help you to gather good quality pure seed, that will grow true to type for year after year. You select your best plants, so you can harvest better and better seed; ideal for your own conditions, with better germination, and growing stronger, healthier plants.

A few general points:

1. Only use strong healthy plants for seed - any that are less healthy looking or not true to

type for the variety should not be used for seed production.

2. Most people want to save seed that is true to type because then you know what you are getting next year, but this may not bother you. Depending on how the flowers are pollinated (self-pollinating, by wind, by insects), you will get seeds more, or less, true to type.

3. Don't save seed from plants grown from seeds marked 'F1 hybrid' – it will produce very variable plants, not necessarily with the characteristics of the original plant you grew.

4. Very obvious – but always label the seeds with the variety and date as soon as you bring them off the plot.

Broad Beans

As pollen is transferred by insects working the flowers, broad beans will cross with other varieties that are growing nearby on the allotment site and will not stay pure.

However, the plants will also self pollinate so, if you can exclude insects at flowering time, (say by a covering of fleece), you can keep your variety pure. The simplest method of all, if you are growing a relatively large number of beans and you are not concerned about achieving 100% purity (eg just for your own use), is to mark and save seed from several plants in the middle of a block of beans.

Insects are relatively unlikely to come from a neighbouring patch straight to the middle of your patch, tending to work the seed from the outside flowers first. So by the time they reach your seed beans, the amount of 'foreign' pollen remaining should be small.

Let your seed beans mature and dry on the bush. The pods will turn dark brown, dry and wrinkled. Then pick and shell them out. Check that they are really dry by biting on them. If your teeth leave a dent, dry them further in a warm (not hot) place with a good flow of air.

Broad bean seeds should keep for several years, so there is no need to grow plants for seed every year.

French and runner beans

It is important to grow some bean plants specifically for seed, rather than simply collecting the left-over pods at the end of the season. French beans are self-pollinating, mostly before the flowers open. Despite this, they can be crossed by insects with other varieties nearby. The extent of crossing varies by area. If you are just saving seed for your own use, grow your seed crop of French beans at least 6 feet away from any other variety (12 feet if possible) and you are unlikely to have a significant problem with crossing. Runner bean flowers need to be 'tripped' by wind or insects before the beans set, and are much more likely to cross with other varieties grown nearby than French beans. Your only answer might be to persuade your neighbours to grow the same type of runner. To collect the seeds, allow the pods to mature fully on the plant until they start to yellow and dry out. In wet weather collect the pods individually as they get to this stage, then spread them out somewhere out of the rain, with a good airflow, until the pods are fully dry and brittle. Once they are dry, shell out the beans and dry further out of the pods. The beans should be dry enough that they break when you bite on them, rather than leaving a dent. Store in an airtight container. If they are well dried and stored in a cool dark place, the beans will last around 3 years.

If you have problems with weevils eating your seeds, put the sealed container in the freezer for a week immediately after drying the beans; this will kill any insect eggs before they hatch. When you take them out, let the container come up to room temperature before opening it, otherwise the beans will absorb moisture from the air.

Peas

Peas are almost entirely self pollinating, only very occasionally crossing with other plants. Set aside a section of row that is entirely for seed production, and make sure you sow at a time that will avoid pea moth caterpillars (sow early or late, i.e. avoid sowing in March/April, in order to avoid the egg-laying infestation on flowers and pods in June/July which gives you caterpillars in July/August). Check the section from time to time as the peas grow, and pull up any plants that are weak or not true to type. Let the peas mature until the pods are brown and the seeds start to rattle. If the weather is very bad, pull up the whole plants and bring inside (eg hang upside down from the shed roof) once the pods start to wither, to ripen and dry further. Once the pods are really dry, shell the peas out. Dry the shelled peas further in a warm (but not hot) place.

Tomatoes

Most modern varieties of tomato are self-pollinating and will not cross because the stigma (the receptive surface for receiving pollen) is short and located within a fused cone of anthers (which make the pollen), so insects cannot get at it. The varieties with an exposed stigma include potato leaved tomatoes and currant tomatoes. The double flowers which are sometimes formed first by many beefsteak tomatoes also often have exposed stigmas, but later single flowers will be normal.

To collect the seed, allow your tomatoes to ripen fully. Collect a few, slice them in half across the middle of the fruit, and squeeze the seeds and juice into a jar. You then need to ferment this mixture for a few days – this removes the jelly-like coating on each seed, and also kills off many diseases that can be carried on the seeds. To do this put the jar of seeds and juice in a reasonably warm place for 3 days, stirring the mixture twice a day. It should develop a coating of mould, and start

to smell really nasty! After 3 days, add plenty of water to the jar, and stir well. The good seeds should sink to the bottom of the jar. Gently pour off the top layer of mould and any seeds that float. Then empty the good seeds into a sieve and wash them thoroughly under running water. Shake off as much water as possible, and tip the sieve out onto a china or glass plate (the seeds tend to stick to anything else). Dry somewhere warm but not too hot, and out of direct sunlight. Once they are completely dry, rub them off the plate and store in a cool dry place, where they should keep well for at least 4 years.

Lettuce

Lettuce flowers are self-pollinating, and very rarely cross. If you plan to save seed from more than one variety, separate them by around 12 foot, or plant a tall crop in between. Select 2 or 3 good lettuces from your row, and mark them for seed. It is very important not to save seed from any plants that bolt early, as you want to select for lettuces that stand well. Heading lettuces may need a little help for the flowering stalk to emerge – slitting the heads partially open with a knife works well.

Once the lettuces have flowered, the seeds will ripen gradually, starting in about a fortnight. Harvest seed daily to get the maximum yield, shaking into a bag. Or wait until a reasonable number of seeds are ready and then cut the whole plant. Put it head first into a bucket, shaking and rubbing to remove the seeds. If you leave the whole cut plant upside down in the bucket somewhere dry, slightly immature seeds will continue to ripen over the next few days. Most of what you have collected in the bucket will be white 'feathers' and chaff. To sort the seed, shake it gently in a kitchen sieve. Some seeds will fall through the sieve with the rest collecting in the bottom. The feathers and chaff will rise to the top, and you can pick them off. There's no

need to get the seed completely clean – a little chaff stored and planted along with the seeds won't cause any harm. If the seed feels a little damp, dry it further on a plate. Lettuce seed should keep for around 3 years provided it's kept cool and dry.

Pumpkin, courgette, marrow, squash

Beware – these cucurbits will all cross readily with each other. The only way to save pure seed on an allotment is to hand pollinate one or more fruits. This is very easy and will avoid disappointments with lumpen squash / courgette crosses. (incidentally this is why fruits grown from shop pumpkins are often totally unlike the one you bought). The following explanation states pumpkin, but applies equally to courgettes, marrows and squashes.

Pumpkin plants have 2 different types of flower, male and female. The female flowers are the ones that will grow into pumpkins. They can be identified by the small immature fruit, which should be obvious beneath the flower. Male flowers just have a straight stem. You need to transfer pollen from a male flower onto a female flower, making sure that no pollen gets introduced from plants of a different variety. One evening, when the plants are just beginning to produce flowers, find some male and female flowers that are going to open the next day. Buds that are just ready to open are much fatter than the others, and they have turned from green to yellow. You need to stop these flowers opening so that insects can't get into them. The easiest way to do this is to gently slip a thin rubber band over the end of the petals, to hold them shut.

The next morning go back to the plants. Pick a male flower, take off its rubber band and tear off the petals. Gently take the rubber band off your female flowers. Using the male flower like a brush, rub the pollen on to each section

of the stigma in the centre of the female flower. Then carefully replace the rubber band round the female flower so that no insects can get in with more 'foreign' pollen. Tie a piece of wool loosely around the stem of the female flower so that, at harvest time, you know which pumpkins you have hand pollinated. Now leave the pumpkins to develop and ripen. After you have harvested them, keep them in a cool dry place for another month or so, to ripen further indoors. Then cut the pumpkin in half, and scoop out the seeds, leaving the rest of the fruit for cooking as normal. Wash the seed in a colander rubbing it between your hands to get rid of the fibres, and then shake off as much water as possible. Spread the seed out on a plate to dry. It needs to dry as quickly as possible, but without getting too hot, (for example not on a sunny windowsill). To test whether the seeds are dry enough, try bending one in half. If it is dry, it will snap rather than bending. **Next time: roots and brassicas ...**