

Allotment Newsletter Spring 2022

Spring came upon us with a burst of sunshine and gloriously warm weather but as soon as I had optimistically sown some seeds in the warm earth it turned really cold again. Why was I surprised? It happens every year.

Every Spring brings new hopes, new ideas, and new challenges. Here are some ideas and tips from allotment holders to help us on our way.

Swap Table

The swap table was set up for allotment holders to exchange seeds, seedlings, plants and cuttings. (Thank you to the person who left some rhubarb roots. They have provided many rhubarb crumbles over the years.)

What it is not is an area to leave any unwanted items that people have no further use for. Over the years we have had mattresses, chairs (broken), plant pots (no one needs more of these!), broken tools and many other bizarre items. You may have missed seeing some of these as committee members take it upon themselves to take these items to the dump. As you know the committee members work very hard to maintain and manage our plots and do not need this extra work.

So please only put stuff on the table that others can use to grow plants and vegetables on their allotments. **No Rubbish please**

Maine Klein

Proposed addition to by-law on location of sheds

There have been several shed fires on our site over the years with considerable destruction to people's gardening tools and other possessions. Sometimes, the fire has started in one shed and

spread to another close by. To work towards at least the containment of fire damage in the future the committee is proposing that any NEW sheds or other structures should be built a minimum distance away from the plot boundary AND a minimum distance away from any other shed/ structure on the same plot – in other words , with a 'fire break'.

The wording of the proposed amendment to **Sheds and other fixtures, By-Law 21** is as follows:

'A clear gap of 1.5 metres is required and must be maintained between any shed/structure and any plot boundary (front, back or either side). A clear gap of 2 metres is required and must be maintained between any shed/structure and any other shed/structure on the same plot.'

This amendment will be put to the AGM in June for its approval. Please note, this only applies to the erection of NEW sheds and other structures – we do not expect anyone to move the old ones!

Please let us know if you have any comments or suggestions.

Janet Francis

Trampolines



Unfortunately, despite previous warnings to secure trampolines, recent storms led to

trampolines being blown around our site. This could have resulted in damage to cultivated areas, fruit trees, structures including glasshouses and most worryingly, to people. More everyday concerns include the safety of users (where responsibility lies with the trampoline owner and parents/carers of the users) and that plots should be used for the cultivation of vegetable or fruit crops – trampolines do not satisfy this condition of our lease.

The committee has been monitoring these issues. On 13 March, after the storm events, the committee voted to phase out trampolines on our site, as follows:

1. No new trampolines;
2. Existing trampoline owners should assess the condition of their trampolines and whether they still need them. If in good, safe condition and thoroughly secured, they may stay on their existing plot until they have been outgrown, then removed from the site;
3. Existing trampolines to be dismantled and safely stored away from wind for the months of October – March inclusive.

Summer Squash



Grow some Summer Squash this year

The squash family is large and includes summer squash, pumpkins, courgettes and marrow. Summer squash plants can make from three to ten fruits.

Sowing: Sow mid to late April inside in 5cm modules or small pots to reduce the risk of waterlogging. Within two weeks there should be

two large leaves with roots filling the compost. Transfer the rootball into a 7cm or 9cm pot (the distance across the top of the pot) and keep under cover to grow fast in the warm afternoons of early May.

Planting: Plant out when risk of frost is over, plants should have two to four true leaves. Set the rootball below surface level and place plants about a metre apart in all directions, then water in.

Use to cover weedy patches: The wide spacing makes them brilliant for weedy areas. Spread a 3-7cm layer of compost over the weeds, then lay black polythene over the area which will kill the weeds, retain moisture and warm up the soil all at the same time. Cut squares through the plastic and make planting holes with a trowel.

Care: Almost no care is needed – slugs don't eat transplants. The plants ramble over long distances, and running stems can be cut off or folded back over the main area of growth. These plants do their own self pruning and growth regulation so there's no need to thin fruits and you will probably see a few rotting fruits. Leave the developing fruits on the soil or on compost or polythene. Cut back any leaves that are shading the fruit to help ripening.

Harvesting: Cut the fruit (with a few inches of stem) when the stalks are dry and a yellowish or brown colour, and the skins feel hard. If you're not sure whether they are fully ripe you can cure them by keeping them warm for a week at 25C

Storing: Squash need a warm dry place (a centrally heated room is perfect) to prevent mould which eats into the fruit via the stem.

Saving Seed: You want to make sure that your flowers aren't cross-pollinating with other types. Choose an unopened female flower (it will have a small swollen embryonic fruit at its base) and cover it with a paper bag until it opens. Then pick a male flower (showier and tend to hang out on long skinny stalks) to brush on it for pollination and cover again. Mark the squash as the one containing true-to-variety seeds (and cross your fingers)

Recommended varieties –

Red and Blue Kuri mature early are well suited to cooler areas and have 1kg fruits of excellent flavour. They store for six months.

Crown Prince has grey skin and orange flesh, superb flavour and dense texture, store up to 9 months. The fruits weigh 3-4kg

Marina di Choggia is a deeply ribbed squash with an amazing flavour which stores for up to 7 months.

Butternut fruits store for 8-9 months. Harrier F1 and Hunter F1 for 1kg fruit. Butterscotch for larger 2kg squash.

Thanks to Charles Dowding from April's Gardening Which for this article.

There are a few packets of squash seed in the trading shed – Blue Kiri, Crown Prince, Butternut and Turks Turban.

Liz Hanchet

Comfrey



If you have Comfrey on your plot now is the time to cut the leaves to make some great plant food. Comfrey has a deep tap root which mines all the good stuff deep in the soil and the leaves are rich in nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus. The bees love the flowers, so once the flowers are over cut all the leaves and stems 5 or 10cm from the ground and use these to make a liquid feed.

There are two ways of making the liquid feed from the leaves, one involves leaving the leaves in a container in water to decompose for 4 weeks but this results in a very pungent smelly liquid.

So a better way is to pile as many leaves and stems as you can into an old compost bag, having cut a corner off the bottom of the bag to allow the liquid to slowly drain out as the leaves decompose. Position the bag over a container (a bucket will do) to catch the liquid as it drains out. I put a brick on the top of the bag to weight it down and keep it in place. Check the bag occasionally because as the contents shrink the bag can topple over. Over the summer I usually

have a couple of bags on the go and leave them behind the shed until I have time to strain the liquid off into old milk bottles. This concentrated liquid needs diluting at roughly 1:15 parts water before feeding to your plants. Use once a week for pots with tomatoes, chillies, aubergines, cucumbers and other fruits once the flowers appear. And for plants in the ground when they look as if they need a little boost.

If you're too busy to do this then you can just cut the leaves and lay them as a mulch or add them to the compost heap.

You need a couple of plants – ask neighbours for root cuttings if you don't have any. They grow about a metre tall and as wide, have a tendency to self-seed, and are difficult to remove so site them carefully.

LizHanchet

Weeds on the roads

Despite March going out on a very chilly note, it is Spring. And one of the first signs of this – other than trilling birds and burgeoning blossom – is the resurgence of weeds. Bad enough on plots, even worse when they are growing through the tarmac of our roads! As weeds force their way up, they can do significant damage to the road surface, so we are asking each plotholder to get rid of them from the road in front of their plot. They can be removed by either digging them out or giving them a squirt with a suitable weed killer. Please help, it could save us money in the long run and our roads are not cheap.

Lynn Coleman

Bonfire Survey

Thanks to all of you who returned our questionnaire. We had nearly 50 responses from across the site, many with quite thoughtful suggestions.

Some of you wanted no change to the current regulations: others wanted a complete ban on burning. But the majority opinion agreed with some further restrictions on burning. This would require a change to our By-Laws. The committee is looking at how to take this forward and will be putting proposals to the AGM in June.

Lynn Coleman

Seasonal Recipe

Ingredients

- 75g butter
- 100g golden caster sugar
- 2 vanilla pods , seeds scraped out
- 3 Bramley apples , peeled and chopped
- 600g rhubarb , cut into even chunks
- 100g stem ginger , finely chopped
- clotted cream sprinkled with ground ginger, to serve

For the topping

- 200g plain flour
- 100g cold butter , diced
- 85g jumbo rolled oats
- 85g light brown soft sugar
- 100g shelled pistachios , chopped

Method

STEP 1

Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. First, make the topping. In a bowl, rub the flour and butter together with your fingertips until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add in the oats and sugar, and stir with a wooden spoon to form a coarse crumble.

STEP 2

Spread out the crumble in an even layer on a baking tray and bake in the centre of the oven for 15 mins until golden, with larger clusters of crumble formed. Once the mixture has cooled slightly, stir through the nuts.

STEP 3

Next, make the crumble filling. Melt the butter in a heavy-based saucepan, then add the sugar and vanilla, and give everything a good stir. Tip in the apple and cook for 5 mins, stirring constantly, until the apples have turned into a thick purée. Once the apples have broken down, add the rhubarb and ginger. Stir well, then simmer for 5 mins until the rhubarb has just

begun to soften. Pour the filling into a bowl and leave to cool.

STEP 4

Once ready to eat, divide the crumble filling into six individual pie dishes, or one larger dish if you prefer, then top with the crumble topping. Can be assembled a day ahead and kept in the fridge, or frozen. To reheat from frozen, cook for an extra 15 mins until piping hot throughout. Bake in the centre of the oven for 15 mins, until bubbling throughout. Serve with the clotted cream.