

Woburn Sands Allotments Newsletter

August 2010

Awards Evening

Over 70 people attended this year's awards evening which was held on a beautiful evening in July. Congratulations to Jane Roberts who won plot of the year award, Carol and Tony Gale who came second and Peter Toogood, who was third. The best novice award went to Lesley Geddes and two highly commended to novices Deki Hathorn and Abdul Malik. Unfortunately, this year's judge, Bryn Pugh from the NASLG, was ill and unable to present the awards. We were delighted that the Town Mayor, Cllr. Clive Cowmeadow was able, and willing, to make the presentations instead. Our judge did send notes for Clive. His final comment was that *'the standard of cultivation on the Allotment filed is high and is a credit to the Society and its gardeners'*.

Thank you to those who brought food and drink. And a particular 'thank you' to Tina Toogood, who coordinated the food, and to Paul Hamer and Tim Kirkland who cooked on the BBQ.

Photographs of the evening are on the web site.

Committee News

The Committee carried out its' second inspection of the field on 21st July. A few plots are neglected or under cultivated and the individual members concerned have been contacted. Other issues discussed at the last meeting were compost and the working party scheduled for 21st August details are set out in the rest of the newsletter.

Security

A white transit van was seen driving slowly along the centre track. It was able to drive in at the bottom gate and out at the top as both gates were open. The occupants seemed to be very interested in the sheds on either side. Please do not leave valuable items in your shed (for new members information, we had over 40 sheds broken into and many rotavators and mowers stolen last year). For the safety and security of everyone on the field please close and lock all gates at all times.

Share Certificates

These are currently being prepared. The new issue together with the revised ByLaws will be sent out with the Kings Seeds Catalogues as soon as they arrive.

Paving Slabs

A number of paving slabs are available from Blackthorn Grove. If you would like them, please contact Colin on 584212, to make arrangements to collect them.

Chippings for Mulch – available at the bottom of the field – help yourself.

Compost

The Committee had planned to make sure there was a central compost heap at the main entrance to the field and to place others on each of the tracks. However, over the past few weeks there have been many comments from members so at its last meeting, taking into account these views, the Committee reviewed its' proposal. In summary:

- i. The idea of a central compost heap was a suitable response to the situation last year when we were threatened with fines should there be more complaints about bonfires.
- ii. There is a concern that some plot holders will put inappropriate material on the compost heaps which could mean it is contaminated if used on plots.
- iii. The irresponsible and thoughtless behaviour of some plot holders has shown that a central heap cannot work. eg. Items such as plastic bowls, wooden chairs, nail studded battens have been dumped there.
- iv. **For these reasons the Committee has decided to dismantle the central compost heap and NOT to have a central point at anywhere on the field.**
- v. The Committee believes that all plot holders should be expected to have a compost bin on their plot – either bought or made. (There are wooden pallets at three point on the field for plot holders to take and use for compost.)
- vi. There will be a calendared date each year when plot holders can dispose of such items as tree branches.

The original proposal was made to solve the difficulty and we recognise the area at the bottom of the field is a mess, but as has already explained in previous newsletters, we were out manoeuvred by hedgehogs and blackbirds!

Working Party

On 21st August there will be a working party to clear the bottom of the field. If you can spare a few hours to help the Committee would be very grateful. We are intending to make the area where the compost is currently heaped into a car parking area. This area will be fenced off until this work is done. As well as clearing, shredding and strimming we intend to clear and make good the shed under the oak tree. This shed will be used by the Society in future.

If you are able to help with the working party please contact Marie at secretary@wsallotmentsociety.co.uk

Refreshments will be provided so it would be helpful to know if you can be there at any time.

Visit to King Seeds

The original contact with Kings was made after a few people had expressed concerns about their seed. Kings offered to pay for the coach and to take members of the Society on a tour of their factory in Essex.

Nearly 40 people signed up for the visit on 26th June. As the tour of Kings was scheduled for the afternoon we visited the RHS Gardens at Hyde Hall during the morning and had lunch there.

When we arrived at Kings we were greeted by Les Day, the Managing Director and Peter Miller, Purchasing Manager, who took us to see the sweet pea trials. We were taken to see 6 acres of sweet peas in full bloom. The sight was amazing and the perfume magnificent. The seeds are eventually gathered ready for next year. *Photographs of the field are on the web site.*

During our tour of the factory we heard about the history of Kings (which started in a corner shop on Coggershall in 1888). The company now produce seed for most UK seed companies, which was a surprise to us. Most seed is now produced abroad by growers that are exclusive to Kings. As they buy from growers around the world they are trusted, known sources - which means Kings have greater control of the quality of the seed.

Seed bought direct from Kings is guaranteed fresh as they only pack the new season's seed. The seed is stored at 50°C and 6-7% humidity (it was a treat to go into the storage area to cool down as it was a very hot day). The seed is tested regularly for example, parsnip seed is tested each 6 months. In the testing area we were able to see trays of germinating seed which is selected from various batches. One plot holder had asked about Bolthardy beetroot. As Kings had received several complaints about this seed there were several trays of the seed germinating. We were able to see that some of the seeds had germinated white rather than red. We were told that about 8% of this particular batch had germinated white and the Company were in the process of investigating why this had happened.

There are various international laws covering the production and testing of seed. The Ministry carries out spot checks on seed germination. Les was very proud to tell us that they have never had a failure in these spot checks. The law states a minimum 65% germination rate, Kings pride themselves on a minimum rate of 80%.

We learned about the types of seed: F1 varieties, which were first produced in 1947 and which cost 3 times as much as usual seed, were bred specifically for the commercial market and are guaranteed type and time the crops are ready. Open pollinated vary the time crops are ready. Kings also produces organic seed.

The seed is cleaned and packed electronically nowadays. The machines are vacuumed after each seed type is packed and a few empty packs send through to make sure the seed does not get mixed up. We were shown how this all used to be done with the hand tools.

We were very impressed with our tour and the general comments on the return journey were that members are very happy with what they saw and would not be buying from other suppliers in future.

During our tour various tips for germination were offered. These are summarised here:

- ☼ Do not use butt water for seedlings as it is contaminated
- ☼ Use seed compost, not multi-purpose
- ☼ Cucumber – lie seed on wet kitchen paper, put in a plastic bag and put in the airing cupboard for 48 hours –
- ☼ Carrots don't sow too early
- ☼ To test if soil is warm enough place back of you hand on soil. If it feels cold it is too cold to sow.

The reasons seeds don't germinate are usually one or a combination of:

- ☼ Overwatering
- ☼ Sowing too deep
- ☼ Butt water
- ☼ Poor (stale) compost
- ☼ See their web site for more tips

If you do have a problem with Kings seeds, give them a call and they will sort it out. It is helpful if you can explain how you sowed and dealt with the seed and if you keep the foil the seed came in – you can give the lot number which allows Kings to track them.

Many thanks to Treasurer, Paul Hamer for making contact with Kings Seeds and then for organising our visit. It was a very interesting, if somewhat hot day.