

April 2006

ISSUE 17

THE GROWER

Information for Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders

Inside this issue:

1 Spring Has Arrived

Chesham in Bloom

Little Reminders

Volunteers Please

2 Your Group Representatives

Prize-Winning Tips

3 Prize-Winning Tips (continued)

Welcome to Our New Friends

Recipe – Vegetable Hotpot

Feedback

4 Information panel

What to Do This Month . . .

Open Meeting

SPRING HAS ARRIVED

IT has been a long cold winter and hopefully it has left less harmful bugs in the soil. It was gratifying as I walked around the allotments on the Cameron Road and Asheridge Road sites despite the cold weather a large number of tenants had dug or were digging their plots. We do hope that as a result of your efforts you will be rewarded with a bumper crop. A number of you have already planted onion sets, broad beans and potatoes but we could still get frosts. Tender plants should be covered where there is a threat of frost.

Everyone is a potential winner therefore it is important that your plot is tidy and plants look healthy when the judges undertake their visits – one in June and the other in August.

Good luck to everyone.

Chesham in Bloom

WE have previously informed you that the Town Council and members from the Business Community will be entering the Britain in Bloom Competition for the second time. Last year we were awarded a Silver Medal and wish to improve on our effort this year. Please help us to achieve this aim by cultivating your allotments and keeping them tidy. Tenants who feel they are unable to work their allotments should contact the Town Hall as there may be some residents waiting for one.

Little Reminders

AS we all know water is scarce and we appeal to everyone to use it sparingly. We are not allowed to use hosepipes either to water plots or to fill water butts but watering cans are allowed to be used for both purposes.

We are all interested to see what other tenants are growing. Many tenants will be more than happy to have a chat if approached but please do not visit other peoples allotments in their absence.

VOLUNTEERS PLEASE

Sunday 9th April at 10am

the Group is proposing to have an

'Allotments Clean-up Day'

Last year was very successful and we hope to improve on our performance this year.

We will meet at the Cameron Road Car Park at 10am.

Please come along equipped with a fork or spade and give a little of your time.

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

PRIZE-WINNING TIPS

An interesting article by Keith Hainge,
one of the winners of the Best Kept Allotment, 2005.

HAVING been asked to write this article and agreeing to do it, I subsequently worried that it would turn out sounding somewhat self-congratulatory!

However, although I did not set out to win the prize, it would be exhibiting false modesty to deny that I have generally considered that my allotment was in quite good shape for most of the year.

Anyone wishing to win the Best Kept Allotment prize will have to meet the required criteria as set down in the rules of the competition. I do not propose to list them here but any person who wishes to rely on mere than good fortune in meeting the set criteria successfully should take note of them.

Key factors

Two well deserved prize winners of the recent past tend allotments very close to mine and they are both very tidy and that they support a wide range of healthy, well-grown crops. These are key factors that will be considered by the judges.

If by personal choice, or by reason of other factors, you only cultivate a limited range of crops you will be, in all probability, 'out of the running'. Assuming that you do grow, or intend to grow, a wide variety of crops, you may consider yourself 'in the running'.

It probably goes without saying that the more informed you are about the business in hand, both theoretically and empirically, the better.

In my opinion it is the practice of good tidiness, hygiene and the effective use of your available time, that will give you the best chance of lifting the prize.

Constraints

I should imagine that nearly all of us have constraints upon the amount of time that we spend tending our allotments and various commitments that mean that we can only visit our allotments at certain times of the day, or indeed, on certain days. Even if one is lucky enough to enjoy unlimited time to spend at the allotment one may be hindered by advanced age and limited energy. Therefore, it is vital to make good use of your available time.

I am going to make a few suggestions here but this is by no means an exhaustive list. A real enthusiast of economy of effort could go on for a long time.

Always keep an eye on the weather forecast or your own ideas of the coming weather conditions and plan your operations accordingly. Sowings, plantings and croppings can then be carried out to take advantage of a free watering in or the avoidance of wet legs and arms when you pick the sprouts. A seed bed could be raked out and covered up before a wet couple of days arrive and then the sowing made later when conditions are more favourable.

Delivery of manure

Nearly all of us take a delivery of manure or compost in the autumn and winter. My advice is take delivery as soon as you have room for it – you can cover it with a tarpaulin. A wet autumn may mean your order being delayed and holding up when spreading and digging conditions were right.

Try to have the delivery made to a point where most of the subsequent wheel-barrowing is either down-hill or on the level – not always possible, I know.

Once the growing season gets under way you will be fully occupied with sowing, planting, watering, staking and weeding, so it is vital to have the allotment dug – at least the areas requiring manure or compost – and all other parts tidy, weed-free and pruned before it starts. This will involve you in putting in a good bit of effort in the autumn and winter when the weather is not always in tune with our aspirations.

Never try to carry out operations that are unsuited to the prevailing conditions. It is a waste of time and effort and may cause damage to the soil structure.

If you want to push on where the ground is sodden try tidying up the edges of the grass paths around your allotment or tidy up the shed – don't look inside mine! You could prune the fruit trees or bushes using planks to stand on.

Crop rotation

One very important job is to plan the position of your crops. Crop rotation is vital in the battle against pests and diseases and if your allotment is fairly small it will require much ingenuity and planning. You could also mark out the row ends of your future crops with stakes or canes.

Frozen soil is ideal for wheel-barrowing your manure or compost about and then spreading it.

If you really cannot do anything practical it pays to just have a good walk round the allotment and a good think about your future plans.

One of the main benefits to keeping your allotment tidy is that it will greatly reduce the number of pests that are always queuing up to attack your crops. Rats and mice will venture out from your untidy shed and eat your pea and bean seeds; earwigs and woodlice will take up residence in old canes and pots; slugs and snails will hide under untidy grass edges, piles of rotting organic matter and planks; dead wood and prunings can harbour mildews and coral spot.

Some weeds, such as groundsel, can cause diseases – rust in that case – others will invade your allotment by creeping in from untended grass edges or spread rapidly if allowed to seed.

Pigeons will have to be kept off vulnerable crops with secure netting unless you have had success with a 'scaring-off' scheme. If anyone knows of a foolproof way of scaring them off please tell us all now! Foxes can cause damage by digging and scratching and generally dashing around the allotment and you may have to fence off bits of the allotment at certain times or just put up with it.

Finally, remember that keeping yourself well supplied with nutrients and organic matter will produce crops that are stronger, healthier and more resistant to pests and diseases and less in need of artificial watering.

Only one person will take the prize each year but many others can take pleasure from a tidy, well-planned allotment that produces good quality crops.

A Note of Thanks

MEMBERS of the group wish to extend to Bob Ayres and his team a sincere thank you for the cleaning up of unused plots and the pruning of trees. We look forward to your continued co-operation.

Welcome to Our New Friends

THE members of the Allotment Group wish to extend a warm welcome to all the new tenants who have joined us. Some of you I know from chatting have never done gardening before; have no fear we are friendly people and are willing to offer advice.

Members of the group are: Vince Crompton, Plots 36a, 36b, 36c and 36d, Cameron Road; Jim Abbott, Plots 31 and 32, Cameron Road; James Bole, Plots 9a and 9b, Bellingdon Road; Lyn Magennis, Plot 6b, Bellingdon Road; Kate Folly, Plots 218 and 219, Cameron Road; Sarah Bowden, Plot 96, Cameron Road; Mick Walker 100a and 100b, Cameron Road.

Recipe – Vegetable Hotpot

2 large carrots, sliced
1 small turnip, diced
2 celery sticks, sliced
50g butter
12 small leeks
25g plain flour

450ml vegetable stock
Salt and freshly ground pepper
5ml Worcestershire sauce
45ml chopped parsley
450g potatoes, thinly sliced
50g grated Cheddar cheese

FRY (sauté) the carrots, turnip and celery gently in the butter for 7-8 minutes and put into a flameproof casserole using a draining spoon.

Fry the leeks for 2-3 minutes and put into the casserole. Stir the flour into the pan and gradually add the stock. Bring to the boil, stirring. Season with salt and pepper and Worcestershire sauce.

Simmer for 3 minutes and mix in 30ml of the parsley. Pour over the vegetables in the casserole and turn them so they are thoroughly mixed.

Arrange the sliced potatoes in overlapping circles on top of the vegetables. Cover the casserole with a lid or foil and bake in the oven for 1½ hours at 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 until the potatoes are tender.

Sprinkle the cheese over the potato topping and grill until browned. Serve garnished with the remaining parsley.

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.

**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

What To Do This Month . . .

Bulbs: Towards the end of the month, you can start Begonia tubers into growth, in trays of compost at a temperature of 15°C (60°F). Clean off dead foliage from any previously grown tubers and then repot in fresh compost. Water them in and keep at a temperature of about 16°C (60°F). Plant up Lilies in pots, ideally five bulbs of the same variety to a 25cm (10") pot: terracotta pots are more sturdy for when the tall flower spikes develop.

Flowers: Sowings can be made in a propagator, in a heated greenhouse or on a windowsill at a temperature of approximately 21°C (70°F) of many summer bedding plants, such as Geranium, Petunia, Impatiens (Busy Lizzie) and Nicotiana along with some perennials. Take care not to sow too thickly or over-water as this can lead to the seedlings damping off (small patches of them suddenly dying for no apparent reason). Many people find that its best to pour the seed into the palm of their hand first, rather than sowing it directly from the packet. If seed is very fine, it can be mixed with silver sand to make it easier to sow thinly and evenly across the surface of the compost.

Remember to regularly deadhead Pansies, Primulas along with other winter/spring bedding plants as, depending on the temperature, you may find they flower at varying times. Also by removing faded flowers this will help to prevent seeds setting which in turn reduces flower performance.

Cuttings may be taken from Chrysanthemums that have been over-wintered. Any shrubs or flowers that may have become too large for where they

are at present can be moved to a new position during February.

Vegetables: Early varieties of potatoes should be chitted (laid out in trays and allowed to form short sprouts) in a cool, light, frost-free place ready for planting towards the end of March - this is proven to increase the yield of the tubers. In the greenhouse or under cover in a warm propagator, you can now begin to sow seeds of Cabbage (summer/autumn maturing), Celery, Parsley, Sweet and Cayenne Pepper, Tomato, Leek and Onion. Outdoors (under cloches or in a cold frame) you can sow early varieties of Carrot, Broad Bean and Parsnip. Shallots can also be planted out from the middle of the month. Asparagus Crowns can be ordered now (with delivery in late March/early April) and it is a good time to start preparing the site where they are to grow, ensuring the ground has been dug thorough making sure it is free from weeds.

Plus...

Do keep a look out for pests such as whitefly, and any plants or cuttings that are seen to be infested should be sprayed. A good way to provide extra winter protection for plants is to use a cold frame which should be situated in full light thereby receiving warmth from the sun but sheltered from cold winds. Ventilation should be provided on warm days so it is a good idea for them to be opened up which will prevent a build up of warmth, however, remember to close them at night. To provide extra warmth an old rug, blanket or even overcoat could be used on nights when conditions are very cold.

OPEN MEETING

THURSDAY 27th APRIL, 2006

will be held at the

**Town Council Hall on Thursday, 27th April
commencing at 7.00pm.**

We hope it will be convenient for you to attend.

*Ruth Malleon, Bucks County Council's Home Composting Officer,
will give a talk on composting.*