

## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2015

### A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

You'll all know Mary Thorp who has been penning these newsletters for many years, and has finally decided it's time to hang up her committee boots in favour of her gardening ones. In her "I'm Signing off" section at the foot of this newsletter you'll note she's given the Society 25 years of service, and on behalf of everyone I'd like to say a very big Thank You Mary!

I'll also take this opportunity to thank the Committee members for all their hard work this year, much of which goes unseen. And to all our members - have a great Christmas and New Year, and wishing you happy gardening in 2016!

Duncan Hoadley

### THE SUMMER SHOW 2015

The weather was terrible but the entries were excellent!

Pest and disease had been a problem this year because of the warmish winter which meant that slugs and snails had been rampant, chomping their way through anything green, fungal diseases such as Onion Rot and later Brown Spot Rot on Apples had destroyed some produce.

Overall everything was a few weeks later than last year, some crops which normally would have been over by September, when we usually have The Show, were still available. The dry summer up to August meant that Blight on tomatoes and potatoes had made a late appearance giving many plot holders with earlier ripening tomatoes, bumper crops.

The results of the weather showed up in the entries with some magnificent tomatoes especially Cherry Tomatoes to which I had to give 4 firsts, good to see plenty of different varieties on display. Runner Beans were very good

(no "stringy" beans ) but there were fewer French Beans and not of the high quality of last year. There were some very nice small

beetroots, courgettes and garlic, on the whole better than last year, and very good Sweetcorn which hadn't suffered the usual attacks by foxes. The displays of mixed vegetables were very good with some interesting vegetables being presented though it would be nice to see a little more imagination in the way they are shown. Potatoes too were good (unlike most of my potatoes which had been feasted on by slugs!) I ignored the fact that most of the "Marrows" were probably overgrown courgettes!

Fruit was dominated by apples not surprising with this year's bumper harvest along with good entries of raspberries and Blackberries. Maybe next year more of us should try experimenting growing more unusual fruits for "Any other fruit"

One thing that surprised me was that there were very few entries in the flower section. The allotments this year have looked really bright with some lovely flowers among the vegetables but people were possibly put off from entering by the torrential rain.

The Children's entries were all wonderful. I was tempted to give everyone a first prize. Somehow we have to tempt more children to enter, maybe more cups for prizes or get them to come up with ideas for the Younger Competitors Section?

Our Allotment Bake-Off judge Adrienne Cleasby reported that there were far more entries than last year, particularly in the Preserves section. There were a huge number of new entrants which was great, and the standard of preserves was excellent. Soft Fruit Jam had the most entries, and the Marmalade section was commended for being well-flavoured with good sets. Adrienne suggests that next year the show schedule is sent out earlier so that chutneys and suchlike which need time for the flavours to develop can be made earlier in the year.

In the Cookery Category there was fierce competition in the White Loaf section which had the highest increase of entries, and overall the number of entries was higher than last year. In the Children's Category Adrienne was particularly pleased that there were entries from all age groups. The standard was high and she would like to see even more children participating next year, especially in the decorated cupcakes.

**OVERALL WINNERS** with most points were John and Monica Hynd with particularly good entries of peppers and aubergines.

**PLOT WINNERS** Deciding the Plot winners is always a very difficult task and I rely on the judgement of the Site Reps. who see the plots throughout the year. Walking through the different sites is always a delight, full of surprises at what everyone is growing and some of the imaginative ways they have designed their plots. We look for quantity and quality of produce, cultivation standards (tidiness etc.), Pest and Disease controls, encouragement of (good) wildlife, Composting and recycling.

**OVERALL WINNER** this year was Roger Trollop, Plot 2 Priory with a lovely hidden away allotment where the children love to come and see his secret Rock Garden.

**RUNNERS UP:** Rachid Belmoktar 48 Hertford, Mark and Anne Plot 75 Priory, Nick and Harriet Hinton Palewell Pavilion, Eileen and Rod Colpus Plot 3 Priory, Emily Coates Plot 11 Priory and many more.....

**SENIOR OVERALL WINNER:** John Edgar, Plot 29 Hertford, who keeps telling me he knows nothing about gardening. He took over a jungle and turned it into a truly immaculate plot with a magnificent show of cabbages this year!

**RUNNERS-UP:** Jenny Jeffries Plot 9, Hertford Isabel and Percy Kimber Plot 72 Priory, Tally Foster Plot 8 Palewell Fields and more.....

**NOVICE OVERALL WINNERS::** Kay and George Brock Palewell Fields,

**RUNNERS-UP:** Helen Lawrence Hertford, and Susan Moore - Priory

### **THE JOB OF THE ALLOTMENT SECRETARIES**

Susan Moore and Aileen Izett now share the hard work of Allotment Secretary. At the moment there is a Waiting List of well over 300 over our 5 Allotment Sites, an extra 50 applicants have been added since the last Newsletter. Some people have had to wait for many

years before they get their allotments and while most new allotment holders do a good job of tidying up their plot and growing produce in the first year at least , things often go down-hill in the second year. There are a few people who don't do anything but let the weeds grow, and then complain when the warning letters arrive.....Between them Susan and Aileen have had to send out over a 1000 emails concerning the allotments, they regularly inspect the plots with the help of the Site Reps and meet every week to discuss the best way to help every-one get the most from their allotments. If you are not sure about taking on an allotment please let Susan and Aileen know (contact details at end of newsletter.

There are times when you are not able to look after your plot (illness, travel, family reasons) At least one plot-holder has employed professional gardeners to tidy-up and replant her allotment, you can have help on your plot **BUT YOU MUST ALWAYS BE PRESENT** to supervise (or ask another plot-holder to supervise for you)

**BRAG** meets regularly with representatives from all Allotment Sites in the Richmond Borough.

At their AGM in November it put forward the following topics for urgent discussion with The Council:

- Waiting Lists (3000 in the whole Borough). Different Sites approach the problem in different ways and The Council's policy is unclear.
- There is a possibility of Richmond Council merging with Wandsworth , how will this effect Allotment services is unclear ( Wandsworth charges higher rents)
- Information is to be sought from The Council on the previous use of Allotment Sites in case of possible land contamination.

**THE TRADING SHED** is open alternate Saturdays and Sundays in Nov. and Dec. (see notice Boards) and will be closed for Christmas after Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> until Jan. 9<sup>th</sup>

All the garlic bulbs have been sold and there will be no onion sets for sale this spring but Seed Potatoes will arrive in the Shed as usual at the end of January.

Don't forget to pick up your Kings Seeds catalogue form The Shed, there is no deadline for orders and you will get a 50% discount on all seeds ( see posters on gates and notice boards).

And if you are wondering about the digging operations round the side of The Shed..... Over the winter I will be planting some prickly shrub roses along the side of the Shed to improve the appearance of the area and hopefully and make thieves think twice before they climb onto the roof.

**BEWARE OF FIRE.** Just a reminder this is the time when many of you make Bonfires, please make sure you do not cause annoyance to the locals with smoke and make sure all fires are completely out when you leave. Get yourself a dust-bin incinerator which is the safest way to burn any debris from your allotment. And please do not store any gas or petrol on your allotment for your own safety and damage that could be caused by trespassers on the sites.

## AUTUMN ON THE PLOTS

### MULCHING

Mulching means covering an area of ground with either organic material such as manure or bark chippings or inorganic mulches like plastic or grit. It is a job that can be done at any time of the year  
Mulching has several effects on the soil:

1. Controlling weeds
2. Keeping moisture in the soil
3. Altering the temperature of the soil and the air just above it.
4. Helping soil structure.
5. Adding nutrients to the soil.
6. Helping to keep crops clean and disease free.

All these effects can be achieved if the right mulch is supplied at the right time. If you use a loose mulch organic mulch such as straw or compost it needs to be laid in a layer at least 4ins deep to be effective but if you want to clear ground of perennial weeds such as

Bindweed or Ground Elder you will need something like black Plastic which needs to be put down when the weeds are beginning to grow in the spring and left in place until the following autumn, though if you have a very bad problem with something like Bindweed or Mares-Tails then it will have to be left down for another year.

## **BIODEGRADABLE MULCHES**

1. Compost, provides nutrients, use on veg. crops with a long growing period eg. Brussel Sprouts, Broccoli
2. Well-rotted Manure, don't use fresh it will burn your crops, use for currant bushes, roses.
3. Straw, good insulator and keeps fruit crops like Strawberries clean. May contain chemical weed killers.
4. Leafmould, looks good and provides some nutrients over a long period. Leaf mould made from Oak Leaves is best. Don't use street leaves for making Leafmould as they often have a high lead content.
5. Lawn-Mowings, can contain herbicides, best mixed with other mulches such as straw, needs to be topped up regularly and can introduce annual weed grasses to soil.
6. Forest Bark, should have been composted before sale to get rid of fungal disease and resins, check to see if inorganic nitrogen Has been added to help with composting. This mulch can help with weed control and possibly pest and disease. Add fertiliser before putting round shrubs and plants as an ornamental mulch.
7. Sawdust needs to have been weathered for several months by spreading out on the ground otherwise if used fresh can cake and repel water. Dig in some fertiliser before using round crops.
8. Woodchips, shredded prunings etc. makes a long lasting mulch, you will need to add fertiliser to the soil before putting round trees or shrubs, beware of introducing disease if not shop-bought.
9. Mushroom Compost, should only be from organic mushroom growers, otherwise can contain insecticide residues. Will always contain high levels of chalk so good for crops such as brassicas.

## INORGANIC MULCHES

1. Plastic Mulches: Black plastic is best for suppressing weeds, clear plastic is useful in the spring to warm up areas before sowing the first crops. They will conserve water in the soil but watering can be a problem later in the season.
2. Finely woven black plastic film is more expensive but suppresses weeds and lets water into the soil.

If putting plastic or any other inorganic mulch round plants or crops prepare the ground first by digging in plenty of manure and fertiliser.

## PLANTS FOR GROWING AND SOWING LATE IN THE YEAR

Plant garlic and Japanese onion sets now if you have not already done so.

These plants need a period of cold soil temperatures before developing into mature plants the following spring and summer. Try sowing onions in modules in Jan.- Feb. in a cool greenhouse or on a window sill, they are easy to plant out in about March and you will have more choice of varieties

Broad beans can be sown in modules for planting out in the ground when about 4 ins high chose 'Aquadulce Claudia' if you sow now, or wait until Feb.-March and sow in modules 'The Sutton' or 'Witkiem Manita'. The advantage of sowing now is that the plants are much tougher than the later sown varieties and seem to suffer less from attacks of Blackfly in the late spring.

Prune Apple, Pear and other "Top-Fruit" trees now. "Stone-Fruit" trees like cherries, peaches or plums leave until May to prevent fungal diseases developing. Cut out all old fruiting stems of soft fruit such as Raspberries and Blackberries and tie in the new shoots in fans or espaliers, feed with Bone-Meal and mulch with manure (Country Natural). Remove the old leaves from the base of Strawberries and any straw from the summer crops (a haven for slug eggs) and mulch with manure. Plant any strong "runners" that have rooted.

## FOOD FOR A COLD WINTERS DAY: ROMANIAN POTATO PANCAKE

Recipe for 4 hungry people:

2 large potatoes peeled and grated into a bowl.  
4 eggs lightly beaten in a separate bowl.  
1 large onion finely chopped  
3 cloves of garlic finely chopped  
4 oz. of strong cheese e.g. cheddar, gruyere or parmesan  
Salt and pepper to taste  
A small bunch of finely chopped Dill.  
(you can add finely chopped mushrooms or leeks, bacon, ham or spicy smoked sausage)  
Gently mix all the ingredients together.  
Pour enough oil to coat the bottom of a non-stick frying pan and place over a moderate heat, pour the potato pancake mix into the frying pan and cook until the mixture becomes firm, then put the pancake under the grill to make the top crisp and crunchy.  
Eat hot or cold and enjoy!

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### **I'M SIGNING OFF!**

This is my last newsletter as I am retiring after 25 years, from the committee. It all goes back to the “Hurricane” of the last century in the 1980s when the Trading Shed was blown down and the committee did not want to get a new one until they had a volunteer to take on the job of Trading Shed Manager. So at the AGM, much to the consternation of all present, I said I would do the job and became a member of the committee in 1991. I was pretty hopeless as a manager but we still have the Shed and I have been on the Committee doing a variety of jobs ever since. I’m sure there must be someone out there who has the technical and creative skills to take over as Newsletter Editor. In the meantime I will still be on my allotments and I wish you all a Happy Christmas and productive New Year.