

May 2008 Newsletter

Committee News

At our last meeting on 22nd May, having received advice from the National Society, we decided that five pole plots will be let out by the Society on a Tenancy basis. We now have in place a Tenancy Agreement and have written to all on the waiting list to see if anyone is interested in taking on one of the smaller plots. If any member of the Society wishes to move to a smaller plot, please write to the secretary in time for the next Committee meeting on 19th June.

Most of the Committee were present for the field inspection on 20th May. We are concerned about the cultivation of 9 plots and are in the process of contacting the relevant members about our concerns.

We have decided that another Working Party will be needed to clear and tidy a number of areas on the field. This will take place in the Autumn.

Membership

Due to illness, Mr Malcolm Cook has decided to give up one of his plots. We are writing to the 20 people on the waiting list to see if anyone would like to have a 5 pole plot and so will reassign Mr Cook's plot once we have heard from them all.

Bonfires

Please remember that there is a ban on bonfires from 1st June until 30th September. Please DO NOT light fires during this period. If there is a very wet summer, the Committee will meet to decide whether or not to lift the ban and Society members will be informed.

Found

The key of a Fiat car has been found on the field – on the middle track. It is with the secretary if you wish to claim it.

Reminder

A few people still have to pay their pole charges. Please do so as soon as possible. If you wish, you can hand over the money to any Committee member and a receipt will be sent to you.

Secretary (Marie) contact details: 01908 585284
secretary@wsallotmentsociety.co.uk

A View from the Field by Peter Leadbeater

Looking back at my 2007 diary, I see that we had our first 'real' amount of rain since March on 7th May. You will no doubt remember that it was an exceptionally dry April last year. This year, I feel many things are behind on my plot, however, time generally balances everything out. Due to the price of seed particularly F1 varieties, I grow many of my plants where I have greenhouses and cold frames. All brassicas, runner beans, marrows, courgettes, cucumbers, sweetcorn and tomatoes are treated this way. When I plant them on the plot I water them in and never again until they begin to crop. This encourages roots to go down in search of moisture. During dry weather I water runner beans frequently but only whilst they are cropping.

Things to do (May – June):

- Keep crops free of weeds by regular hoeing. I find a draw hoe the best tool for this work as there is more control of the blade and I can work much closer to the crop. Looking around garden centres, the Dutch hoe is more common especially those with stainless steel blades. Although stainless steel looks nice they do not keep a sharp edge as well as those with carbon steel blades.
- Earth up potatoes as required, again, a draw hoe is ideal for this.
- Plant out Brussels plants and protect.
- Erect supports for runner beans; 8 foot bamboo canes are perfect – either in rows or wig-wam form. Cable ties are a strong method of fixing as it is

important that the structure can withstand a strong wind when covered with wet foliage.

- Set runner beans, French beans and peas. When climbing beans fail to grow around their support, twist the leader around anticlockwise - it will unwind again if clockwise.
- Sow sweetcorn seed; these require more depth of compost that you usually get in a standard seed tray. (Root trainers are ideal).
- When the danger of frost is over (approx. late May/early June). It is safe to plant out marrows, courgettes, pumpkins, Cucumbers and suitable varieties of tomatoes. When planting out marrows etc. it is best to slightly raise the soil at the planting positions as they suffer from stem rot if water lies around the stem during a wet spell of weather. When you sow the seed direct or into pots put them on edge.
- As May progresses more varieties of brassicas can be sown; autumn cabbage, sprouting broccoli, cauliflower etc. I am trying out cauliflower 'Clapton' this year. Claimed to be club root resistant, but expensive, they are from Kings seeds (the supplier we use for our seed purchased scheme). I'll let you know how I get on with them.
- Soft fruit will be ripening during June – do protect it from birds.
- If you managed to plant some really early potatoes and they survived, you may be able to start digging them at about the end of May and, if you sowed broad beans in the autumn they should be ready then too.
- Cut asparagus spears when they are about 6 inches (15 cm) high. Use a sharp knife and cut just below ground level. Do not take spears after mid-June but allow the fern to develop and feed the plant for next season.

Dates for your diary:

8th July: Second plot inspection
11th July: Plot judging
18th July: Plot Awards evening - your chance to see the winning plots
4th October: Pumpkin Competition
National Allotment Week is 11th – 17th August

Pests

We are working Peter Leadbeater very hard at the moment as he is in the process of writing a series about Pests. Eventually he will be producing a booklet of his advice and this will also be on the website

While Peter advocates the use of sprays we are aware that a number of plot holders try to work their plots organically and will include advice for organic gardeners in the future.

We will start this month with Peter's general advice about pests:

At this time of year a variety of pests start to attack our crops. The list of pesticides available to the home gardener is constantly changing so it is difficult to make specific recommendations. I understand that Derris, considered to be an organic insecticide, is about to be withdrawn from sale. If you do use pesticides, use them sparingly, always read the label, follow the manufacturers instructions and use them safely – and please remember your neighbours may not want chemicals on their plots.

Good husbandry and crop rotation can help keep problems at bay. However, pests can easily transfer from one plot to another and many have probably been on the field for years. I shall be writing about the following pests in the coming months: flea beetle, cabbage root fly, cabbage white fly, pea and bean weevil, aphids, gooseberry sawfly, carrot fly, leather jackets, wireworms, caterpillars, slugs and snails, pea moth, mice, moles, small birds, larger birds, deer and rabbits. This information will also be on the website.

Web Site

We have a small technical hitch with the web site – it should be updated very soon.