

# Allotment Newsletter

## Summer 2022

East Finchley Allotment Holders Association

### **Neglect goes a long way**

I have spent less time on my allotment this year than on other years as I had to have a hip operation. I was afraid that I would get a “dirty plot letter“ as it was getting so overrun but managed to persuade my husband to give a hand. The result was that the plot was partially cultivated and not too neglected. However, the fruit the artichokes and asparagus that don't need much care were more prolific they have ever been. My freezer is full and we have summer pudding coming out of our ears.

### **Our Allotment community**

I was thinking when writing this newsletter about what a sharing caring group of people we have on our allotments. Over the many years that I have worked there I have had so much help and advice from other plot holders. People help each other in so many ways, for example:

- The person who advised me to plant broad beans and sweet corn when I was worried that I had left it too late. You were right. They are doing well.
- The person who gave me some hollyhocks that I planted 2 years ago. They are thriving and give me much pleasure .
- The person who helped me install my pond. I still haven't had any frogs visiting but I am hopeful.

The various people who

- water my plot when I am away.
- give me surplus cabbages, potatoes and beetroot . I often return from the allotment with more produce given to me than produce that I have grown.

Thank you all .

### **Report from the AGM**

This year's Annual General Meeting of the Allotment Association was held on Sunday 26th June at the allotments. We welcomed the following new members to the committee: David Holt and John Kyriakides

#### **1. Formal adoption of a complaints procedure.**

The Chair explained that the Association had now formally adopted a complaints policy and procedure, and a document had been circulated to plotholders for information (copies are also available in the shed).

### **East Finchley Allotment Society Complaints Procedure**

#### **What is a complaint?**

##### **Our objectives**

Our aim is that complaints about allotment matters should be dealt with:

- Impartially
- Objectively
- Complainants will be treated with respect and will not receive adverse treatment if they have made a complaint

##### **Our complaints policy**

If you have a complaint, please contact us with full details by completing a short form and handing it to someone on the Allotment Committee. Copies of the form can be obtained from the Trading Shed, or the website or by sending an email to the Allotment Secretary.

##### **The process**

- o We will strive to handle any complaints quickly and satisfactorily
- o We will be able to raise the matter with the committee if the initial decision/outcome does not meet your expectations

### **What will happen next?**

- o Where we agree to investigate a complaint someone will be appointed to investigate
- o We will send you a letter acknowledging receipt of your complaint
- o We will then investigate your complaint
- o You may be invited to discuss and hopefully resolve the complaint with someone designated to deal with it
- o The person reviewing your complaint will let you know their decision.
- o If the outcome is less than expected you will be invited to discuss your reasons with the allotment committee.

### **Amendments to By-laws 21 and 20.**

On the Agenda this year were proposed amendments to two of our By-laws for the AGM to vote on

**The aim of the proposed amendment to By-law 21 on Sheds and other fixtures** was to ensure that NEW sheds or any other structure on a plots are built with a ‘fire break’. The wording is as follows: ‘A clear gap of 1.5 meters is required and must be maintained between the shed/structure and any plot boundary (front, back or either side). A clear gap of 2 meters is required and must be maintained between any shed/structure and any other shed/structure on the same plot.’

The AGM agreed this amendment. (And if you are thinking of putting up a shed please get in contact with Sean Cassidy, our Vice-Chairman, for advice on location, shed size and height.)

**By-law 20 deals with bonfires.** There were two proposed amendments to this By-law. The first removes the provision for Summer burning - bonfires would no longer be allowed on the first Wednesday of the

months of May to September. The second shortens the Winter burning period by allowing bonfires ONLY in the months November to March – bonfires would not be allowed in October or April. The AGM agreed both these amendments. By-law 20 is now as follows:

Bonfires for the burning of vegetable matter may be lit by allotment holders on their plots only:

- at any time or any day during the months of November to March but not before 1pm on Sundays.

When permitted, bonfires must be kept under control at all times and not left unattended, and must be completely extinguished before the Tenant leaves the site. Plastic or other material that might cause foul smoke or dangerous fumes must not be burnt on bonfires. ‘

The meeting discussed getting a green skip though it was noted that there are issues with skips on site – people can throw stuff in that they shouldn’t – but we might be able to hire one on a ‘one-off’ basis as a trial. There was also the possibility of a shredder/chipper to deal with woody waste if we could sort out the problems of on-site storage and a shredder operator.

### **Election of Committee Members**

Four new members were nominated, seconded and voted onto the Committee: Richard Goldwater, Thomas Lane, David Holt, and John Kyriakides. Julia has stepped down, and Richard Goldwater will take over her work as Treasurer and Company Secretary. Lynn has resigned as Administrative Secretary. A complete list of Committee members can be found in the Newsletter.

### **More help needed**

Our Chair pointed out that we need people to step forward and help with the running of the allotment. In particular, we need someone to take on the role of Secretary.

The Chair underlined the problems we would have if people didn’t step up and take on the

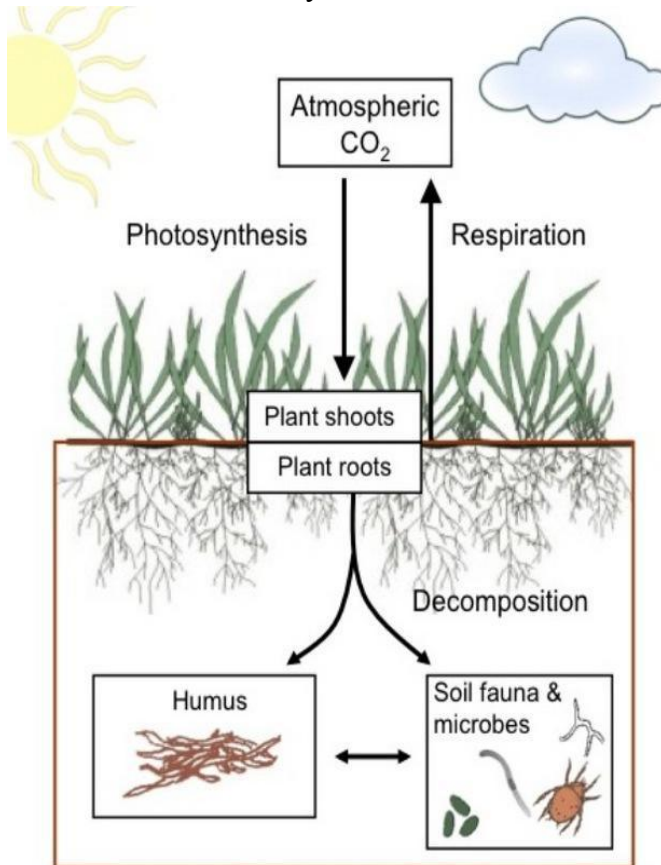
work of committee officers in managing the allotments. These task would fall de facto to the younger generation of ploholders and it would be up to them to secure the future of a site

## What is the Carbon Cycle?

Atmospheric carbon dioxide is going up. Did you know, though, that worldwide, soils contain 3 times the amount of carbon as there is in the atmosphere? This is a vital sink for CO<sub>2</sub>. However farming, in particular 20<sup>th</sup> century techniques have resulted in a 50 – 70% decrease globally in the amount of carbon held in soils. Fortunately, there are ways to reverse this loss.

So what does carbon being contained in soil actually mean? The following picture from the journal *Nature*

(Ontl, T. A. & Schulte, L. A. (2012) Soil Carbon Storage. *Nature Education Knowledge* 3(10):35) illustrates the Carbon Cycle:



As plants photosynthesise they use the sun’s energy to fix atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and convert it to sugar, then build this into cellulose and lignin to make plant tissues, including roots and wood. When the plant dies – unless it is removed – the cellulose is left on the soil surface and is

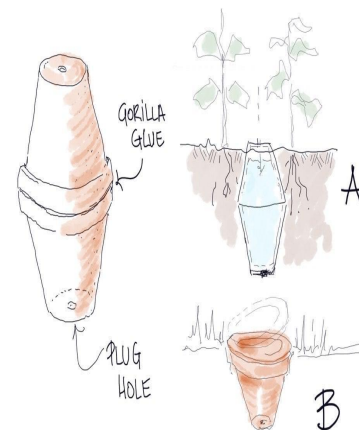
rapidly dragged down by the action of earthworms where it remains as Soil Organic Carbon (SOC). Some of this carbon recycles back into atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> but some is converted into humus and remains in the soil. Humus is what gives “rich” soils their darker colour – compare the yellow-grey of London clay to the black earth (Chernozem) which is found metres deep in former steppe grassland in Ukraine and which has traditionally allowed the cultivation of so much wheat and sunflowers.

There are huge advantages to having soil with high quantities of carbon stored as humus – better water retention, better availability of nutrients, improved soil structure – in fact everything you want to grow great veg.

In the next issue we will give tips on how to increase the humus in your soil...watch this space!

**Liz Sheridan**

## The Olla Technique for watering



Ollas are traditionally used in warm countries to provide a source of humidity to plants minimising the need to irrigate large surfaces. The idea is that you create a water reservoir of porous material, bury it in the ground as deep as you can whilst leaving the top at soil level so you can top the water up (but not allow much evaporation) and plant vegetables around it. The roots will naturally go towards the olla and “suck” water out, but at a relatively steady pace. You will water less often and more “strategically”.

That's the theory at least ;-)

I've done it in the last few years and actually found that the veggies around the ollas were clearly suffering less from my inconsistent watering efforts...

Assuming that unglazed terracotta pots are still around (I've managed to find them at B&Q on super sale a couple of years ago!), there are two possible methods:

A) requires the use of 2 pots and superglue (I've found that Gorilla glue is good even on porous substrates)- you just have to glue to pots across the rim, and plug one of the holes with a cork or something relatively durable if left in the ground. This has the advantage that you can use two small pots (10-15cm diameter), hold relatively good amount of water, and they reach pretty much down once put in the ground

B) you can just use a bigger pot with a lid; but it takes more space in the bed and it does not reach much depth.

**Claudia Cherin**

## **Strulch the mulch for organic gardeners.**

Hurry while stocks last!

We are again stocking Strulch in the shed. It is available in 13.5k bulk bags (covering up to 4.5 square metres) for £13. A bargain compared with prices in the shops (often £13 for 9kg bags). It is not only a mulch (much needed in this hot dry weather) but also a slug and snail deterrent due to its physical properties together with the embedded minerals.

Strulch is manufactured in Britain from locally sourced quality wheat straw with added iron minerals. The process stabilises and colours the straw producing an easy-to-use garden mulch. Use on borders, raised beds, around cultivated fruit and on vegetable plots. Leave on beds for more than one year or work into the soil at the end of the season to improve soil structure and drainage.

Remove existing weeds and spread around established plants and shrubs to a depth of 3-4 cm on bare soil leaving space around the stems. Water the mulch to fix it in

place. Wear gloves when handling as it may contain traces of iron which will be absorbed by the straw after spreading. Keep away from sources of ignition when dry.

## **Mares Tails and how to get rid of them**



Mare's tail or horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) is an invasive, deep-rooted perennial weed. Its upright shoots at first sight look like rather attractive little fir trees until you realise that unless pulled out and controlled they can take over your plot.

Your mare's tail may have come from spores, but it usually arrives via rhizomes from neighbouring gardens, or stem fragments in composts or manures. It is almost impossible to eradicate mare's tail

completely, but with patience and persistent weeding you can greatly lessen it.

Mare's tail dies down in the winter and in the spring it starts to appear again. The first stems often have a cone-like structure at the end which is full of spores - pick these as soon as they appear otherwise the spores will float off and settle somewhere else in your plot. I have a spare kerbside bin into which I put every bit of mare's tail I find. When this is full it gets bagged up and taken home for the council black bin - which either goes to landfill or for burning. Don't whatever you do put it in the green waste bin.

New shoots will keep appearing all summer. Where possible use a narrow trowel to dig out the shoot as far down as possible - with a little bit of digging and tugging you can often pull out a good 6cm or more of root (rather like a brown shoelace) which is infinitely satisfying. Aim to dig at least 2"

down anyway before pulling out a shoot. Shallow, occasional weeding is not so effective so leave this for places where it is impossible to dig.

If you are digging a new bed do it slowly and carefully, looking for the brown roots as you go and following them down as deep as you can to get as much of the root out as possible. And dispose of each bit of root into a special bin kept for the purpose – any bit left in will just take off again!

Our plot E10 was overgrown and infested with mare's tail when we took it over about 7 years ago. In order to cope, we started by making just a few beds surrounded by paths and we dug these beds almost inch by inch removing every bit of root we found. The paths we covered with black weed-proofing material and then wood chip. This was as much to hide the sight of the wretched stuff as to try to stop the mare's tail spreading! When we lifted the matting much later, sometimes the roots were growing palely along underneath and these were easy to pull out, and in other places they seemed to have disappeared altogether.

There is still mare's tail all over the plot but it is much more isolated and we try to pull it up as soon as it appears. I treat it as the enemy and am always pleased to think that every pull will be weakening it. The mare's tail in the grass under the fruit trees is kept in check just by mowing.

If you have to use chemicals then apply tough weedkiller in late summer when growth is strong. Before using you will need to bruise the shoots with a rake or your boots to ensure the weedkiller penetrates. And you will need to keep doing this for a number of years.

Good luck and keep at it. Your persistence and patience will be rewarded!

**Liz Hanchet**