

March 2008 Newsletter

Committee News

Bonfires can be a considerable nuisance if you live adjacent to the allotments, especially on a day when a number of plot holders have bonfires at the same time! As we have received complaints from local residents recently the Committee would like to remind all plot holders about bonfires:

These should only be lit on calm days, when the wind is blowing away from Tidbury Close. If the wind changes direction, please douse your bonfire - we do need to be good neighbours.

Our insurance policy states that bonfires must be at least 10m away from buildings, that they should not be left unattended and a means to extinguish should be available (bucket of water).

We are sorry to report that Ralph Pursell has resigned from the Committee. Having been a member for over 30 years, Ralph's invaluable experience will be missed.

There are many more papers than usual for the AGM this year. Please make sure you read the proposed new ByLaws and Constitution and make sure any proposed amendments to these are with the secretary (in writing) by Thursday 10th April at the latest.

Drainage Problems

Thank you for not driving on the field recently. The Bow Brickhill end of the field is like a quagmire which we think is due to drainage problems exacerbated by the number of vehicles that now drive on the field. The water was turned off for a while but with the wet weather it is difficult to identify the precise cause. We have decided to sort out the drainage first. Milton Keynes Council will be clearing the drainage channel on the Bow Brickhill road in the next month or so. We need to clear the channel and pond on our side of the

gate. This will take place on Saturday 19th April. We need some volunteers for a small working party (6-10 people). If you are willing and able, please contact Marie. Peter Leadbeater will be organising us on the day.

A View from the Field by Peter Leadbeater

March/April

Soil conditions can change rapidly in the early part of the year and gardeners must work with the weather and conditions. A common mistake (and I still do it) is to sow small seeds too early and too much at one time. The weeds will probably grow faster than the crops and everything will require hand weeding at the same time. This slow backbreaking job always seems to occur when I am extra busy and so gets neglected which results in partial failure of one or two items. However, generally speaking there is time to set (sow) again.

Things to do:

- Plant onion sets. I always trim off any excess dry material before planting in a shallow drill. I then rake the soil for the next row allowing the drill to partly fill (the sets are just visible). Using this method I find very few are pulled out by birds.
- Sow parsnips. The soil should not have been freshly manured as this can cause the roots to fork. Take out a seed drill and sow a few seeds every 4 inches and eventually thin to leave the strongest seedling. Parsnips are slow to germinate and this spacing allows a small hoe to be used when all the planting stations are visible.
- Brassica seeds, particularly Brussel sprouts can be set. Use a sprinkling of lime along the drill to reduce the risk of club root. Watch out for flea beetle.
- Lettuce, is quick maturing. Sow a few seeds at intervals along the seed drill. Space at about 9 inches for butterhead and crisphead types and 6 inches for

little gem. Thin to one per station when about 1 inch high. You can transplant some of the thinnings which will mature slightly later than those left in their original positions.

- Other vegetables that may be put in now include carrots, onions and spring onions, leeks, beetroot, early peas and broad beans.
- Plant potatoes; all varieties can be planted by the end of April. This year I planted 1 row of 'Swift' and 1 row of 'Rocket' on 13th February and I will let you know how each performs. I have risked a few for 10 years now and never lost them yet - but there is always a first time! Obviously start with earlies and be prepared to pull some soil over them when they first start showing. In 2007, I planted 2 rows of 'Rocket' on 17th February, dug the first on 11th May and regularly from 16th May.
- Spring cabbage beds require cleaning up and a good pinch of sulphate of ammonia sprinkled around each plant. This is very high in nitrogen so do not put too much, otherwise they will be all leaf and not heart up. (Less than ½ teaspoon per plant is plenty). Apply before rain and work into the soil.
- Harvest leeks, parsnips, sprouting broccoli, winter cabbage and cauliflowers as they mature.
- Make sure you protect crops from deer, rabbits, pigeons and small birds. Birds will be nesting and have young to feed - just as your seedlings appear.
- Asparagus, is a good long term crop. For anyone thinking of growing asparagus the planting time for crowns is late March to late April. 1 or 2 year old can be obtained from specialist growers and may have to be purchased by mail order. Modern all male varieties such as 'Gijnim' will give the best results. Well prepared, clean ground is required as asparagus needs a permanent bed. Allow 15 inches between crowns, planting in a trench spreading the roots with the crown about 2 inches below the surface. Do not

cut any spears during the first year and only a small number in the second. Cutting should stop by the middle of June even on an established bed and the fern allowed to grow to build up the plant. A top dressing of well rotted manure should be applied each year and now is the time to do it if you have an established bed.

New Members

Welcome to Rebecca Boobyer, who has taken over her Father-in-law's plot, Brenda Parish and Alison Munroe.

Waiting List

We have a waiting list of 15 people, which shows just how popular having an allotment has become. Over the years a number of plot holders took on extra plots when there were many unworked areas. If you have more than one plot and are considering giving up one of them, perhaps now is a good time to hand over to one of those very keen people.

Rotavation Service

On Saturday 15th March, 8 plots were rotavated. This can be arranged through the secretary or direct with Mrs Stone on 01908 670889. The charge for the service is £25.

Manure

Several loads of manure were delivered to individual plot holders in the Autumn. We now have a source of 'communal' manure which will be put at both ends of the field. Please help yourself.

Field Inspection and Plot Awards

The Committee will make an inspection of the field immediately after Easter. There seem to be a few unworked plots, these will be identified and the plot holders contacted.

We are delighted that John Bates, the Chairman of the Garden Club will be judging the 'Best Plot' this year. The date for judging has yet to be confirmed and will be in the next newsletter. As suggested previously by Paul Hamer, this year we are intending to make an award for 'Best Novice'. Those who have had a plot for less than 2 years will be eligible.

We intend to hold the Plot Awards on the field this year so that the winning plots can be viewed. This will take place in July – details to follow. We are intending to have a barbeque. If you have any ideas about the format of the awards and/or are able to help out in any way, please contact Marie.