

# HW&DAA NEWSLETTER

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**HWDAAs web site: [www.hwdaa.co.uk](http://www.hwdaa.co.uk)**

## Chairman's Comments

### Water Tanks

Members may NOT wash tools, produce or hands in water troughs.

Please use a bowl or watering can for washing and empty the water onto your plot.

This is to avoid cross contamination by water borne bacteria and viruses from one plot to another. The tanks are for dipping only and we want to keep the water pure.

### Rats

Whilst never completely eradicated, the population can be controlled by the careful location of bait boxes. (Boxes are used to protect children and animals.) It is vital that you report precisely where you have seen the rat(s), so that our rat controllers listed below can locate the bait boxes most effectively.

#### **Please call the following:-**

Alderman Moores - Phil Cass 07811 623 136  
Bower Ashton - Ron Pedley 0117 922 1601  
White City, Kennel Lodge 1 + 2, The Meadows - Peter Sinclair on 0117 963 8366

### Sheds

It is your responsibility to keep your shed in good condition. That means ensuring the roof is watertight, and that external wood is given a periodic coat of preservative. (roofing felt, preservative and brushes may be cheaply purchased from the Association Stores)

It is essential that you secure the door of the shed (even if you leave it unlocked) otherwise winds may severely damage the door/roof. If you fail to heed this simple safeguard and the shed has to be repaired or replaced, it will be **at your expense**. A new shed can cost £130 or more.

## Site Inspections

The cycle of site inspections starts towards the end of March '09. They are carried out by teams (from other sites), who report if they see a problem with items such as:

- state of cultivation,
- shed condition,
- rubbish (remove yours from the site)
- carpets (forbidden)
- tyres (also forbidden)
- state of verges and paths (need to be 2ft wide, straight and well-defined – you are responsible for right-hand path as seen from main hauling way)
- excessive weeds,
- trees (forbidden, except fruit trees on dwarf rooting stock)
- lack of plot numbers displayed at the front of plots
- ponds that are too large/deep, ill-defined and a danger to children.

Where there is a problem, the plot holder will receive a standard letter detailing it and asking for it to be put right. Follow-up inspections the following month usually result in a clean bill of health but, where necessary, a second letter stresses the need for action. If the problem remains unresolved by the third month it may, depending on circumstances, result in the member being given a notice to quit! Please – if there is any reason for the problem, talk about it with your site rep rather than leave it till you receive a letter.

## Seeds News

- Most of the seed potatoes are sold out but, if you are quick, there are a few varieties left. We do not plan to obtain more this year from our wholesalers in Scotland.
- Garlic is in
- There are new organic and oriental seeds on the stands. (including Chinese Mustard

and Spicy salads)

Ron Pedley (0117 922 1601) will expand the range of seeds not currently in stock in the Store if there is a demand for them.

The annual Which report (in October 08) on the germination rates of seeds from different suppliers rated Kings (our allotment stores suppliers) highly. So besides being incredibly cheap, they are first class. You would be foolish to buy them elsewhere!

### **Plants Discount**

Riverside Garden Centre will give you a discount on **plants** if you produce your Association membership Card – show it before they start ringing up.

**Bob Franks**

## **Points from the AGM on 15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2009**

### **Harry Green Shield**

The Harry Green Shield for the best 2008 Association plot was awarded to Phil Smethurst. Our President Dave Brice presented the Shield to his widow Denise.

### **Membership**

Almost exactly a year ago, there were 423 members on 463 plots. Now there are 431 members on 474 plots. The increase is due to the continued policy of letting half plots only to beginners, and to the breaking up of two difficult plots on KL2 into a total of 8 very small plots to accommodate greenhouses / polytunnels. The waiting list exceeds 80.

**Bristol Flower Show** is to be held in Ashton Court this year. Apparently, the venue will change each year.

### **The Royal Horticultural Society**

We have recently been accepted as a Group Member which has enabled us to get cheaper insurance as well as access to advice. It also gives privileges at certain shows and discounted rates for other shows, lectures, etc.

### **Strimmers for Hire**

Although members have a discount on equipment hire from Brandon Tool Hire in Hotwells, it can be expensive to hire equipment for what may be just a couple of hours to trim the paths or reduce a weedy patch before cultivation. In response to members' requests, the Committee is investigating the possibility of providing equipment (initially strimmers) for cheap hire. Could this be the end of the backbreaking use of shears, sickles and even scissors!

### **Additional land for allotments**

The current position at White City (where we are seeking to expand towards the underpass and/or the British Rail land between our present boundary and the railway) is that a sample of soils has been tested by a team from UWE and has been given the 'all-clear'. However, this land forms part of a larger disposal (where the developer is to be required to offer the strip to us via Bristol City Council) and British Rail has not yet formally disposed of it to the developer.

### **Security**

Breaches have been rare over the past year. One exception was on Bower Ashton where a number of sheds were broken into and strimmers stolen – a good example of the reason for not leaving valuable equipment in sheds overnight. There was also a theft of a rucksack from an unlocked car on the Meadows. So it is in your own best interests to lock cars on the Site, and keep keys and valuables on your person.

Courteously challenge anyone who you don't recognise. If dissatisfied, contact the Site Rep or any Committee member as soon as possible. (list of committee contacts on every site gate/ notice board)

### **Stores**

It was another good year for the stores, especially Alderman Moores. Turnover has been boosted by people from allotments outside HW&DAA but, if this becomes significant, then we propose issuing Associate Memberships for a nominal annual fee. Dave

Brice continues to source excellent deals to keep down prices to members. Ron Pedley orders the seeds, which are now always in stock for members to buy; (the system of annual pre-orders has been discontinued.)

### **Toilets**

Thanks to the fantastic work by Stan Morgan, and some capital assistance from Bristol City Council Allotments, we now have flushing toilets and hand-basins at Alderman Moores. There are even pictures on the walls! This is not just a lavish facility but necessary for lectures / training and social events.

### **Future Capital Works.**

Now that the financial support (for capital works) from the Council is nearing its end, we have formed a subcommittee to investigate and cost the works necessary to enhance and maintain the infrastructure. This will involve a complete inventory of work on fences, gates, hauling ways, the water systems, walls, hedges and tree surgery.

### **Our website - email addresses**

Members are reminded about our really professional and useful website maintained by webmaster Bob Corfield. It is crammed full of items of topical interest with links to other useful sites. You can change contact details on the site, download applications for sheds / greenhouses, email committee members, put in ads for items to buy or sell - and lots more.

About 25% of members have given their e-mail addresses. This means they can download their newsletters from the website and be notified of any offers in the store as they occur. Please send in more.

### **CHRYSANTHEMUMS – continued**

There are various ways to overwinter chrysanthemums – depending on how tender the varieties are in the first place. I have just tried to find which is the best way to get my plants through the winter here in Bristol.

I had a good selection of outdoor plants, which were in bloom from August right

through to November. Some of them had already survived one winter. I chose varieties that didn't need greenhouse protection and otherwise simply on the basis of being pretty colours. There were several downright common types – the bronze ones mostly - and I had some stunning pale peach ones, white ones and rich ruby red with crimson undersides. These fancier ones were new and had come from Halls of Heddon on the Wall. Now I suspect this year will prove – because I'm really trying to keep track – that the more unusual the colour, the more tender the plant. I overwintered the set of plants or crowns in 3 different ways

Group 1 - I left in the ground, covered with a thick layer of leaf mould. I cut down the dead stems only after the last frost in February.

Group 2 – I dug up, dried off and cut back - then left in an unheated greenhouse covered in dry compost.

Group 3 – I dug up, put in an old compost bag and left in the allotment shed. These had the least TLC – but were the fairly robust bronze ones. (Still very desirable plants though)

Well, as of today (26 Feb) the ones in Group 3 are throwing up lots of good looking shoots. Group 1 (left in the garden) are still alive. And Group 2 in the greenhouse are showing an interest in life - I have started to put compost with a little moisture in it onto them. So maybe outdoors varieties all come through cold winters, even with little attention, or maybe the bronze ones in group 3 are more vigorous.

When the new shoots from all groups are two inches or so, I am going to take a few basal cuttings from each plant, pot them up into an airy mixture of moist perlite, or sand + compost, label them (assuming the labels have also survived the winter!), keep them warm until they root, and try to bring on some good new plants. But how I hope that the Salmon Allouise and the Taiga White are in there among the survivors...

**Effie Romain**

**SPRING EVENTS / TALKS  
AT ALDERMAN MOORES STORE  
NEW FOR THIS YEAR**

On a frosty February evening, a capacity crowd of allotmenters turned out to hear Nick Wray, Curator of Bristol University Botanic Gardens, give the first of the allotment Spring talks - on "Microclimatology and its relevance to the allotment".

Nick told us a little about the new Botanic Gardens at The Holmes and about its horticulture classes (look at their website or contact the Courses Administrator - 331 4906 – for further information). He also handed out free copies of a book about the history of the Botanic Gardens – it has been on several different sites over the years, and three major local families and various behind-the-scenes factors have influenced its development.

He defined a microclimate as the very local conditions which have a unique pattern of weather, and are influenced by the slope and aspect of an area. It is surprising how many different areas there can be within a site and even on just one plot. These microclimates can be used by gardeners to their advantage if they carefully choose and position their plants - as Nick illustrated with his slides (mainly of plants growing at Bracken Hill, the previous site of the Botanic Gardens). On to the practicalities ...

Obviously you need to become aware of your local conditions and this is just a question of observation. Look out for areas that are exposed to wind, that receive shelter from a wall or fence (and also wind turbulence created by the wall), frost pockets, exposure to light / shade, where sun falls on the plot at different seasons.

Plants do their best when they have a constant type of environment (with gradual climate changes) rather than frequent and/or extreme fluctuations. To a limited extent you can manipulate these conditions eg protecting plants with fleece minimises wind chill. Nick stressed the benefits of hedges in providing shelter while minimising the effects

of wind turbulence but, on an allotment where hedges may not be permitted, crop plants themselves such as soft fruit bushes can provide shelter for more tender plants. He also explained that snow used to be removed from plants but this exposes the plant to extreme fluctuations in temperature which is not good for it. So, unless its weight is damaging the branches, it is better to leave snow on the plant as it maintains an even temperature beneath.

The microclimate includes conditions in the soil, as well as above ground, and this can be manipulated by the gardener, for example adding moisture-retentive compost and leafmould below trees in areas where you want to grow plants which thrive in damp, shady conditions. Also adding lots of grit to areas where you want to grow plants that like free-draining soil.

While you can alter the microclimatic conditions to a limited extent, the main way to use the knowledge is to make sure you don't grow inappropriate plants for the conditions and, more importantly - find warm light areas to grow crops to mature early, and use less favourable areas to plant crops for later harvesting.

Next time you are sitting down at the plot with a mug of tea you can tell your neighbours that you are hard at work – checking out the microclimates on your plot.

**Julia Heckford**

[Report on Tim Foster's grafting workshop on 7<sup>th</sup> March in next newsletter]

**The next HWDAA event is on  
Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 7.30 – 9.70 pm  
at Alderman Moores Stores**

**Gardeners Question Time**

A Panel from the National Vegetable Society District Association will be on hand to answer all your questions. An invaluable opportunity to pick the experts' brains - start scribbling your queries down now so you don't forget!

From your Editor

[summer newsletter will have a guest editor – **Bob Corfield (webmaster) - so please send articles to him via the website**]

### **Seed Stories**

I have a lovely book '**Forgotten Fruits - a guide to Britain's traditional fruit and vegetables**' by **Christopher Stocks**, published by Random House Books **ISBN 978 1 9052 1180 7** which tells the history of long-cultivated fruit and veg, and the stories behind the names of some varieties and the people associated with them. The title is not entirely accurate! It is true that some of the plants are no longer grown - but quite a few are with us and available from the Allotment Stores! For example ...

#### **Parsnip Tender and True (bred 1897)**

The prolific Victorian authoress Mrs D M Craik wrote a well known poem with the refrain 'Douglas, Douglas, tender and true' (being a quote from an old Scottish book written in 1450 about the Douglas family). It became a popular song called 'Tender and True' when set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1874 and was printed in several forms with different music settings for a couple of decades. This is the memorable last verse...

Stretch out your hand to me Douglas Douglas  
Drop forgiveness from heaven like dew  
As I lay my heart on your dead heart Douglas,  
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.

#### **Parsnip The Student (bred 1859)**

James Buckman was one of those remarkable Victorians whose scientific expertise straddled several fields, and who combined academic brilliance with an appealingly down-to-earth approach to scientific enquiry. One of his correspondents was Charles Darwin, and it appears that, while he was a professor at the Cirencester Agricultural College, he bred The Student largely as an experiment, using the seed of wild parsnips, to demonstrate how quickly wild plants could be 'improved' (or 'ennobled' in the terminology of the day) and re-domesticated

under favourable conditions. He wrote: 'Our ennobled examples of these were considered so perfect that it was thought advisable to consign the whole of the seed of 1859 to Messrs Sutton of Reading, as new varieties of any cultivated crop plant are always desirable, and more especially when, as in the present case, the new form has been directly derived, not from a variety, but from original wild stock' It suggests a scientist of unusual professional modesty to name his parsnip, not after himself, but after his students (but would you want your name to be commemorated by a parsnip?). Incidentally it is said that Professor Buckman lost his post at Cirencester in 1863 because he supported Darwin's theory of evolution.

#### **Seed sowing indoors - tips from talk by herb expert Jekka McVicar (attended by chairman Bob F)**

Fill your clean seed trays, pots or modules with the compost, smooth over, tap down and water in well (use watering can with the rose turned upwards to give gentler flow and start flow of water away from seed tray). Have labels and waterproof pen to hand!

Sow at different depths for different size seeds – large (eg courgette) press into the compost to a depth equal to that of the seed, medium (most veg seeds, but eg tomato) press gently into the compost until you can no longer see them, just below the surface of the compost. Only a very few veg seeds are classified as small (eg claytonia/winter purslane) - just sprinkle very sparingly over the top of the compost.

Then cover compost with vermiculite or perlite. Don't water again until shoots show, unless compost looks as if it's drying out

### **Seed Storage and Lifespan**

Seeds in the UK have a 'use by' date on the packet. Often they will be in a sealed foil packet within the main packet. This excludes air and light, which keeps the seed fresh.

Packets often contain a lot more seeds than are needed for the allotment for one year.

### How long do they keep?

After the packet is opened, this will vary according to the storage conditions and how near the end of its life the seed was when packed. The table is a guide to what can be expected of specific types of seed, assuming good storage conditions.

Seed	Life in Years	Average Days to Germinate
Bean, Broad	2	21
Bean, French	2	14
Bean, Runner	2	14
Beetroot	5	13
Beet (leaf)	5	13
Broccoli	5	8
Cabbage	5	8
Carrot	3	16
Cauliflower	5	8
Cucumber	7	9
Kale	4	8
Kohlrabi	4	7
Leek	3	14
Lettuce	4	7
Marrow/courgette	6	7
Onion	4	14
Parsley	2	10
Parsnip	1	17
Peas	2	10
Radish	4	6
Salsify	2	12
Spinach	2	11
Swede	2	8
Sweetcorn	3	9
Tomato	3	7
Turnip	2	8

### So what to do with that half packet of seeds you have left over?

The three main points are to keep the seeds cool (but not frozen), dark, and to exclude air. Reseal the little silver foil packets by folding over and then place the seeds in an airtight tin or plastic storage box. Ideally you would keep them in the fridge but anywhere cool will have to do in most households!

### Checking Seed Germination Rate

If you have a leftover packet of seeds that you are unsure of (perhaps it's been kept in poor conditions or results weren't what you expected) then you can check the germination rate for your seeds.

To germinate, your seeds need to think they've been sown so take a piece of kitchen roll and dampen it. Put a number of seeds on the damp kitchen roll, (20 is good if you have a lot), and put in a plastic bag or Tupperware type container. Put into somewhere dark and warm, eg an airing cupboard or a closed cupboard in an occupied room.

Check the seeds to see which have sprouted - and if they fail then you haven't wasted time effort and space planting them. The table above gives the average germination time for each seed, so you know how long to wait before declaring a failure. Often they germinate well before the average time, so check frequently.

### SEASONAL RECIPE

#### Spaghetti with leeks, peas & saffron cream

- ¼ tsp saffron strands crumbled
- 350g (12 oz) leeks (prepared weight)
- 50g (2oz) butter
- 150g (5oz) peas (thawed, if frozen)
- 400g (14 oz) spaghetti
- 330ml (1/2 pint) double cream (or use half water, half cream)
- 6 tbsp Parmesan cheese

1. Put saffron in a small bowl, cover with 4 tbsp boiling water and leave to stand.
2. Thinly slice leeks. Cook gently in the butter for about 10 mins to soften. Cook peas at the same time if fresh, or add 3 mins before the end if using thawed from frozen peas
3. Meanwhile, cook the pasta in a large pan of boiling salted water until al dente.
4. Add saffron liquid and cream (or cream / water mix) to the leeks and peas and heat gently until simmering. Stir in half the cheese and remove from the heat. Season
5. Drain pasta thoroughly and add to the sauce. Toss lightly to mix, serve at once.