

May 2005

ISSUE 14

THE GROWER

Information for Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders

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SPRING IS HERE AGAIN

SPRING is here again and many allotment holders are spending time digging and planting. It is gratifying to note that many had taken the time to dig over their plots in the autumn thus making the soil easier and better prepared for planting. Tender plants should not be planted too early as it is possible that they could suffer from a late frost.

Best Allotment Competition

THE judges commented on the high standard of allotments when they carried out their inspection last year. Let us all try to improve on last year's standard and make the task just that more difficult in deciding on the winners.

The judges will be concentrating on the tidiness of the plot, the number of varieties and the quality of plants.

The first inspection will be carried out on June 6th and the second inspection on August 8, 2005.

Open Meeting

THE Open Meeting of the Allotments Tenants was held on 7th April at the Town Hall and was well attended. The atmosphere was relaxed and attendees were encouraged to participate in the discussions. Many interesting ideas were put forward and these will be discussed by the allotment group.

The Deputy Mayor, Chris Spruytenburg, attended the meeting. He is an enthusiastic allotment holder. He assumes the responsibilities of Mayor in May and informed the meeting that during his Mayoral term of office he intends to promote the allotments. We wish Chris good luck for an enjoyable and rewarding year.

Plant Sale

THE Chesham Horticultural Society will hold a plant sale on Saturday May 21 at The Trinity Baptist Church from 9.30 am to 12.00 noon. The plants are reasonably priced. Please support the Society.

Get The Most From Your Plot

IDEALLY crops should be rotated within a plot so that the same plant family group is never in the same spot every year. This not only helps to keep soil nutrients at their optimum but also discourages soil based pests and diseases which are often attracted to crops within the same family group.

Firstly decide on the vegetables you enjoy, giving consideration to the amount of space available. Aim to produce vegetables all the year round without shortages or gluts. The area chosen should be divided into three equal sections.

YEAR 1 SECTION 1 – Dig in well rotted manure or compost in the autumn or early winter. In the first year grow Beans, Leeks, Lettuce, Onions, Peas and Tomatoes.

YEAR 1 SECTION 2 – Dig the area over and add lime if the soil is acid. This can be checked by using a pH test kit or meter. Ideally maintain a pH level of between 6 and 7. A general fertiliser should be applied 10 to 14 days prior to planting or sowing. This area can then be used for growing Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbages, Cauliflower and Kale.

YEAR 1 SECTION 3 – Apply general fertiliser prior to sowing and planting. The crops to be grown in this section include Beetroot, Carrots, Parsnips, Potatoes, and Swedes.

YEAR 2 As above moving all crops on one section.

YEAR 3 Crops and treatments are rotated once more so that all sections have grown all plants over a three year period before moving back to Year 1 positions.

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

Co-opted Members:

Kate Folly
Plots 218 and 219
Cameron Road

Mick Walker
Plots 100a and 100b
Cameron Road

Council Representatives:

**Councillor Elaine Bamford,
Councillor Alison Pirouet
and Councillor Chris
Spruytenburg**

Allotments Open Day – a date for the diary

THE second allotments OPEN DAY will be held on Saturday 13th August, 2005. It will again be opened by the Mayor at 10.30 am. The venue will be on the Cameron Road site where the hut is situated. Please support the group by making it a family outing. There will be painting for the children to keep them entertained, allotment tours etc. Refreshments will be available at a very reasonable cost.

Allotment Safety

Jane Taylor

IT can be quite daunting, taking on a plot at an allotment site, especially if you are on your own most of the time with maybe one or two other allotment tenants about at best. There is no need to worry unduly: take notice of some basic precautions and you will be safe.

1) Mobile phones

These are a boon for allotment tenants. Remember to take up a phone if you have one, and pre-programme it with the Thames Valley Police non-emergency telephone number (08458 505 505). I'm sure everyone knows the emergency one! And it also gives you a means for calling for help if you injure yourself with a piece of gardening equipment. For ladies, this provides an extra bit of security in a place where you can find yourself quite exposed if you're the only one up there.

2) Gates and locks

Remember to lock the padlock behind you! Sometimes the padlocks are just hooked over the mesh and not fastened – this means that anyone passing can just steal the lock, meaning the whole site is insecure until a new one can be made. And they do have to be made specially, since they have to fit the same keys we all have . . . Also if you are locked in, it is harder for someone to just walk in and steal produce or threaten you. Please do remember this as everyone suffers if the site is left open.

3) Report it!

If you don't tell the Police of damage or theft, they can't do anything about it! The more they know, the easier it is for a pattern to be found and the culprits to be caught.

4) Dehydration and low blood sugar

It's easy to get dehydrated while working, especially if it's warm and you're there for hours. Take up a large bottle of water and a flask of something hot. It's also a good idea to have a high-calorie snack such as chocolate or Kendal mint cake for if you overdo it and feel wobbly. At such times, accidents are more likely to happen! And if you're working over lunch, remember to take sandwiches!

5) First aid

If you have a shed, keep some plasters, sterile wipes and a bandage inside. If not, take a small first aid kit up with you so if you do hurt yourself, you can stop any bleeding and patch yourself up enough to be able to get home.

Of course for serious injuries, phone 999 if you have a mobile and are able to do so. If you are doing a lot of digging, especially with a fork, go up when there are likely to be others about. Find out when you last had a tetanus shot – and go to your GP for one if it's more than 10 years. One of the biggest ways of getting tetanus is from manure, so we all need to be up to date with the jabs!

6) Watch out for others

If you can look about you as you enter or leave the sites, check to see if there is anyone else there, and if they are ok! Call to others as you arrive and leave so they know if you're there. Be friendly!

Mother's Rhubarb and Orange Crumble

THERE'S lots of lovely rhubarb forcing it's way upwards on the plots at the moment and it would be mean of me not to share this fabulous recipe for rhubarb crumble.

This is one of my all-time-favourite puddings – and it is definitely a pudding rather than a dessert. You know when you have got it right if you have something resembling soft toffee around the edge of the dish. Serve it either hot or cold, with warming custard or ice cold double cream.

1lb rhubarb
1 level tablespoon golden
syrup
Juice of one orange
3oz demerera sugar

For the crumble:
4oz self raising flour
2oz butter
1oz demerera sugar
Grated rind of one orange

Cut the rhubarb into chunks and put into a dish (approx 1.5 – 2 pint size). Heat together the golden syrup, orange juice, and sugar until evenly blended. Pour over rhubarb.

Make crumble: rub the butter into the flour. Stir in the sugar and orange rind. Sprinkle over the rhubarb. Level the top. Bake at Gas Mark 6 (200 C or 400 F) for about 35 mins. Rhubarb should be tender and top golden.

Sarah Bowden, Plot 96

Garden Pests

GARDEN pests are a real problem for any gardener and there are many ways of controlling them. Organically is preferable and recommendations on how, what and when to use organic products can be found on the Henry Doubleday Website on www.hdra.org.uk or telephone 024 7630 3517. Factsheets detailing non toxic alternatives for your home and garden can also be downloaded on www.pan-uk.org. or by telephoning Pesticide Action Network UK on 020 7274 8895.

Many use chemicals and it is very important that these are disposed of carefully. Never pour chemicals down the drain, sink, toilet or even a sewer. Also to avoid them ending up on landfill sites and finding their way into water courses, do not put chemicals in your rubbish bin. The nearest disposal site for pesticides is Amersham Household Recycling Centre, London Road East, Amersham. Not all Household Recycling Centres have pesticide disposal. You can check where they are located again by going on to a website www.pesticidedisposal.org.

Did you know that six garden pesticides were withdrawn from the UK market in July 2003. These pesticides were present in 81 different commercial products, details of which are listed on the Pesticide Action Network UK website www.pan-uk.org/lap/withdrawals.htm. If you have any of these 81 products on your shelves then please take them to the nearest disposal site for pesticides

If you do not have access to the website we will gladly provide any of the above lists or information if you let a member of our Allotment Group know.

Take a leaf out of Gardening Expert Monty Don's book – he says: "Go to the shelf where you keep your pesticides and herbicides and fungicides. Put them in a bag. Seal them up. Hand them in. Dispose of them safely. They are poisons. They are poisoning you, they are poisoning your garden and they are poisoning the planet."

Elaine Bamford
Town Councillor and Member of Allotment Group

New Allotment Charges

From October 1, 2005 rental charges for Council allotments will be as follows:

	per pole
Amersham Road	£3.00
Asheridge Road/ Deansway	£3.00
Cameron Road	£2.00

Make Your Own Organic Fertiliser!

LOTS of plot holders are attempting to follow organic methods. That means not sprinkling growmore or other such fertilisers on to your crops. Of course there are plenty of organic fertilisers available in the garden centres (even though some of us may be a bit fearful of bone meal after the BSE scare). However, there are also fertilisers that you can produce yourself, completely free, using plant matter readily available on most allotments: nettle tea and comfrey tea (not for human consumption!). Recipes for comfrey tea are fairly widely available. I am going to tell you about nettle tea.

Apparently in France, nettle tea is very popular and is even made commercially and sold in garden centres.

Nettles are extremely rich in nitrogen, potassium, magnesium, and trace minerals such as iron. You can easily make some concentrate nettle tea at home or in your shed and then use it diluted either as a feed directly to the soil or as a foliar feed sprayed on to the leaves. It is believed that as well as feeding your plants, the nettle tea will boost the plants ability to resist attack from diseases and insects. Be very careful with your nettle tea; in its undiluted form, it is a strong herbicide (weed killer).

Now for the recipe:

1. Wearing gloves and long sleeves, cut the nettles at about half their height.
2. In a large container such as a large plastic dustbin, mix 1 gallon of water (preferably non-chlorinated – for example, from your water butt) with every pound of nettles. Put a lid on the bin because once it starts to ferment the smell will be over-powering.
3. Allow the tea to ferment from one to three weeks. The warmer the weather, the quicker the process. (However, don't let the mixture overheat because this would kill the necessary bacteria.) The tea is ready when fermentation has ceased. Test for this by stirring. Avert your nose to avoid the fumes, and then take a look. No more bubbles? It's ready to use.
4. Strain the tea as soon as fermentation has stopped. Store the infusion in clean plastic or glass containers in a cool spot, clearly labelled.
5. Remember, unless you want the herbicide effect, dilute the tea before using. For soil applications, dilute to a 10% solution (1 cup of tea to 10 cups of water) or 5% for foliar feeding.

Sarah Bowden, Plot 96.

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

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 to:

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

If you would like a reply please supply your name and address.

We will, of course, still consider all comments or suggestions made anonymously.

Labour of Love . . .

Jenny Wright

I REMEMBER when I was six or seven years old going round the garden in winter looking for the tiny green tips of bulbs, and even if it had snowed the tip would have a halo of black soil round it where its life force had melted the cold snow. Then in summer the raspberry bushes at the bottom of the garden provided plenty of interest.

We had a Council house with quite a large back garden, and my dad must have noted my interest, because one Saturday I came back from shopping with my mother to find a 2ft by 4ft tiny garden with a little brick wall round it, and that was my very own garden. I grew some pink flowers in it (I can't remember what they were) and a love of gardening was born.

Over the years though, having three children and working as a 'Temp', I left most of the gardening to my husband and that only consisted of mowing a lawn and planting bedding now and again.

At the age of 62 and finding myself alone and in a flat 12 months ago, living in Wiltshire, I got an allotment from the local Council and successfully grew potatoes, beetroot, lettuce, gladioli and geraniums.

Then I moved to Chesham and got an allotment on Cameron Road in August 2004. But it's been hard going. The ground was like a field and I set to digging it over, sometimes as little as one hour a day – I didn't want to overdo it. Finally I managed to dig over eight separate beds leaving a small grass path between each one.

There are so many things I don't know. I've read that compost heaps need to be kept warm with a covering on and then again I've heard that they need to be wet! And what is it that keeps digging up the kitchen waste that I'd dug into a hole in the soil only to find it dug up and thrown to one side, but not touched or eaten? And will I look silly trying to put up some canes for sweet peas when I've never done it before? People are indeed helpful but usually I find myself on my own during the day and there's no-one about.

Along with vegetables I do want to grow lots of flowers. Someone once said to me they could understand why people grew vegetables, but not why they grew flowers. I could only think of a poem I'd read somewhere that began "Breathes there a man with a soul so dead . . ."

Chesham Horticultural Society and Allotment Holders' Association

CHESHAM & District Horticultural Society and Allotment Holders' Association was founded in 1913.

The late Dr Arnold Baines (Councillor, Town Mayor and local historian) was President for many years as was his father before him.

The Society today exists to support its members with the provision of seeds, seed potatoes, onion sets and shallots at extremely good prices. For example, we submit one order to Suttons Seeds in early January to the value of about £600; because the order is so large Suttons give us a discount of 40% (35% is passed on to members, 5% is retained for funds).

In addition we buy Seed & Potting compost, Horticultural Sand and Grit, fertilisers such as Bone Meal, Fish, Blood & Bone, Sulphate of Ammonia, Growmore, 6X etc, etc, in bulk and sell to members at low prices.

The Trading Hut is on Plot 3 of the Cameron Road Allotments and is open most Saturday mornings between 10.00 and 11.30 from early April until the end of June and then on a couple of Saturdays in September. We can open at other times by arrangement.

We don't have regular meetings with speakers but we do have a social calendar with a get together in the McMinn Centre in early April (free to members and their guests), three coach trips per year (the Malvern Spring Show, Barnsdale Gardens and the RHS Gardens at Hyde Hall in Essex, are the destinations this year), two Shows – 2nd July and 3rd September this year and a social AGM with a speaker in mid-November.

Membership costs £1 per annum per couple or 65p for an individual if you are below the age of 60, 50p if you are above that magic age.

If you are not yet a member and would like to join, please contact Mike Allenby on 784391.