

December 2005

ISSUE 16

THE GROWER

Information for Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders

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FESTIVE GREETINGS

YES, that time of the year has come round again and we are edging towards the end of 2005. We hope the year was good to you and the time spent on the allotment proved fruitful and satisfying.

The members of the group wish to extend to you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Chesham in Bloom

YOU may have read in the *Bucks Examiner* that the town entered the Britain in Bloom competition for the first time. The town secured a silver medal and this was despite the short period in which to prepare – approximately three months. The town will be entering the competition for 2006 and with your help we hope to achieve a better result.

Your group has agreed to enter the competition and consequently we are asking all tenants to make that extra effort to keep their plot tidy and that the plants look healthy. Any tenants who are unable to work their plot should contact a member of the group or a member of staff at the Town Hall. Unfortunately there is a minority of tenants who have previously failed to cultivate their plot over a period of time.

The Britain in Bloom judges are likely to visit the town to carry out the judging in July and therefore we ask for your co-operation in order to improve on this year's result.

Best Kept Allotments

THE winners of the best kept allotments were as follows:

Mr Keith Hainge – Cameron Road.

Mr A. Magennis – Bellingdon Road.

The presentation was made to the winners at the Annual General Meeting. We offer them our congratulations.

Will you be next year's winner?

Allotment Rents

WILL you please make a note in your diary that allotment rents were due on 1st October, 2005.

We are aware that many tenants are still employed and are unable to visit the Town Hall to pay their rents.

We wish to suggest that a phone call is made to the Town Council to ascertain the cost of the rent, then a cheque sent in the post as this would save staff the task of having to send out reminder letters.

Annual General Meeting

AT the Annual General Meeting held on 29th September 2005, the following members were elected to serve on the allotments group for 2006:

Chairman: Vince Crompton.

Vice-Chairman: Chris Spruytenburg.

Secretary: Alison Pirouet.

Representatives for Cameron Road: Vince Crompton and Jim Abbott.

Representatives for Bellingdon Road: James Bole and Lyn Magennis.

Co-opted Members: Mick Walker, Sarah Bowden and Kate Folly.

The meeting was one of the best attended and thank you for turning up. We look forward to your continued support.

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
Bellington Road

Lyn Magennis
Plot 6b
Bellington Road

Co-opted Members:

Kate Folly
Plots 218 and 219
Cameron Road

Sarah Bowden
Plot 96
Cameron Road

Mick Walker
Plots 100a and 100b
Cameron Road

Council Representatives:

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

MINTED

by Tadcaster

SO herbs. What are they all about then? £1.25 for a small pot or packet of wilting leaves in the supermarkets. Almost nothing to grow yourself. Are herbs worth the effort?

Yes they are. Herbs take up little room in the garden, but added to food they create flavour and variety to meals. Herbs punch well above their weight in the culinary stakes. So what's it to be? A cabbage for one meal, or a patch of herbs that will add taste and diversity to many? Take your pick.

The best chefs grow their own herbs, or have access to newly picked leaves. There's a good reason for that. Fresh herbs have an intensity of flavour that outshines the jars of dried leaves that have been sitting on your kitchen shelf for months. Get rid of them. You're a gardener aren't you? Fresh is what you're about. Fresh is what you do.

So where do you start? Which herbs do you plant? What will give you the best return for minimal cost and little labour?

Start With Perennials

Start with the perennials. They're the easiest. You can add the annuals and biennials later. The primary contenders amongst the perennials are Sage, Garlic, Bay (*Laurus Nobilis*) a slightly tender shrub, Dill, Lemon Balm (*Melissa Officinalis*). And mint.

My parents had a patch of common mint near by the kitchen door. It was watered by the dregs of loose-leaf tea from an old brown teapot and it flourished in the moist conditions. Given the right conditions mint spreads. In fact it increases at an astonishing rate, and it's creeping roots rival bindweed in their tenacity. Try moving mint and you'll find that the smallest root remain grows into a substantial plant and what started as a agreeable addition to the vegetable plot soon becomes an annoying weed. But the genus *Mentha's* determination to colonise the earth is its only fault, and if you don't want the hassle of controlling it, it's easily contained by cultivating it in an old pot of some kind.

Cadgers Plant

Most gardeners are scroungers, and mint is the perfect cadgers plant. Mints usually grown from a bit of root given by a neighbour, and the recipients usually pass on a few cuttings themselves. Mint starts as a single import and by the end of the second year every plot in the vicinity has a plant. You don't need to be a horticultural expert to grow mint. It thrives on neglect. Just remember not to turn your back on it if you

don't want it pushing you out of bed! And if you decide to grow mint in a container, be as adventurous as you can with your choice of pot. Use the old Wellington boot that's leaking, or the handleless bucket or holed pan. What about an old handbag as a hanging basket of mint? Or the old suitcase that you were going to throw away? A bit of happy improvisation will add a quirky interest to your plot. Raising a smile with your inventiveness is worth more than the dreary uniformity of neatly aligned rows of lettuce. What about a grass and mint seat? Or a scarecrow with mint hair? Water it when someone's passing. Brighten someone's day. Grow a pot of smiles.

Intensity of Flavour

Do you need mint? Well of course you do. If you have a mint plant you can forget the bland pots of overly sweet, artificially coloured mint jelly from the supermarkets. Your mint will be dew fresh and have an intensity of flavour that satisfies the senses. We all know that a few leaves chopped into vinegar adds saucy zest to lamb, but mint is not fussy, it'll go with other cuts. And not just meats. Try adding a few leaves to a summer salad for added interest and freshness.

And it's not just the aroma of mint that appeals. There are other benefits. Menthol, one of the active ingredients of mint, predominates in the Peppermint (*Mentha Piperita*). It's grown on a vast scale for commercial use in sweets, chocolates, and other confectionaries and also for cosmetics and medications.

Medicinal Uses

The Royal Horticultural Society's Encyclopaedia of herbs advises that Menthol is an antiseptic, a decongestant, an analgesic, and a mild anaesthetic. Peppermint helps to relieve nausea and morning sickness, indigestion, gastric ulcers, gastroenteritis, irritable bowel syndrome, colic, influenza and colds, respiratory infections, sinusitis, catarrh, asthma, itching skin, ringworm, neuralgia, and rheumatism. It's also an effective insect repellent!

The Australian Slender Mint (*Mentha Diemenica*) relieves cramp and colic and is also a good insect repellent, and Corn Mint (*Mentha Arvensis*) is an antibacterial that benefits digestions, reduces inflammation, and relieves pain and itching.

It's not all good of course. Pregnant women should avoid the Australian Slender Mint and Pennyroyal (*Mentha Pulegium*), because they're diuretics, and can be

hazardous if taken in excess. But even Pennyroyal has its good points, used externally it's an effective treatment for skin irritations. And it repels mice. How's that for a humane deterrent!

Most people can name one or two mints, but the Royal Horticultural Society lists the genus *Mentha* as having ten sub-species and each of those has several variants.

I have a Spearmint (*Mentha Spicata Crispa*), a decorative variety with healthy curled green leaves, and the duller leaved Moroccan Spearmint (*Mentha Spicata*), both of which grow to a metre in height. Like most mints they have an indefinite spread.

Woolly Leaved Applemint

I also have Peppermint (*Mentha Piperita*), and the woolly leaved Applemint (*Mentha Suaveolens*), which really does smell like a fresh apple, Lemonmint (*Mentha Citrata*), and the variegated Pineapplemint and Gingermint (*Mentha Gentilis*). I'm still looking for the variegated form of the Applemint, and the Blackberry flavoured mint.

A few years ago I was in Tunisia and saw an Arab walking away from the local market with a pot of mint. It was a typically dry hot sunny day and he raised the pot to his nose

to inhale the fragrance as he walked. His pleasure was obvious and I saw his face soften in an appreciable smile. It occurred to me then that in this country we would probably use an aerosol packed with artificial perfumes and chemical additives to replicate the freshness of the countryside. We complicate our lives unnecessarily. Sometimes simple is best. What about a pot of mint in your bathroom? Add a few crushed leaves to your bath.

Lighten Your Soul

And if I've persuaded you, and you are interested in growing mint, plant it near a path or seat where a stray hand can brush the leaves and fill the air with cologne. The smell of fresh mint on a hot summer's day will lighten your soul and remind you why you're a gardener.

If you're not impressed and you'd rather have something that's easier to control, try 'Emperors Mint' (*Micromeria* sp.), Korean Mint (*Agastache Rugosa*), or Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum Pilosum*). They're not true mints, but they have the mint aroma and are less invasive.

Me? I'd rather have real mint. I don't mind having too much of a good thing
Mint Julep anyone?

Orange Mint Tea

2 cups water. 2 tea bags. 3 tablespoons fresh mint leaves. 2 tablespoons of sugar. 4 cups of orange juice. 2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice.

Boil water and remove from heat. Add tea bags, mint, sugar and stand for ten minutes. Remove tea bags, stir in orange and lemon juice and chill. Serves 4-6.

Citrus Mint Pork Sauce

2 cups orange juice. 2 tablespoons corn starch. 2 tablespoons brown sugar. 2 tablespoons lime juice. 1 tablespoon crushed mint leaves. 1 teaspoon grated lemon peel. 1 teaspoon grated lime peel. ¼ teaspoon of salt.

Combine sugar, mint, salt and corn starch in a medium pan. Slowly add orange and lime juice and stir until mixture thickens. Remove from heat and add lemon and lime peel. Brush onto both sides of pork ribs or similar and grill/barbecue.

Kentucky Mint Julep

¼ cup of fresh mint leaves. 2 cups of water. 2 cups of sugar. Crushed ice. ½ oz of bourbon whisky.

Heat water and mix in sugar. Remove from heat, add mint and allow to steep for 25 minutes. Add ice and bourbon. Don't expect to get any gardening done.

Mojito Cocktail – As favoured by Ernest Hemingway

1 full measure of white rum. ⅔ of a measure of syrup. Dash of bitters. Juice of half a lime. 2 measures of soda water. Mint.

Crush mint in bottom of a tall glass with freshly squeezed lime. Half fill shaker with ice cubes, shake and add rum. Add bitters, shake and strain. Add soda. Write a novel about an old man and the sea.

Happy (Hic) Gardening – Tadcaster

Spearmint, Peppermint, Applemint, Pineapple and Gingermint will be available at the Chesham Horticultural Society plant sale in 2006.

Letter

Thanks for your help

As a recent convert to the allotment fraternity, I would like to thank the allotment holders for the help and encouragement I have been given since the beginning of the year.

Previously I had no sympathy with my wife's agonising over her allotment; she worried about it even when we were away on holiday! How wrong could I have been, even growing flowers I feel the ups and downs, the delight when things start to happen and despair if it goes wrong, I am on my allotment most days and very happy.

To those of you who have just taken on an allotment the only advice I would give is to take it easy, you may be using muscles that haven't been worked for some time and like me end up having to see a physio!

Good luck to all new allotment holders.

*Phil
Allotment 16
Cameron Road*

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.

Winter Tasks on the Allotment

This time of the year is fairly quiet on the allotment – and with less to do it's a good time to consider servicing your favourite garden tools and mowers. And storing them properly will help ensure that they work well and last for years to come.

On your allotment now . . .

Should you have a few spare hours available, pruning dormant plants quite severely will prove beneficial for their growth next season. Plus:

Flowers: Sowings can be made of Coleus, Cyclamen and Geranium provided suitable temperatures can be maintained.

Vegetables: Broad Bean Aquadulce Claudia can be sown outdoors and the variety The Sutton can be sown under cloches. Towards the end of the month sowings of Pea Fortune can be made but delay sowing if soil conditions are unsuitable, cloches will be needed to provide protection from severe weather. For large Onions, seed can be sown during December and early January, transplanting the young plants outdoors in spring. Vacant areas in the vegetable plot can be dug ready for sowing and planting in spring.

Fruit: Soft fruit such as Currants, Gooseberries, Raspberries, Blackberries and Tayberries can be planted at this time as they are dormant. Extra Currant plants can be raised by taking hardwood cuttings from existing healthy

bushes. The cuttings should be 25-30cm (10-12") in length, then buried to about half their depth. For Blackcurrants, all the buds that are intact should remain, but in the case of Whitecurrants and Redcurrants only the top four should be left, removing all the others. Cuttings may also be taken of Gooseberries.

Pests: Pests may overwinter on plants so keep an eye out for them, as small infestations of Red Spider Mite, Greenfly and Whitefly can soon spread. This could provide problems in the future so it is best to control now by either spraying, removing them from the leaves or, if really necessary, disposing of any plants that are infected.

Pest Invasion!

The country's continuing love affair with gardening has opened the door to an invasion of exotic pests that is killing off our natural habitat, a leading scientist has warned in the Independent. But there's good news for the humble Hedgehog – it can take some comfort from the fact that it is the UK's favourite garden creature. According to Female First it's joined in the top ten by the robin, frog, blackbird and ladybird.

Chesham Horticultural Society

CHESHAM Horticultural Society and Allotment Holders Association have announced provisional dates for next year's sales of Seed Potatoes, Onion Sets, Shallots, Fertilisers, 6X, Seed & Potting Compost, Horticultural Sand, Vermiculite etc. as follows: 18th February, 25th February and 4th March, 2006.

If you are not a member of the above association we encourage you to join. Contact Mike Allenby on 784391.

Seed Potatoes: The following varieties and quantities have been ordered; the numbers refer to 25kg sacks.

1st Earlies: Arran Pilot (2), Foremost (1), Pentland Javelin (1), Red Duke of York (1), Winston (1).

2nd Earlies: Charlotte (2), Kestrel (3), Wija (1).

Main Crop: Cara (3), Desiree (4), King Edward (1), Majestic (1), Picasso (3).

The price will be £2.20 per 7lb (3.2kg).

In addition there will be Sturon Onion sets and Golden Gourmet Shallots, both priced at 40p per ½lb (230g).

Please note there is no opportunity to re-order, so they will sell what they have on a 'first-come' basis; when they're gone they cannot obtain any more.