

HW&DAA NEWSLETTER

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Events and Tips

Helen Slater has organised two excellent events so far this year and there are more to come. There was the very popular, hands-on 'Preparing Your Soil' with Tim Foster on 23rd April, and the superb, amusing and interesting 'Gardeners' Question Time' with experts from the Vegetable Society on 22nd May.

Tim and the Vegetable Society team will be coming again. Tim will be dealing with the topic of hands-on pruning and, separately, the rarely known skill of grafting.

The events will be held at the Alderman Moore's store and will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Prices will be £3 on the door. Dates and times will be confirmed in the September Newsletter and on the Association website. Helen can also be contacted on 0117 923 9033.



The Gardeners' Question Time threw up some interesting topics such as the relatively poor basic growing chemicals (N, P, K) in cow and horse manure, and the need to enhance it at the appropriate stage of plant growth (although the manure is excellent for improving soil texture). Also, the addition of bone meal to the soil to apparently enhance flavour as well as acting as a slow-release fertiliser.

A little-known plant (*Plectranthus Amboinicus*), a native of South Africa and South America, is likely

to ward off white fly, spider mite and possibly other pests. It also has a very pleasant oregano-like flavour and aroma too, and is often used to flavour meat and game. It is available in the UK from specialist suppliers and is easily propagated in a polytunnel or greenhouse.

There were some interesting comments on the cultivation of tomatoes in greenhouses or polytunnels. It is essential not to overcrowd them and to allow a free flow of air around the plants in order to avoid many common infections. If you use growbags, ensure they are either supported on their sides to provide depth or doubled up to have the same effect. Best of all, use large pots.

Melon, cucumber and similar-shaped seeds should be planted with their edges vertical and at twice the depth of the seed. Water the pot before planting and subsequently water from below.

With sweet peas, instead of abrading or soaking them before sowing, place them between two sheets of wet blotting paper until they sprout (keep moist by spraying), then pot them in seed compost and keep warm. See Lesley's seeds article below.

Low-Income Rent Discounts for 2013-14

Tenants must apply between June and 1st September. A form can be obtained from the Council Allotment Section, telephone: 0117 922 3737.

Gate Locks

When operating the key pads on the gate locks, please do NOT use the 'C' key at all unless you have made an error. Unnecessary use of that key results in heavy wear and ultimately costly early repair or replacement.

Bob Franks, Chairman

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Seed Sowing 2013

By Lesley Woodward, Seed Manager

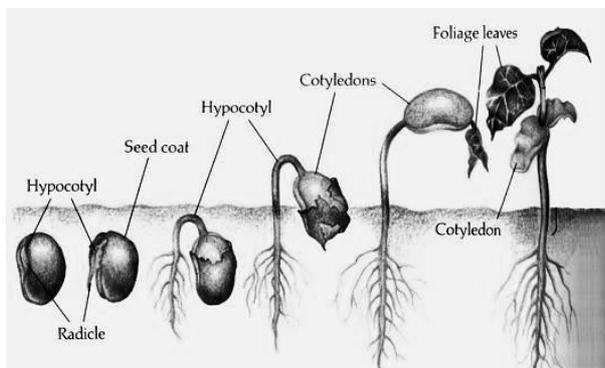
Finally, at the third attempt, my leek seeds have germinated. Not in a seed tray this time, but scattered directly on the surface of a deep bed and covered lightly with compost.

For the past 15 years I have successfully grown all my seeds in trays, outside from April onwards, protected with plastic cloches and additional plastic sheeting at night. This year, however, it has been a battle to get anything to germinate and grow on. There were a few warmer weeks at the end of April/early May and many seeds finally started off. Then it turned cold and dull again, and they stopped growing and looked sick.

I know I am not the only one, as we have had similar stories of failure to germinate seeds from visitors to the stores. Those with heated propagators and/or a conservatory or greenhouse have coped far better.

It seemed like a good idea to talk to Kings, the company from whom we buy our seeds, so I phoned their Purchasing Manager, Peter Miller, to see what advice he could give. Firstly we discussed the seed itself. Kings, like all seed companies, are governed by strict regulations which are laid out in detail on the Defra website:

<http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/plants/seeds/seedCertification/>



All seed which they sell is sampled at intervals and if it does not germinate to statutory standards it is discarded and not sold on. Assuming then that the seed is of high quality, what else is going wrong if we are having problems getting them to germinate/grow on?

Sowing too early. Do not be tempted to sow too early, especially if you are sowing outside. The night soil temperature MUST be above 7°C for seven days running [think “lucky seven twice!” — Ed.]. Seed sown early will take longer to germinate. Sow a few weeks later and they soon catch up. Seed from plants from warm countries, such as tomatoes, peppers and aubergines, need about 12°C to germinate, indoors in a heated propagator.

The Met Office writes: “This March has been the coldest since 1962 in the UK in the national record dating back to 1910. Provisional figures indicate that the UK mean temperature was 2.2°C, which is 3.3°C below the long term 1981–2010 average ...This ranks March 2013 as joint second (tied with 1947) coldest in the records.”

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/news/cold-spring-2013>

Avoid temperature fluctuations. Keep seeds somewhere where the temperature is even and above 12°C. This rules out many windowsills. This year, even greenhouse growing has been a problem as night temperatures have fallen sharply, even as the day temperature has reluctantly risen. Last year’s early and warm March caused big problems as seeds started well then were knocked back by the cold April.

Hygiene. Use clean seed trays and seed compost — not general multi-purpose. Always use clean tap water NOT from a water butt. Peter describes the water from a butt as a “bacterial soup” (includes bird muck, algae, etc.)

Don't dry or drown. Once seeds get going be careful not to let them dry out or drown. Put newspaper under the trays to suck up excess water.

Correct storage conditions. Make sure seed packets from previous years have been stored in a cool and dry place. It is surprising how long you can keep seed – Charles Dowding says five years for lettuce and tomatoes, six years for beans, and two years for onions, brassicas and carrots.

Hope this helps. Keep sowing: still plenty of time to get seeds in and lots of varieties available in the stores!

A Gardener's Nightmare

Adapted from a general article on weed control on the great website: <http://www.allotment.org.uk>

Horse Tail (*Equisetum Arvense*; strictly speaking not the same as the aquatic-growing Mare's Tail, but we'll use the latter name here because it's in more common usage) is an herbal remedy dating back to ancient Roman and Greek medicine. Most gardeners, however, regard it as Public Enemy Number One.

It looks like it belongs in Jurassic Park when in fact it comes from the much older Palaeozoic era. It's been described as a "living fossil" yet there's nothing fossilized about its growth — it spreads like wildfire if left unchecked. Unfortunately, it is no stranger to HWDAA sites and will still be present long after we're all gone. Control is more realistic than cure.

In spring, brown-green shoots appear with small cones at the tips that produce spores (millions of them) and it grows away from thin, creeping brown roots that you can hardly see as they are soil-coloured. Completely digging out these roots is almost impossible – they can go down into the soil

for up to 2 metres – yes, 7 feet. Conversely, shallow, occasional weeding is arguably not effective and can make the problem worse, as the plant can regrow from any small pieces left behind.

Later the 'leaves' or tails appear. These will die-off as autumn turns to winter and the roots sit there, waiting for spring. The leaves have a waxy coat, which makes the plant highly resistant to weed-killers.

Crushing the leaves to break up the coating helps weed killer to penetrate and become absorbed but in large areas it is not so easy to crush all the leaves. However, glyphosate weed killer will have an effect and may eventually kill the plant. You will probably need five or more applications. Knock it back, it re-grows and you repeat. Ammonium sulphamate is alleged to be a far more effective weed killer. It can kill it in one application but may well need two.

The HWDAA association did a controlled experiment several years ago covering a section of a plot which was then left uncultivated for a year — results good. Use the back of a spade to bruise the stems in September and then liberally spray with systemic weed killer. Cover the section with black plastic to prevent other weeds.

Taking an organic, 'no chemicals, no dig' approach has yielded mixed results for me. I tried just black plastic year and currently I am suffering from the consequences. This year I've been digging to a fork's depth and meticulously hunting for and pulling out the very strong, almost shoelace-like elasticated strands. You know when you've hit mare's tail from the unmistakable sound of snapping when you lever the soil out. In order to reduce the risk of snapping, I've found it useful to gently but firmly crush any compacted soil containing trapped mare's tail strands underneath my boot. This frees the soil enough to shake the roots away from the soil in one piece. It's a tedious process but if performed with care it can really keep the mare's tail down to very manageable limits

Drying or drowning the roots prior to composting is a must. Any new growth can be easily dealt with by carefully pulling the relatively weak new shoots

completely from their moorings. If you see mare's tail growing on your neighbour's plot, give them a nudge because it will most likely spread to your own plot.

Touch mare's tail with a mechanical cultivator at your peril. If you do you will understand why it has been around for 60 million years.

Wildlife on Allotments

By Elaine Griffin

A few years ago we put a small terracotta tray, the sort that goes under a flowerpot, on a wall outside our kitchen window. It was to provide somewhere for birds to have a drink. Little did we realise the hours we would have watching how much wildlife is actually attracted to such a small expanse of water, which is only about 3 cm deep. What we didn't expect was that birds would use it to bathe in. We have had up to eight sparrows all lining up to get in, baby sparrows sitting on the edge not quite sure what to do, and usually having a drink before taking the plunge. Even blackbirds use it for a bath. I then have to quickly go and fill it up. They even use it in the depths of winter when we have to take a kettle out to melt the ice.

But this week (in June) I have been fascinated to see over several days a succession of bees coming to drink. I think it's the whole hive coming. One bee arrives and shortly after leaving another will turn up. My family think it's the same bee, but I think it's one bee who has then told the rest of the hive where to come. We did think about trying to mark the bee but we're not quite sure how. We'll have to ask the presenters of Springwatch!

Anyway, where is this leading? Our first pond was half a barrel and again provided a great habitat for frogs and toads. On our allotment we have a small preformed pond, left by the previous tenants and we were delighted to find newts breeding in it. Natural England produced a lovely booklet on the subject of Wildlife on Allotments, which unfortunately is no longer available in hard print but is available to download from their website. Please take a look:

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/31035?category=130041>

Seasonal Recipes

Broad beans are one of my personal favourites from the allotment during the early cropping season. Along with lentils, peas and chickpeas they have been cultivated in parts of Europe since at least 6000 BC. They go particularly well with smoked meats such as bacon. For example, '*Judd mat Gaardebounen*', or smoked collar of pork with broad beans, is the national dish of Luxembourg. Vegetarians could substitute the bacon for grilled halloumi cheese.

Broad Beans with Bacon and Parsley

- 1 lb (450 g) shelled broad beans
- 8 rashers streaky bacon, bacon bits or pancetta
- 1 oz (28 g) butter
- 1 large or 2 small onions, chopped
- 2 tablespoons plain flour
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley

Cook the beans until tender in boiling salted water. Cut the bacon into dice, heat the butter in a pan and fry the bacon and onion for 3 or 4 minutes, until the onion is soft. Blend in the flour and cook for 1 minute.

Drain the beans and add 8 fl oz (240 ml) of the cooking liquid to the bacon and onions. Bring to the boil, stirring, add the beans and reheat gently. Season to taste and stir in the chopped parsley.

Baked Raspberry Cheesecake

I'm hoping for a better season for soft fruit this year and raspberries are no exception. This delicious recipe has been taken from the BBC Good Food Guide website.

- 8 digestive biscuits

- 50g butter , melted
- 600g cream cheese
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 175g caster sugar
- vanilla extract
- 2 eggs plus 1 yolk
- 142ml pot soured cream
- 300g raspberries
- icing sugar

Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C) or gas mark 4. Crush the digestive biscuits in a food processor (or put in a plastic bag and bash with a rolling pin). Mix with 50g melted butter. Press into a 20-cm spring-form tin and bake for 5 minutes; then cool.

Beat the cream cheese with the flour, sugar, a few drops of vanilla extract, the eggs and extra yolk, and the pot of soured cream until light and fluffy. Stir in **half** of the raspberries and pour into the tin. Bake for 40 minutes and then check; it should be set but slightly wobbly in the centre. Leave in the tin to cool.

Using the remaining raspberries, keep a few for the top as decoration and put the rest in a pan with 1 tbsp icing sugar. Heat until juicy and then squash with a fork. Push through a sieve. Serve the cheesecake with the raspberry sauce and raspberries.

Contributions to the Newsletter

If you have any interesting articles, recipes, news or views that you would like to share with others in the Newsletter, please phone or email the Editor using the contact details on Page 1. We are always very grateful for contributions from the members of HWDAA – think of all the combined years of gardening experience that can be drawn on to share with the members!

Your Editor.