

HW&DAA NEWSLETTER

Editor: Heather Jenne hjenne@blueyonder.co.uk 0117 973 3451 Date: June 2011
Correspondence to : Registered Office, 2 Kennel Lodge Road, Bower Ashton, Bristol BS3 2JT

HWDA web site: www.hwdaa.co.uk

Chairman's Comments

Rats and Mice

Rats and mice are a fact of life on allotments and are often found in compost bins. Rats are opportunist and can gnaw their way into sheds and damage crops stored there. They are particularly prevalent where there are chickens.

Mice can be a nuisance in polytunnels and greenhouses, eating seeds before they germinate. A remedy is to cover pots and trays with a secure plastic 'lid', or keep them on a suspended shelf attached to the crop bars/girders. Directly sown peas can be made less attractive to mice by first rinsing them in paraffin. Mice may be dealt with by individual tenants using their own mouse trap baited with chocolate, cheese and the like – BUT ONLY STUFF THAT YOU WOULD BE HAPPY TO EAT YOURSELF.

By contrast, we attempt to keep the rat population down by means of poisoned bait in special boxes. As this poison can have serious consequences if taken by children or pets, it is strictly controlled, and the exact bait box locations have to be recorded by us, HWDA, in accordance with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations.

Phil Cass [AM 75 and 07811 623 136] maintains the records assisted by some Site Reps. Phil is the only person to decide on the appropriate bait and he sets the bait boxes.

Under no circumstances may poisoned bait be brought onto Sites by individual ploholders.

Along with this warning, I now have to add that if this important safety requirement is ignored, we reserve the right to terminate your tenancy. It really is that serious!

If you have a rat problem, note **exactly** where you have seen the rodent and tell your Site Rep who will arrange for a bait box to be placed. Boxes are regularly checked and re-baited where necessary. It may take several weeks for the poison to be effective, as rats breed almost continuously.

Security

There was a bold theft in Bower Ashton recently. A lady had her handbag and contents stolen from

her shed while she was working on her plot. As this included a slip of paper with the gate code, Bower Ashton tenants will shortly be told a new gate code.

Beware – keep valuables on you or, if in your shed, lock / close the door.

If you see anyone behaving suspiciously, or indeed who is just unknown to you, engage the person in conversation and ask their name and the number of their plot. If you are dissatisfied with the answer, ask someone with a mobile phone to call the Site Rep or any other available Committee member (list on the site gate or notice board). [If it's a camera phone, surreptitiously take a photo]. If they in fact turn out to be a bona fide allotment holder, hopefully you'll have made a new friend! We really want the allotments to be places where people feel part of a welcoming community despite having to be alert for security issues.

NB Except for Committee members carrying out their duties, **nobody** is allowed on another's plot without the express permission of the Tenant.

Auction of Abandoned Tools and Equipment

A small auction will be held at Alderman Moores Store on Sunday, 3rd July '11 at 12 noon

Banned Items

The following items are banned on allotment sites: tyres, carpets of any kind, domestic cookers, baths and any item not specifically used for cultivation. (baths currently used as dip-tank substitutes will be phased out)

Capital Works until November '11

The Committee has budgeted for a number of improvements this year.

1. Improving the hauling ways on Alderman Moores, White City and Bower Ashton (WC and AM have been done – BA will be done after the new water system is installed)
2. Building a composting toilet on White City. Now completed and formally opened by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress on Thursday 2nd June – report in Evening Post the following day, and see photos on hwdaa website.
3. Installing a larger water main, new and additional self-regulating dip tanks on The Meadows

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The money for this has come / will come entirely from HwDAA funds (ie rents and stores profits)

Longer term plans include providing improved water systems for Kennel Lodge 1 + 2 and Alderman Moores, improved security, and composting toilets for Bower Ashton, Meadows, Kennel Lodge 1 + 2. (though if we expand by acquiring additional land, the works may have to be delayed while we sort out clearance, water provision and security for that land)

Sheds, Greenhouses and Polytunnels

You are reminded that all sheds, greenhouses or polytunnels on your plot, whether or not provided by the Association, must be maintained in good order throughout your tenancy.

In the case of sheds this means that roofs must have intact and effective felting and be coated with opaque wood preservative all around [do not forget the back up against a hedge!]

Keep structures clear of weeds and prevent tree branches damaging roofs.

Ensure doors are shut securely as wind inside a shed is a sure recipe for serious damage.

In Memoriam

Alan Calandra joined us in 1986 and was a very capable gardener who freely passed on his knowledge and skills to newcomers. He also helped with cultivating others' plots when they were ill. He will be sadly missed, not least by Beryl, who will continue his good work on plot 4 at Bower Ashton

Jan Goldsmith took over plot 71B KL2 in 2007 and a greenhouse on 75B in 2008. A very popular lady, she helped in the Bower Ashton stores and continued offering assistance despite health problems. Our condolences to her husband and children, who will maintain the greenhouse plot.

Bob Franks

Book Review

How to Grow WINTER VEGETABLES by Charles Dowding, Publisher Green Books 2011

I have just purchased this new book and I am finding it fascinating and enormously helpful. Charles Dowding demonstrates that with careful planning, the vegetable patch can provide

produce all year round. He describes true winter as under way by December and continuing until March. He then identifies and addresses the 'hungry gap' months, which he describes as a kind of second winter when in April, May and June, the garden can be almost bare of produce.

Dowding explains that a well organised plot can be full in these winter months if planned for carefully and well ahead. With this in mind he provides an extensive month by month sowing, planting and growing calendar. Harvests for winter will mostly be sown and planted in mid-August through till early September. The timing is critical so, from the moment I started reading, I began filling my diary with reminders for sowing and planting in the months ahead.

Based on his 30 years experience of organic vegetable growing, the book is full of excellent tips high-lighted in coloured boxes on each page. One such tip is to grow, at the end of a summer crop, a variety of seedlings that mature at the same rate. He identifies several groups and gives for example one collection namely spinach, chard, lettuce, endive, chicory and winter purslane. This group takes four or five weeks from sowing till ready to plant in the ground. He suggests sowing a mix of these seeds in plastic module trays with up to 60 cells. This will give a large selection of plants that can all be planted out at the same time to create a bed with a variety of different crops.

There is an extensive chapter on under-cover growing in poly tunnels, greenhouses, cloches and cold frames to extend harvests. He's very enthusiastic about home-made cloches and offers advice on materials for making them. The clear and realistic photographs throughout the book are as inspiring as the direct and simple text. I highly recommend it for extending productivity on the allotment.

Sue Berger

Honeys, Humble Bumbles, Swarms and Nests

You don't really 'keep' honeybees; you provide a home for them. They have an inbuilt instinct to collect pollen and nectar, feed and nurture their young and their queen, and to make honey. Beekeepers are permitted to take the surplus honey for their own use and to watch these fascinating creatures at work.

It is not enough for a honeybee colony to be a single unit – queen workers, drones – they have to ensure somehow that new colonies are made – they do this by raising new queens and then sending the original queen plus about half the colony off to find a new home, leaving the virgin queens to decide between them who will rule next. A 'swarm' is the old queen bee, surrounded

by a large number of worker bees to protect her (she is a valuable asset, for without her and her eggs, there will be no future colony). 'Scout' bees depart at frequent intervals to look for a new home and report back to the swarm until somewhere suitable is found. In the wild, honeybees nest off the ground, preferably several feet up. They build wax combs in a downward direction so they need a branch or similar from which to start.

For the honeybees this process is normal and necessary to ensure survival. For the beekeeper and neighbours it can provide an interesting challenge. Beekeepers don't like losing bees as it means a reduction in the amount of honey produced. Neighbours don't always like having their garden taken over by honeybees in large quantities! A large part of bee management, therefore, is to practise controlled swarming, ie endeavouring to persuade the bees that they have swarmed while keeping them within the beekeeper's jurisdiction. In order to do this the beekeeper will carefully divide the colony in spring. However bees are wild creatures and don't always cooperate with the beekeeper!

So what do you do if you see a swarm of bees in your garden or while you are out and about? The local swarm coordinator in this area is Brian Steadman (tel: 0117 944 5741) or you can contact either the local authority or the police. However, you need to give them some information...

Firstly, note when the bees arrived. Honeybees that are about to swarm fill themselves up with three days' worth of honey so they can survive while they hunt for a new home. They are usually remarkably good-tempered while filled with honey. However, it is best not to assume that they'll be friendly. Bees will sting if one is foolish enough to threaten their queen. They can also be made aggressive if disturbed, or sprayed with water. Secondly, make sure they are honeybees, and work out how accessible they are. (Beekeepers do not have insurance or skill to collect bees from very high or awkward places.) Then leave them alone; watch from a distance and enjoy the privilege of being fairly close to them, and wait for a beekeeper to come and collect them!

By contrast, a bumble bee nest is a seasonal thing – a queen bumble bee hibernates over winter in a hole somewhere, then emerges in spring to find a suitable nesting site (eg in or near the ground, in low walls or rockeries). She lays her eggs and collects pollen to feed her young. As they hatch, they help look after the other emerging youngsters. Bumble bees do not make honey. If you find a bumble bee nest, please leave it alone. The best and simplest advice, if the nest is in the ground and causing concern, is to

place a large terracotta flowerpot upside down over the top of the nest. The bumble bees then have a single hole to fly in and out of and the nest is protected and identified. If the nest is in a wall you can place a screen to persuade the bees to fly upwards out of your way.

Bumble bees often nest under sheds or in old compost heaps, where the soil is soft and easy to burrow into, but will only be there for the summer – once the bees have grown up and mated, the queens hibernate in solitary splendour and the cycle begins again. They tend to choose a new place in which to over-winter, abandoning the summer's nest. Therefore if the nest location is one you would prefer they don't use again, you can block up any entrance holes in October. Bumble bees only sting under extreme duress; if you disturb their nest, for example!

All bees love alliums, herbs (especially mints and lavender – honeybees adore borage), sunflowers, asters, clover. If planting flowers, plant single-flowered forms where possible: the double ones are often sterile and therefore do not produce nectar or pollen.

Ruth Barsby (Beekeeper for 6 years)

From Your Editor

Nectar Robbery by short tongued bumble bees

The amazing variety and beauty of flowers is partly due to the relationship between plants and their pollinators. Through millions of years of evolution, insects have adapted to use flowers, and plants to use insects. By producing a sugary reward in the form of nectar, plants attract insects to their flowers and use those insects to carry their pollen. The plants benefit from having their pollen spread over a greater distance with much greater accuracy than if transported by wind. The insects benefit by gaining a high energy source of food in the form of nectar. This relationship can then be considered a mutual one, with both groups gaining an advantage from the interaction.

In every mutualism, however, there may be opportunities to take advantage of the situation. One example relevant to the allotment is a short-tongued species of bee (*Bombus terrestris* commonly called the buff-tailed bumblebee – one of the most common) which has learnt to steal nectar from broad bean flowers without pollinating them. To do this the bee will make a hole in the flower near to the source of the nectar (making it possible to reach the sugary reward in the long flowers which would normally be too deep for it to reach), without going near the stigmas and stamens to pollinate. Looking for evidence of robbery is quite simple - the flowers will have a neat circular or semi-circular hole near their base close to where the nectar is produced. Once

holes have been made by the robber, other insects may also use them.

Directly damaging the flowering parts of a plant would appear to be detrimental to the plant and, in some situations, nectar robbery may reduce the numbers of seeds produced. So you may get fewer broad beans as a result. However, the flowers could have been pollinated before robbery and, afterwards, other bees can still enter the flowers via the normal route and pollinate, though the reduction in the amount of nectar can make them less attractive to true pollinators.

But, if it's any consolation, the holes made by robbery can encourage other insects to feed from otherwise inaccessible flowers, encouraging a greater diversity of insects on the allotment!

Garlic chemical composition – cooking

You are probably about to harvest your garlic crop in the next month or so. (The time to harvest hardnecks is when 30% of the leaves have started to go brown. For softnecks, it's when half the crop stems have completely drooped to one side)

Did you know that the taste of garlic as an ingredient, and its therapeutic properties, varies dramatically depending on how it is prepared? For example, crushed garlic has a pungent flavour - very different from the much milder flavour of garlic cooked whole.

This is due to 3 components in garlic: allinase, alliin and allicin. Allicin is responsible for the flavour, smell (and to a great extent, the medicinal) effect of garlic. This is not present in an (odourless) untouched whole clove – it is only created when the allinase interacts with the alliin. These chemicals are present in separate cells of the clove and only combine to make allicin when the clove is chopped, crushed or pressed or bitten into. When the allinase and alliin interact, this produces not only allicin, but lots of other sulphur compounds which contribute to its health properties.

If garlic is cooked whole (eg roasted), it has a less complicated chemical composition and will taste milder than garlic which has been crushed or chopped prior to cooking. With chopping, the chemical reaction in the garlic is not fully activated so it does not have quite such a strong flavour as when it is crushed. However, heat (and acid) inactivates the enzyme allinase. The classic way to use garlic is to chop or crush it before sautéing it - then to add other ingredients – providing a flavourful but not strong garlicky foundation to the dish. If you add crushed garlic towards the end of the cooking time the food will be more pungent. If you want the most aromatic, and aggressive garlic

taste, eat it raw after crushing / pressing.

This recipe is one slight degree down in intensity, as the garlic is chopped by the blender, not crushed.

Green Chutney dip

1 bunch of coriander,
2 cloves of garlic,
small cooking apple,
½ green chilli,
1 Tbsp. sugar,
salt,
lemon juice,
1Tbsp dessicated coconut,
2 Tbsp. natural yoghurt.

Blend all together. Will freeze.

Green Garlic Pesto

'Green garlic' is the name for bulbs that are harvested before reaching full maturity and before starting to dry - the flavour is milder and fresher and the flesh is juicier than normal dry garlic.

3 large bulbs green garlic, (trim and discard the roots but leave the green stems on)
4 tbsps olive oil
½ tsp sea salt
4 tbsps toasted pine nuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds
a good handful of fresh basil leaves
150g grated parmesan cheese

Finely chop the garlic. Blend all together. Add more salt and olive oil to taste. This pesto keeps (covered and chilled) up to 3 days or, frozen, up to 2 months.

Bubble and Squeak with Garlic Scapes

Scapes are the stems and flower buds (also called rocamboles) that emerge from hard neck garlic varieties. You need to remove them so the plant puts all its energies into increasing the size of the cloves, rather than into flower production. But why throw them on the compost? They taste rather like chives and can be used in salads or stir fries, or this traditional dish.

Cooked mashed potato (or sliced or diced)
Cooked cabbage, spinach or any other green vegetable available
6 or so garlic scapes, cut into 2 cm (1") lengths
olive oil + butter for frying

Gently fry the green veg and scapes in olive oil and butter, then stir fry for a couple of minutes. Add the potato and seasoning and mix in with the veg and scapes. Press down all the ingredients until gold and crispy, Turn and brown the other side.