

HW&DAA NEWSLETTER

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

HWDAAs web site: www.hwdaa.co.uk

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Annual Plot Rents

As you are aware from the previous Newsletter and the AGM, the Committee has reserved the right to increase the plot rents slightly for the year 2008/2009 in order to meet increasing costs.

However I need to alert you to the likelihood that, for the year 2009/2010 and beyond, our costs are likely to rise significantly. At the moment, Bristol City Council currently allocate us £7,000 pa (deriving from previous sales of allotment land) by paying for work on infrastructure such as fencing, hauling ways, car parks, water systems, etc, but this is likely to cease on or after 2010, when all the money the Council received in the past will have been spent. We will need to provide replacement income for these types of capital works. Based on our current membership, if we were to continue to allow for a figure of about £7000 pa for infrastructure works, this could mean rents rising to something of the order of £30, £50 and £70 for small, medium and large plots (though the normal discounts would apply to those on limited incomes).

However, there are two factors at work here. First, on the negative side, we will have to budget for paying VAT on all works (at the moment the Council's spending on our behalf does not attract VAT) in addition to materials and labour - which of course will have increased in 2 or 3 years' time. Secondly, on the positive side, we are applying for grants to help with the repair and maintenance costs on fencing, water systems and hauling ways.

We understand that the Council is also considering the need to radically increase their rents in the light of funds from capital receipts drying up. Unlike us, they are not able to bid for grant money.

One particular source of concern is the water systems, which are both inadequate for our needs and are reaching the end of their life-expectancy. The experts tell us that they will probably have to be replaced within the next five years; so we

would be wise to budget for that starting now.

Please read the rest of the information below and contact Angie Tonge, Bob Corfield or myself with your comments.

Grants

We are currently pursuing two grant applications and hope to get decisions on them by the autumn. One is to provide water butts and associated guttering so that all our sheds can collect rainwater, thus reducing water bills and carrying. Another is to provide new and enlarged water mains, more taps and water troughs; improved hauling ways; recovery of derelict land for more plots (should we be able to obtain the land, see below).

Additional Plots

Due to all available plots being currently let and a burgeoning waiting list, we are negotiating to obtain additional land for allotments at White City and Alderman Moores.

The possible White City land is owned by British Rail, who have given first refusal to Sustrans. We are investigating whether British Rail would consider making it over to Bristol City Council instead, so that we could lease the land from the Council.

Alderman Moores has some derelict land adjacent (previously allotments but reclaimed by the Council some years ago and scheduled for housing) and we have written asking for some of it to be returned to us for allotments because there are problems with developing it due to mine shafts. Some Councillors are supporting our request, but it would seriously help our case if as many people as possible were to write to the Council and demand that the land be retained for allotments. So much of our green space is being lost forever. And the demand for growing food small scale and locally will intensify as imported and mass-produced stuff becomes costlier as oil prices rise. But then where do you grow it? In window boxes? So please add your support.

Hedges

Regrettably, there have recently been cases of tenants cutting down hedges on the perimeter of sites. Whilst it is necessary to cut them back to reduce their impact on growing areas, if you remove them, the sites will be exposed to vandals (necessitating expensive and otherwise unnecessary fencing) and reduce the beauty and wildlife habitats on the sites. **Please be careful. Sensible pruning is the key.** As an alternative to costly fencing, we are experimenting with growing Pyracantha hedges, which will hopefully be decorative, attract wildlife and form a deterrent barrier - but they take a while to become effective.

Bonfires

Do be careful that bonfires do not cause offensive smoke both to other ploholders and neighbouring public (especially after the recent rains which will have dampened material). There is no surer way to alienate neighbours and find yourself in court. Better to compost!

DOGS

Dogs must be led on leads, and restricted to the Tenant's plot. Other tenants do not appreciate dog poo on their paths, so please scoop it up, as on the street.

Site Inspections

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the cycle of site inspections started at the end of March. Inspecting teams were looking for clear signs that plots were under cultivation and that preparations were being made for seeding and planting in the Spring. They also looked for sheds needing attention and trees near walls.

Walls and Trees

Repairs are still under way on the dividing wall between Kennel Lodges 1 and 2; this costly work is mainly because of roots from nearby trees undermining the wall.

Hopefully all Members adjacent to all walls have been mailed regarding the need to **remove** all trees that are within 4 feet of the wall. If trees cannot be dug out, they should be felled and the roots treated to prevent re-growth. We sell Root Out in the New Store. Assistance, if necessary, is available through your Site Rep. Espaliers or other trained fruit trees are probably alright if grown on supports away from the wall (ie the supports are not directly attached to the wall and just use the wall for heat retention and reflection), but discuss this with your site rep if you are in any doubt.

Note that only fruit trees on dwarf rooting stock are permitted on allotments. Steps are being taken with regard to offending trees on the other side of our walls.

Bob Franks

Bits and bobs from the AGM

This was the first year the AGM has been held in the New Store on Alderman Moores. It was packed and cosy!

Toilets are to be built in part of the old brick store next to the New Store. This will then enable the Association to run talks and courses for HwDAA members at the store.

Membership has increased 5.5% over last year, due to the continued strategy of only letting half plots to new unproven tenants. The waiting list exceeds 50. Most applicants want a plot on Meadows, KL1 + KL2, for which there is a wait of about 18 months. The Plots Secretary asks searching questions before putting people on the waiting list, to try to ensure that we only let plots to people who are committed, so we don't have 'failed' lettings. It is important for neighbours to make new members welcome and, if appropriate, provide some mentoring.

Phil Cass has been appointed maintenance manager for all the sites (ie the bits not let to members), including gate locks and sheds where damaged beyond the tenant's capacity to repair. (Be careful to make the doors secure so that the wind does not blow it off / blow out the roof!) Discuss all gate lock / shed maintenance matters with your site rep in the first instance.

The quarterly newsletter is going to be sent out by post/email, rather than put in sheds, to ensure it reaches everyone speedily. **We would like to send as many as possible by email to keep down costs, so please tell Bob Corfield your email address if you haven't already. (link from website)** And do look at the frequently changing items on the website, including volunteers wanted for TV programme!

Dave Brice, was elected as our new President. A new committee was also elected – info on website.

The Harry Green Shield for the best HDAA plot (independently judged by the City Council) was awarded to Nigel Perkins (AM) for the second year running. Nigel very kindly presented the prize money to the Association.

The mystery of White City allotments... continued! You may recall an article in the Dec 2006 Newsletter asking if anyone knew how the White City allotments got their name.

The story that the name derived from the huts in the nearby prisoner of war camp, which were painted with whitewash to cheer up the Italians housed there, seems to be a bit fanciful - as I have been told by two people who were born locally and know the area well that the camp was situated further away – on the other side of the railway crossing off Winterstoke Road.

I have since discovered that a prominent exhibition took place in south Bristol in 1914. It was held on what was, until recently, the site of the Mega Bowl complex and was housed in large, white canvas marquees. A photograph in the Reece Winston collection shows part of the exhibition referred to as 'the White City'. The allotments are only a short distance away – on the other side of the onetime railway marshalling yard - and so maybe the name was transferred.

Any further information is very welcome.
John Holland Plot 53 WC
Email: holland.john@hotmail.co.uk

Letter to the Editor

I began gardening on Alderman Moore's in 2002 when over half the plots stood idle and overgrown and a huge part of the site was a wilderness as impenetrable as Sleeping Beauty's forest. What a treat it is now to go around admiring the combined industry of a fully rented out site even though, inevitably, there are the occasional absentee plot holders. The change has mirrored a movement across the country of people wanting to eschew huge supermarket commercialism in favour of returning to a simpler way of life, where you not only know where the food you eat comes from but, even better, you grow it yourself.

Alderman Moore's has come a long way in the last few years to create a sense of community. The new stores has provided a central meeting place as well as somewhere to buy a terrific range of gardening equipment, materials and a good library of books. It is a positive pleasure to read up on cultivation matters in the company of more experienced gardeners as they sit over a cup of coffee. This is in stark contrast to the dark ages of 2002, when we entered a dim dank hole after queuing outside (usually in the pouring rain) to purchase some seed potatoes.

Another change, in the last few years since Alderman Moore's really began to come alive, has been the number of children who come onto the site, marching up the hauling ways with their gardening tools, willing participants in the quest to cultivate. An allotment is an ideal place for city children to play, to ride their bikes and enjoy the freedom that their country counterparts know better. Some parents have put up swings and slides on plots, knowing that if they want to encourage their children to take a real interest in gardening, they need to balance this out with some fun and play. Too many children (I was one) were initially put off gardening because it was too coercive and lacked the element of freedom and fun. We are lucky that Alderman Moore's combines both a fabulous green environment and a community of people brought together through a common interest in gardening. A perfect place for children and budding gardeners to be.

I would like to say thank you to the HwDAA committee who have given up enormous time and effort to provide this new injection of life. Let us join with you to make this a place where all can enjoy the conviviality of being part of a community, where children can romp and play while they learn about gardening, where valued volunteers give up their time to run the communal focal point of stores and café, where older people encourage novices, where the site is used creatively and imaginatively by individuals who want to garden in their own way, and, above all, a place where we encourage the next generation.

Briony Waite

Editors's comment Many thanks for your appreciation, Briony, so lyrically expressed. The allotments are worked by a diverse group of people who all primarily want to grow veg and fruit but who all have different secondary reasons for being down there. While some seek a community of like-minded folk, others seek peace and quiet and solitude; for everyone who finds growing in straight lines across their plot aesthetically pleasing, there will be someone who prefers to arrange things in a less traditional way. So, managing the allotments is a balancing act and the committee (after much discussion at its last meeting) reached the conclusion that permanent play items such as slides and swings should not be put up on plots - though of course it is fine to have a small sitting area, where children can play when not helping parents or cultivating their own bit. Much as we do not want to dictate what happens

on plots other than making sure they are well maintained and appropriate things are being grown, the bottom line is that an allotment is a temporary garden for growing veg and fruit, (not for the myriad other things you do in a garden)

Also, the committee have had to consider health and safety issues, and think there are too many potential dangers if children are allowed to play or ride bikes around the sites unsupervised (especially Alderman Moores) because of cars manoeuvring on hauling ways and blind bends.

We want to encourage children - let them have a bit of the plot to grow their own produce, and be down with adults so that they can imbibe the atmosphere and have gardening role models – but with regard to ‘freedom and fun’, there has to be respect for other allotment users. It goes without saying that all parents will drum into their children the number one rule that they must not under any circumstances go on to any other plot. So it can’t include freedom to go anywhere except on their own plot and paths and the haulingways. Fun must follow on from the attitude that children and parents bring to the allotment, not the distractions that are available, always being realistic about the amount of time that a child will enjoy down at the site. I believe some families arrange to go down together and when the children have run out of gardening steam, one person supervises while the others garden - a brilliant solution to getting time to do something without worrying about whether the children are safe and nicely occupied.

Now the growing season is under way, it is a good time to get children started with their own area of veg. There was a series of 3 lovely articles in the Saturday Telegraph garden pages (23 Feb, 1 + 8 March) on ‘Molly’s garden’ – the planning of a 12 year old’s veg plot, seed sowing, and soil preparation - with a summer series to coming on harvesting and recipes. (google Telegraph Gardening Molly’s Patch). Actually, never mind it being for children – it’s a brilliant guide for adults as well!

From your Editor Stores News

There is still a large selection of seeds in both stores at amazingly cheap prices. There are plenty of onion and shallot sets. Potatoes are running out fast. In June we plan to get in some special cold stored potatoes for planting in summer and harvesting at Christmas. Thinking about sheds

and site inspections, remember the stores stock cans of timber treatment, roofing felt and nails.

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

Bower Ashton Store opens Sunday 10.30 – 12.00 and Wednesdays 13.00-14.00.

Course

Organic gardening (‘maximise your success with vegetables and flowers’) run by WEA at Windmill Hill City Farm, Wednesdays 12.45 – 2.45, starts 30th April 2008 for 10 meetings, phone Windmill Hill City Farm 963 3252

Recommended bean varieties from 2007

Climbing bean: Barlotta Lingua di Fuoco produces lovely coloured pods and marbled beans, which can be eaten when very young, but are best left to mature and use the dried beans in stews, soups etc – winter soul food!

Runner bean: White Lady Pretty white flowers, tasty beans, long pods, stringless if picked before pronounced bean bumps show.

Allotment TV star (well, extra!)

On 12th April, you can catch one of our members, Audrey Stazaker of White City, in the episode of Casualty.

SEASONAL RECIPE a quick vegetarian pasta dish featuring spring vegetables, from Good Housekeeping’s Vegetarian Cookery ...

Pasta with grilled asparagus + broad beans

- 225g (8 oz) shelled broad beans
- 350g (12 oz) dried pasta
- 450g (1 lb) asparagus, trimmed
- 2 tbsp olive oil + oil for basting
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- grated/shredded zest + juice of 1 lemon
- 3 tbsp chopped fresh mint
- 4 tbsp single cream
- 4 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese

1. Blanch the broad beans for 2 mins, drain.
2. Cook pasta for 10 mins until al dente
3. Halve asparagus spears. Brush with a little oil and grill for 3 – 4 mins on each side, until charred and tender.
4. Heat 2 tbsp oil in a pan, add the garlic and lemon zest and fry gently for 3 mins. Add the beans, mint and cream; heat gently.
5. Drain the cooked pasta and return to pan. Add the sauce, cheese and lemon juice, toss lightly to mix, season and serve at once.

Green Manures Special

What is it? The slightly misleading name for various fast-growing plants which we use between crops (a) to avoid leaving soil bare (b) to suppress plants we don't want (weeds) and (c) to dig into the ground before planting 'proper' crops, in order to help soil structure and (in some cases) add nutrients.

Why? The bare earth between removing one crop and before planting is not great for the gardener or the soil. Weeds will grow or, if you keep the ground clean by hoeing scrupulously, rain will wash some nutrients down to lower levels and (especially in summer) can smash the top particles apart leaving a dried crusty top that water runs off in heavy rains. Of course you can avoid weeds and protect the soil structure by covering with black plastic, but green manure is an alternative to consider - and feels, well, a little more 'green'.

Are there any other alternatives? If you have sufficient quantity, other alternatives are to cover the surface of the soil with organic matter eg well-rotted manure, compost or leaf mould. It needs to be at least 5 cm thick to suppress weeds, and may contain active weed seeds if it was not decomposed at a high temperature. The nutrient content varies - cow manure (fairly high) to leaf mould (virtually none) - but of course, depending on the next crop, your soil will need different levels of nutrients.

Green 'Manure'? Only some varieties of green manure add significant nutrients to the soil when they are dug in. These are deep-rooted plants which bring up nutrients from deep in the soil which are otherwise not reached by crops, and the clover / bean family plants which develop nitrogen nodules on their roots. (nitrogen is an essential plant nutrient and is reckoned to be washed away by winter rains)

Aren't annual weeds green manures in a way?

All organic matter added to the soil improves

it when it decomposes and maintains the soil ecosystem so, in this sense, weeds dug into the soil act a green manure. The big difference is that weeds seed very freely at irregular intervals, so you can't leave them to grow between planting crops as some will be bound to flower and seed and their seeds will come up year after year ('one year's seed: 7 years weed') - whereas you know the green manure plants will all grow at the same rate and you dig them in BEFORE they seed. 'Cunning plan!' (Baldrick)

What types? The grid lists the different plants that can be used as green manures to cover the soil over winter. (There are some half hardy annuals for infill over summer months - bitter lupins, mustard, fenugreek, buckwheat - but of course you can grow crops for this!) Some add nutrients, some just provide ground cover; some cover the ground well, others are a bit sparse, some have the bonus of pretty flowers (but don't let them go to seed).

How does it fit into crop rotation? Garden Organic recommends using green manures of the same family as the crop it follows on from, so as not to compromise the crop rotation pattern. Essentially, all nitrogen fixing green manures have to be treated as legumes but the others fit in anywhere.

What are the disadvantages The main thing is to be organised, so you have allowed enough time for the green manure plants to grow, then to be dug in and decompose a bit before the next crop. And to work out the best type for the season, length of growing time, crop rotation etc. (With thick rooted plants, there is a bit of effort involved in chopping up the roots as you dig them in.) The information is in the grid so you can plan now for the coming growing season.

Where do I get the seeds? The stores!

Over this coming year, please let me know what types(s) you have used and how you got on, so I can report back and update the grid to reflect our local conditions.