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THE GROWER

Information for Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders

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SPREAD THE WORD!

AT first glance your local allotments may appear to have little to offer to the average citizen. A mass of rank undergrowth, lop-sided sheds and old men in flat caps reminiscing about Burma.

This is a great shame.

The allotment reached its peak of popularity during the austere war years of the '30s and '40s, but has been in a near terminal state of decline since then. It used to be a way for the townfolk to provide their families with cheap, healthy vegetables while the farm workers went off to fight in WW11.

Nowadays they are largely populated by the survivors of the war who are too old to work their plots with the vigour of youth, and spend most of their time smoking pipes and telling tales of the great pumpkin harvest of '68.

Where are the young plot-holders to replace this fading breed? As more and more of the older generation move on to the great dahlia bed in the sky or become too ill to turn the brown, crumbly loam, their patches are becoming infested with a tangle of brambles and bindweed.

In an environmentally conscious age, we should be making the most of these green lungs in our city. You can always guarantee that your own vegetables will be chemical free and non genetically modified. Allotments, however provide more than just fresh vegetables for your table. They are a living community crossing age, gender and race barriers. They provide somewhere for the tired urban dweller to go and breathe and learn to touch the earth again. In short, they are a haven from the evils of city living.

Yes, there is the occasional spot of vandalism. Yes, there may be the occasional feud over the "largest pumpkin" competition. It is still the most relaxing way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

This is a call to arms.

Encourage others to rent an allotment now and make them beautiful again, before your local council decides to cover them with more concrete and tarmac.

Allotment Open Day

WE are holding an Open Day of the allotments on Saturday, 14th August, 2004.

We hope to have the Mayor to open the proceedings. It will commence at 10.30 am outside the hut on the Cameron Road site.

Please support the day and bring your family and friends along. There will be guided tours and childrens' activities. Refreshments will be available at reasonable prices.

Best kept Allotment

THE first allotment judging has now taken place.

The second judging will be held on Saturday 14th August, 2004.

A Reminder

TENANTS are reminded that hosepipes are only to be used for the filling up of water butts and not for watering allotments.

A Note For Your Diary

THE Annual General Meeting of the Allotments Group will be held at the Town Hall on Tuesday, 28th September, 2004, commencing at 7.30 pm. We hope it will be convenient for you to attend. At the meeting you will be able to elect your four representatives to serve on the group for the ensuing year.

Rubbish Dumping

IT has come to our attention that allotment holders are again dumping rubbish on vacant plots/space.

At the Asheridge Road site, rubbish has been dumped on an uncultivated plot. Prospective tenants will be put off from taking on the unsightly plot. The rubbish has been cleared by the Council.

On the Cameron Road site garden waste is being dumped on a site that has been cleared by the Council.

Additionally a neighbour has complained of waste being dumped next to his hedge which, he states, encourages rats. He alleges that he has seen growers dumping their waste.

Please refrain from dumping your weeds, broad bean stalks etc. The money which is used to clear rubbish could be better spent improving the security of the allotments.

Vandalism

SOME tenants on the Cameron Road site have experienced some vandalism.

Representation was made to the Town Council and work has commenced on erecting a fence to prevent the vandals from gaining access from the tip end.

Thank you Bob for commencing work so speedily.

Can we remind tenants to keep the padlocks in place and locked on all gates.

ASPARAGUS TIPS

by Chesham Town Councillor Chris Spruytenburg
Working Group Member

MY father fancied himself as something of a gardener but it seems he was never much good at it! I remember him pruning/hacking his way through the rose bed leaving all the cuttings for my mother to pick up!

He also had the habit of hovering over the gardener whom we employed once or twice a week, offering him gems of horticultural 'wisdom' in the hope that this would get more out of the poor man.

One of the areas of our sandy Suffolk garden which you would think he would have had some success with, would have been the asparagus beds. Mainly sterile, they did produce something worth eating but in small quantities, totally disproportionate to the amount of labour he had paid the long suffering Mr Hall. However, when occasionally they did reach the table, I do remember how he revelled in tipping back his head and savouring the succulent, nutty spears.

So musing on those childhood days, when incidentally my love of vegetable growing was nurtured by my mother who actually paid me for my produce so I could pay for the next year's seed, I decided to try my hand at growing the elegant, desirable vegetable some 45 years later.

I invested in some crowns which reminded me of huge spiders and having

carefully dug out a trench and sieved the soil, spread out the crowns evenly one inch deep. Some sprouted within a month but I was not tempted to try them because you should never pick for two years otherwise the plants will wither.

The next year most of them came up and, although not very tall, the elegant plants provided a talking point between us allotment holders. Most doubted that I could successfully grow them on stony, chalky soil, thinking as I had, that they did best on sandy soil.

However, according to *The Vegetable Expert* by Dr D.G. Hessayon, what is needed is good drainage, a sunny spot, sheltered from strong winds. No mention of sandy soil.

This year, becoming more adventurous, I grew some asparagus from seed in pots and must soon, very carefully, attempt to transplant them into newly prepared beds. Wish me luck as I realise that they should be sown directly into the ground.

It's May 2004 and we have tasted asparagus from my original plants for the first time – they are mouthwateringly, decadently, delightfully, delicious with a lovely nutty flavour, boiled in water, dripping with butter and sprinkled with pepper. No wonder my 93 year-old mother still loves them all these years later.

Allotments and Children – Encourage Them

FOR some of the older allotment holders, children only spell trouble. This is not always true. Some children would love to have a little section on an allotment which they can call their own.

Take them with you and find out what tasks they like doing: start off with short visits. If visits are longer than an hour have a picnic break.

Children are likely to eat vegetables if they see them grow and have been involved in the process.

Even if they become less enthusiastic during teenage years they are far more likely to grow their own vegetables in adulthood.

Recipe – Courgette

THE courgette vegetable as we know is very bland. Here is a recipe which will excite the taste buds.

Ingredients:

- 4 – 6 courgettes
- 2 shallots or small onions
- 2 cloves garlic
- Margarine
- Fresh tomatoes or tinned tomatoes.

Chop garlic and shallots and soften in margarine. Slice fresh tomatoes and add to courgettes – toss (tinned tomatoes with herbs may be used instead of fresh tomatoes).

Cover and simmer for five minutes if you like crunchy vegetables; 10 to 12 minutes if you prefer softer vegetables. Please try this and let us have your comments for the next issue of *The Grower*.

GOING ORGANIC?

THE organic approach to allotment gardening recognises that the whole environment in which plants grow is much more than the sum of its individual parts, and that all living things are inter-related and inter-dependent.

Organic growing involves:

- Treating the soil and growing environment as a resource to be husbanded for future generations, rather than mined for short term gain.
- Providing plants with a balanced food supply by feeding the many soil living creatures that live with composts, manures and other organic materials.
- Choosing renewable resources, thereby creating a sustainable future.
- Reducing pollution of the environment, by recycling garden, household and other wastes, rather than dumping or burning them.
- Combating pests and diseases without using pesticides that may prove harmful to human health and that of domestic and wild animals.
- Encouraging and protecting wildlife, by creating suitable habitats and by minimising use of harmful pesticides.
- Creating a safe and pleasant environment in which to work and play.
- Moving with the times – taking new scientific discoveries and ideas into account, as well as the best traditional knowledge.
- Using good horticultural practices.
- Recognising the importance of genetic diversity and hence the preservation of threatened plant varieties.

Keep a Diary

KEEP a record of your activities on your allotment. Garden Record Books can be obtained from most garden centres.

It will help you to keep track of type, variety and planting dates, and it will also help to have a record of harvest times, yields and flavours. Also keep records of applications of mulches, fertilisers and insecticides.

By checking your records, time and money will be saved. You will get to know the varieties to grow that are best suited for your allotment thus improving future yields.

Also very useful are records of rainfall, temperature, first and last frosts and also periods of drought.

Compare your records with weather forecasts for your area. This will enable you, over the years, to see how performances vary between dry and wet years and what constitutes an average year on your allotment.

Tips for Organic Allotment Gardening

from Chesham Town Councillor Elaine Bamford
Working Group Member

FOR many years I have been a member of HDRA (Henry Doubleday Research Association) – Europe's largest organic membership organisation.

It is dedicated to researching and promoting organic gardening, farming and food.

I would recommend their *Organic Gardening Catalogue* – the seeds are of high quality and reasonably priced.

They also have organic display gardens open to the public and many, many other benefits to members, including *The Organic Way* quarterly magazine.

Why not visit their web site www.hdra.org.uk or for information and general enquiries telephone (024) 7630 3517 – well worth it if you are interested in organic gardening or considering if you really ought to go organic – believe me it works.

From *The Organic Way* magazine – some Tips for Allotment Holders:

- ❑ Use those free computer CDs that arrive in the post for bird scarers. Thread them onto a line of string connect to a cane or fence and as they move in the wind the reflected light deters the birds. Move regularly for maximum effect – birds get used to them.
- ❑ Make plant labels from empty yogurt pots. Cut them into strips and write on the inside.
- ❑ Plastic bottles cut in half make good mini greenhouses for starting off young plants and keep slugs at bay.
- ❑ Newspapers eight or more sheets thick with a layer of straw on top create a good ground mulch under fruit bushes. Suppresses weeds, retains moisture and lasts all season but remove in winter to remove any harbouring pests.

Good luck for the season and may the fruits of your labours be plentiful.

**Information
for
Chesham
Town Council
Allotment
Holders**

**Chesham Town
Council
Town Hall
Chesham
HP5 1DS**

Phone:
01494 774842

Fax:
01494 582908

Email:
admin@chesham.gov.uk

Web:
www.chesham.gov.uk

FEEDBACK FORM

Please return to: **Chesham Town Council, Town Hall, Chesham HP5 1DS**

WE hope you have enjoyed reading this issue of The Grower. Now we would like to hear your views. Please write in with your suggestions, comments or tips for allotment holders in the space below:

Suggestions / Comments / Questions / Advice

If you would like a reply please supply your name and address below.
We will, of course, still consider all comments or suggestions made anonymously.

Name: _____ Address: _____

Your Group Representatives

Vince Crompton (Chairman)	–	Plots 36a, 36b, 36c and 36d Cameron Road
Jim Abbott	–	Plots 31 and 32 Cameron Road
James Bole	–	Plots 9a and 9b Bellingdon Road
Brian Wilkins	–	Plot 8 Bellingdon Road

Council Representatives:

Councillor Elaine Bamford	Councillor Alison Pirouet
Councillor Chris Spruytenburg	Councillor Mick Walker