

HW&DAA NEWSLETTER

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Plot Rents, Allotment Year 2008/2009

The Committee has unanimously approved the annual Plot Rents for the Allotment Year 2008/2009, commencing 1st October 2008,

Large Plots - £44

Medium Plots - £33

Small Plots - £23.

The Treasurer, Bob Corfield, prefers to receive payment by cheque through the post. But if you want to pay cash, he will be available to collect payment **between 10.30 and 11.30 (NB this is shorter than the stores opening times)** on these two Sunday mornings:-

5th Oct 08 Bower Ashton Store

12th Oct 08 Alderman Moores Store

Please note that your Tenancy is automatically terminated if the Treasurer has not received your payment in full by 14th November 08, and your plot will be re-let. There are NO exceptions to this rule.

Plot Rents, Allotment Year 2009/2010

Sadly, we have to make greater provision for the future than just allowing for inflation because, from 2010, Bristol City Council will not be providing the financial support of £7,000 pa we have recently enjoyed. (This distribution derived from capital receipts arising from past disposal of surplus allotment sites. We have used it for maintenance and capital expenditure, eg upkeep of walls, fences, hauling ways and the construction of the new stores at Alderman Moores.)

At this stage in the year, the committee has to give you notice of the maximum to which rents **might** be raised. The amounts we have agreed for the allotment year 2009/2010 (ie from 1st October 2009) will be not greater than:-

Large Plots - £50

Medium Plots - £40

Small Plots - £30

However, don't be shocked at this big increase because, when we review our income + planned expenditure + what to allow for contingencies this time next year, we may decide we do not need to

apply the full amount. (Incidentally the Council allotments will also be suffering from lack of capital receipts and I understand that their rents will be dramatically increasing for the allotment year 2009/2010, and that a large plot will be in excess of £60 pa.)

White City, Security – new gate lock

There have recently been breaches of security at White City and some thefts. We are trying to find out where undesirables have been getting in and taking measures to stop this, including anti-vandal paint. However,, this has led to nervousness when non-familiar faces (members from other sites) use the hauling way as a short cut.

Therefore, to ensure that only White City members use the site, we have changed the lock on the small wicket gate, which will now need a separate key to access that gate. It is vital that the key is not copied as we find that poor replicas damage locks. If you need another, John Holland, your Site Rep, holds a small reserve, cost £4.

Renewal of Mains Water Systems.

Unfortunately, our application for a grant from Local Food (an offshoot of the Lottery Fund) for a sum in excess of £50,000 towards the upgrading of the mains water supplies on all sites has been turned down but we have been given a chance to re-apply with an amended bid. We had hoped to start work this winter but this is not likely. Given the current amount of rain, that might not seem a problem, but we could just have a hot dry summer in 2009!

Rainwater Collection

So now is the time to install rainwater collection systems on your shed and greenhouse roofs: rain has a better pH for the plants and, being close at hand, saves an awful lot of carrying, particularly if you have a greenhouse or polytunnel. Incidentally, if you have a polytunnel contact our Secretary, Angie Tonge for advice - she has a superb means of collecting rain from her polytunnel in large quantities. Good value waterbutts available from the Stores.

Cars and Hauling Ways

Do not leave your car on the hauling way for longer than is necessary to load or unload heavy equipment. Please use the car parking spaces or the adjacent public highways.

Maximum speed on Hauling ways is **5 mph**. Yes, that's barely moving; but there is always a risk that children (or adults) can suddenly emerge from a plot with disastrous consequences. Moreover, speed damages the surfaces, which in some cases are poor enough already.

Bristol City Council Residents Parking Scheme

You may recently have received consultation documents about possible residents parking schemes in areas outside the current central controlled parking zone. I wonder if you realised that the proposals include the Bower Ashton area - which would affect on-street parking for Kennel Lodges 1, 2, The Meadows, White City and Bower Ashton (it doesn't extend to roads around Alderman Moores site). If this area were to become a residents parking zone, you wouldn't be able to park on the street unless you have a visitors permit for £1 a day (possibly purchasable via the allotments association), or use pay and display parking (first 15 mins free then £1 per hour for up to 4 hours). We are seeking clarification and exemption status and will keep you informed.

At the moment, the council are finding out which residents areas want a parking scheme and will then consult further with those areas and aim to bring in pilot zone(s) late 2009. All the information is on the Council web site (go to Transport and Services, then click on appropriate bits of either 'Spotlight on' or 'Latest transport and street news' sections).

If you want to highlight the difficulties this might cause you visiting the allotment or have other concerns, write to your Counsellor (who may well be Charlie Bolton, also one of our ploholders) c/o Bristol City Council Office, College Green, BS1.

We are in favour of not using vehicles to allotments, but there are clearly some people who are incapacitated, live distantly, or who are carrying heavy or bulky tools that are inappropriate for a bus, bike or shanks' pony!

Cultivation

I am often asked what constitutes acceptable degrees of cultivation that do **not** trigger an

adverse report from Site Inspectors.

Your Tenancy Agreement, Schedule 2, para 3 requires that the plot as a whole be kept clear of weeds and, "As a yardstick, at least 2/3rd should be under cultivation" (nb. if you were on a Council plot it would be 3/4). If you have just taken over a plot in poor condition, the inspection team would accept that it is unreasonable to expect that standard of cultivation until your first full year had elapsed. However, a plot taken over in the spring should have at least half under cultivation by the autumn. As we now only let half plots, this should not be too onerous a task for anyone of serious intent. Remember - your Site Rep probably told you that you should not take on an allotment unless you were able to devote at least 10 hours a week during the growing season to the task! Paths along and across plots count as **uncultivated** areas. If you are at the back of a large plot, do not forget to clear right up to the fence/hedge as this all counts as part of your plot.

As for 'cultivation' - this is digging and planting / sowing! Many people apply plastic or weed-suppressant material to areas that they are unable to cultivate right away or want to 'rest'. This suppresses the weeds but does **not** count as cultivation though of course, if you plant through holes in the plastic for appropriate plants, that is acceptable. Keep the ground cultivated over winter with crops such as winter lettuce, broad beans, leeks, garlic, cabbage, purple sprouting broccoli etc or if there is still a gap, green manures. Put something in, or the weeds will take over. Nature abhors a vacuum.

Open Day at Alderman Moores

The very successful Open day on 7th September used the New Stores, three tents and a gazebo. Outside judges considered over 50 entries of vegetables, flowers and herbs and awarded first place rosettes to John Smith, Bill Westwood, Dot Morgan, Angie Tonge and Briony Waite. The tremendous public interest and goodwill generated encourages a repeat event next year. Brilliant organising - well done everyone!

Alderman Moores Toilets

Against all odds and by working around the clock, Stan Morgan, ably assisted by Dave Brice, constructed the new flush toilets in time for the Open Day. There are hand basins, mirrors, ceiling lights ... and even a picture on the wall. Thanks also to Bristol City Council for part funding the project.

Bob Franks

Seed Saving Special – Part 2

(adapted from Real Seed Catalogue instruction leaflet)

The seed saving advice in the last newsletter concerned annual crops, ie those that grow, flower and set seed in one growing season. Part 2 is about crops that are biennial, ie that grow in the first year and make food storage organs so they can overwinter, then re-grow in the following spring to produce flowers and set seed. (We interrupt their normal pattern by harvesting them before they re-grow - especially roots, because when they regrow they go woody as they use up the tasty nutritious stored starches).

Beetroot, swiss chard/seakale beet & leaf beet/perpetual spinach (types of *Beta vulgaris*)

Chard and leaf beet are overwintered in situ – select a minimum of 6 – 8 plants to leave for seed which best fit your needs (depending on your preference for stem versus leaf, smooth or wrinkled leaves etc). Beetroot can either be overwintered in situ, or can be harvested in autumn, the best plants selected and stored, then replanted in spring

These plants will cross readily and since they are wind-pollinated, theoretically, crossing can take place with any other flowering beet plants within around 2 miles. On allotments, you need to have discussions with your extended neighbours/the rest of the site to check whether they are going to let their plants go to seed (at the moment, virtually no-one does except by accident).

How fussy you need to be about crossing depends on what you are trying to achieve. If you simply want a reasonably diverse population, a degree of crossing is not that important. Plant your seed plants closely together in a square, and take seed from the central plants in the block - you will find that the amount of 'contamination' is minimal providing there aren't large numbers of other flowering beets right next door.

If you are aiming to keep a variety true to type, you need to isolate it, usually by physically covering your seed plants. To do this, plant at least 6 plants very close together in a circle with a wooden stake in the middle. As the seed stalks form, growing up to 4 feet (1.3 m) tall, tie them together, supported by the stake. Then as they develop, cover the group of flower heads with either a shiny paper bag that will withstand rain, or a bag made out of agricultural fleece. Shake

the bag from time to time to make sure that pollen is distributed within the bag.

As the large prickly seeds mature, keep an eye on them, and start to harvest as they turn brown and start to dry out. You can either cut entire seedstalks, or harvest mature seeds by rubbing them into a bucket. Make sure that the seeds are thoroughly dry before storage, and they should last at least 5 years.

Carrots and Parsnips

Dig them up in the autumn and select the biggest, best coloured and shaped roots. Twist off the foliage, and store the roots in a box of dry sand in a frost free place, making sure that they don't touch. In spring replant the roots, and they will resprout and flower. (you can also leave them in the ground over winter, like beetroot, but then you can't check what they look like and slugs may thank you for a delicious feast)

If you want to maintain a carrot variety effectively, you really need to save seed from at least 40 good roots to maintain good genetic diversity. If you have too small a genetic pool, you will end up with small, poor quality roots in a very few generations.

Carrots grow into big plants waist high or taller, producing successive branches with large flat umbels of white flowers. Parsnips make tall flower heads of little yellow flowers. They are insect pollinated and need to be isolated from other flowering varieties by at least 500m in an open field situation. Few people let their carrots or parsnips go to seed so this is not normally a big problem but they will also cross with wild carrot/wild parsnip giving thin white useless roots. As with all insect pollinated crops, barriers such as walls, other high crops etc can affect insect flight paths drastically, so you don't necessarily need to eliminate all wild carrots or parsnips within a ½ km radius, but do watch out for any white roots in subsequent generations and get rid of them. Pull up any that flower long before the others as you don't want to develop a strain with a tendency to bolt

To harvest your seed, keep an eye on the umbels of flowers, and cut them off as soon as they start to turn brown and dry. If you have plenty of plants, just save seed from the first and second umbels of flowers to appear on each plant, as these will give the biggest and best seed. Dry the seed heads further inside, and then rub them

between your hands or in a sieve to separate them. You will notice that the seeds have a 'beard' which is removed in commercial seed to make them easier to pack.

You can sieve the seeds further to remove more of the chaff, but there is no need to get the seed completely clean – just sow slightly more thickly to allow for the chaff mixed in. Carrot seed is relatively short lived, but if it is stored somewhere cool and dry, it should give good germination for 3 years. Parsnip seed doesn't store well so use the seed the following year.

Western brassicas - broccoli, kale and cabbages (types of Brassica oleracea)

Sprouting broccoli, cabbages, cauliflowers, calabrese, kales and brussel sprouts are all members of the same family and will cross with each other. (They won't cross with turnips, swedes, oriental brassicas or mustard greens which are members of other Brassica species) In addition they are mainly self-incompatible – which means that in order to get seed, insects have to carry pollen from one plant to another to pollinate the flowers.

For absolute seed purity therefore, only save seed from one variety in any given year – and grow as many other brassicas as you like provided you don't let them go to seed. The seed will keep well for up to 5 years as long as it is stored somewhere cool and dry. Try to ensure that there are no other flowering brassicas within a mile of your garden. In practice, walls, tall crops etc all break up insect flight patterns so, as long as you don't have any immediate neighbours with flowering western brassicas, you shouldn't have too many problems with crossing.

To make it as easy as possible for insects to work your seed plants, make sure they are laid out in a block, rather than a row, so that they are tempted to move from one plant to another rather than away to other flowers elsewhere. Keep at least 6 plants for seed, ideally more. Remove any poor specimens, or any that are not typical for the variety – you can always eat these plants, so long as you don't allow any flowers to open.

All of these plants, including cabbages, will throw up a tall flower stalk covered in lots of small yellow flowers. (you will have to slash the heads of ball type cabbages to let the flower stalk out) These will then form slender seed pods, which start out green, and turn a straw colour as they

mature and dry. Once they start to dry, keep a close eye on them, as they tend to shatter and drop their seed. It's best to cut entire plants once most of the pods begin to look dry, and then leave them to mature further on a sheet indoors. Once they are thoroughly dry, the seeds will come out of the pods very easily: the simplest way is to trample the plants on top of a large sheet, and then sieve out the debris.

Turnips and oriental brassicas (types of Brassica rapa)

These plants will cross with each other, but not with Western Brassicas plants mentioned above, and the same points about seed purity apply (see the first 3 paragraphs above).

To grow oriental brassica or turnip varieties for seed, you need to overwinter the plants to obtain flowers and seeds in their second year of growth. Although spring sown crops may bolt to seed in hot summer weather, this is not ideal for seedsaving, as you may end up accidentally selecting for early bolting in future years. You can try leaving them outside, well-mulched, and with extra fleece in cold weather, but the best solution is to sow your seed crop after midsummer in a polytunnel, where semi-mature plants will overwinter quite happily. Select at least 6 of the healthiest and most typical plants to reserve for seed, eating the rest over the winter. In spring, the plants will flower, and form seedpods. The seedpods are green at first, but then gradually dry out and turn a pale tan colour. Once most of the pods are dry and brittle, cut the entire stalks of the plant, and lay out on a sheet (somewhere under cover with a good airflow) to finish drying off. Then rub and crush the pods with your hands to release the seeds, and separate the seeds from the chaff with a coarse sieve.

If you want to develop your seedsaving further, try to get hold of one of these books, which will cover all other species and give you fuller instructions for everything.

'Back Garden Seedsaving' by Sue Stickland

'Seed to Seed' by Suzanne Ashworth

'The Seed Savers Handbook' by Jeremy Cherfas

'Breed your own Vegetable Varieties' by Carol Deppe

And also look on the Real Seed website www.realseeds.co.uk which gives excellent instructions, and pictures where appropriate, and from where you can also order seeds.