

November 2006

ISSUE 19

THE GROWER

Information for Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders

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Best Allotment Competition

The judges again commented on the high standard of allotments when they carried out their inspections. The winners were:

Mrs Loraine Faulkner – Cameron Road
Mr John Stephenson – Bellingdon Road

We extend our congratulations to both winners.

Allotments Open Day

The Third Allotments Open Day was held on Saturday, 12th August, and was opened by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs Merrin Molesworth. Although it was overcast it was well attended.

There were excellent Treasure Hunts for children, tours of the allotments for visitors and refreshments were provided. A number of visitors were keen to have an allotment and were offered advice.

We wish to thank all those who helped in the preparation, providing refreshments, prizes, the setting up of the gazebo and conducting the tours. Our thanks are also due to the Deputy Mayor who showed a keen interest and offered encouragement and support. She spent a long time touring the plots.

Petty Thefts

There have been a number of complaints regarding the pilfering of apples, plums, greengages, etc. Many tenants would willingly give excess fruit – you only need to ask. The latest complaint regards the theft of a kettle.

Britain in Bloom Competition Result

As you are aware, Chesham Town entered the above competition for the second time with the allotments as part of the entry. The town obtained a Silver Award and the allotments were complimented by the judges. We were a little disappointed that we did not put more effort into displaying more scarecrows. Please make a greater effort next year.

Successful Cheese and Wine Evening

The Cheese and Wine Evening which was held on the allotment on Saturday, 29th July, was a huge success.

The weather was good and members responded generously. Although it was meant to be cheese and wine, members brought quiches, sponge cakes, home made biscuits, pies etc.

At the end of the evening some members suggested that we should have more socials. We will therefore discuss the feasibility of organising more events.

SOCIAL EVENING

SATURDAY, 4TH NOVEMBER, 2006

We are holding a Social Evening on Saturday, 4th November, starting between 4.30 and 5.00 pm at 76 Deansway, Chesham. Because of the Health and Safety implication, Alison Pirouet has kindly offered the use of her garden for the event. There will be fireworks and a barbecue so please bring along sausages, beefburgers, potatoes and any other nibbles, etc. We would also welcome wine, beer and juices, etc! Come along and have fun.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Town Hall on 28th September, and was well attended. The following members were elected and co-opted to serve for 2006/2007:

Chairman:

Vince Crompton
(Cameron Road)

Vice-Chairman:

Councillor
Chris Spruytenburg
(Cameron Road)

Secretary:

Councillor
Alison Pirouet

Councillor
Elaine Bamford
(Cameron Road)

Jim Abbott
(Cameron Road)

James Bole
(Bellingdon Road)

Lyn Magennis
(Bellingdon Road)

Co-opted Members:

Kate Folly
Sarah Bowden
Jane Taylor
Yvonne Webster

MISSING LOCKS

Another gate lock has vanished, and again Cameron Road!

A great deal of time and money has been spent erecting fencing and raising the height of the gates, but it is all pointless if tenants continually lose the locks.

The locks cost £20 each, and take a while to arrive when ordered.

Some tenants at Cameron Road appear to have a 'couldn't care less' attitude to the security of the site.

We must impress upon tenants the importance of locking themselves in while on site, or at least locking the lock to the fence until ready to leave.

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE - Part 2

By an established allotment holder – Plot 40b

Grass

The best way to deal with grass organically is to start by strimming it. Pile the grass up at one side: this pile will become your compost heap, so site it somewhere convenient. Assuming you manage to trim the whole plot in one go, you now have to dissuade the grass from growing again before you can dig it all over. The best method is to use a mulch of either clean, old, hessian-backed wool carpet (don't use synthetics because of the chemicals), weed-suppressing thick black plastic or special weed-suppressing woven fabric, or cardboard. The first can easily be obtained by going to the local carpet shop and asking them if they have any old carpet in their skip. The others can be obtained from most garden centres or DIY stores with garden sections. This can be an expensive solution. Cardboard is a cheap and cheerful one, and green too. Most supermarkets will give it away. Once you've acquired a few dozen boxes (as big as possible), flatten them, remove all the big staples so they don't end up in the soil (and therefore your fingers), and then overlap them across the plot. You can even pile the cut grass on top to exclude even more light. The others you just unroll across the plot. These should keep the grass from getting out of control. Don't underestimate how fast it can regrow if you don't mulch! Non-organic grass clearance simply consists of spraying the plot with an appropriate herbicide. There are several things to bear in mind first. Spraying very tall grass is very difficult, so you will still probably have to trim first (in which case, see above). Instead of mulching, spray. But then you will still have to mulch anyway, as new weed seed blows in all the time!

Thistles

Creeping thistle is tricky to get rid of organically: Garden Organic recommends digging it out as deeply as possible, mulching the ground to weaken any new growth. Creeping thistles have very deep complex root systems. It has to draw on reserves of food in order to get back to the surface, and if it can't get light, it cannot replenish them. There is a finite number of times it can therefore regrow if it can't get light and eventually it dies. But it's very persistent and so you can expect to be digging it out for months. Non-organic approach: glyphosate. See above! With a very heavy thistle population, it is probably better to dig up as many as possible and then glyphosate the new growth (which will permit the herbicide to penetrate easier).

Brambles

These are also a pest to remove, but it's not impossible to do it organically. The roots are relatively shallow, so can be dug out with a fork. Strimming the tops off first is however a great help. In this circumstance, you can't use a line trimmer. You need a specialist brushcutter which has a blade rather than plastic line. It will make short work of a patch of brambles. You also need very thick gloves, preferably leather, to pick up the pieces! Then you can go in with a fork (spades tend to sever roots, which can then regrow) and start levering out the roots. Some do go very deep: in this case if you get regrowth you go after them again. Non-organic methods: again strimming might be a good initial option, but you need to spray with a brushwood killer such as SBK, which is powerful enough to kill woody stemmed plants such as brambles. The disadvantage is that it takes some months to disperse before you can plant crops. And you still end up having to dig in order to get the roots out.

Nettles

These come under the same heading as brambles, ie shim and start digging. They generally have deep roots, but these are more fibrous than other perennial weeds. They die back each winter and then regrow in spring, so can be easier to deal with during dormancy. Again you need to make sure you dig out all the root pieces, both the fibrous ones and the longer creeping sections which is how they spread. Inorganically, spray with either glyphosate or brushwood killer and wait. Glyphosate is probably better because it doesn't linger in the soil, but may take several goes to kill all the plant.

Ground elder

This is another really nasty weed. It doesn't grow very high, but does smother everything in sight. The Romans introduced it as they believed it cured gout (along with introducing snails and rabbits, so they aren't usually popular with gardeners!). It forms a dense mat of roots a few inches below the surface which takes a lot of digging out as it's literally woven together. In this case, putting a light-excluding mulch on first is probably the best approach, which after a few months will have weakened the plants enough to make them easier to dig out. You'll need patience, a good strong fork and probably a heavy duty knife with replaceable blades to cut sections free. Inorganically, it's the usual suspects again. Spray and wait. But it doesn't really

help – you still have to dig it out! If you can cope with roots, then you could try and rotavate once you are sure it's dead, but one of the more annoying things about ground elder is its ability to regrow even after you're sure you've killed it or dug it all out. If you have it, expect to be battling for several seasons whichever method you choose to use.

Bindweed

This is pretty much endemic in most allotments, because it's another weed with really deep bright white roots which snap easily when you try and dig them out, and it can regenerate from a tiny fragment. Field bindweed (the tiny pink one) is the hardest to get out, and with deep roots the only method you've really got is to remove and bum every white root you find while digging. The hedge bindweed (huge white flowers) will climb up everything and is nighimpossible when it's tangled up in the roots of a fruit bush or similar. Keep digging, and eventually you'll weaken it enough so it doesn't regrow. It

loves manure heaps too. Glyphosate works well on bindweed: it's actually a good method to let it twine up a bamboo cane and then, wearing rubber gloves, to spray glyphosate onto the gloves then wipe your hands up the leaves. That way you treat the plant and not your crops. If you have an organic allotment you might like to cheat a little and apply to persistent bindweed in this way. Inorganically you'll just spray the lot!

Annual weeds

Speedwell, fat hen, groundsel, chickweed and scarlet pimpernel are some of the more prevalent annual weeds. They are easy to remove when small, but do run to seed extremely fast and so it's well advised to keep them down by hoeing or hand-weeding once your plot is up and running. Speedwell is particularly hard to eradicate since its seeds can mature after the plant's been pulled up: unless you have a very warm compost heap to kill seeds, you may well reintroduce it a few months later . . .

Planned Asbestos Removal

Small amounts of low-grade asbestos have been identified in a recent survey at the allotments sites at Cameron Road and Asheridge Road. While the advice received is that there is little imminent risk to health, it is considered prudent to have the asbestos removed by a licensed contractor. The work will take place in early December 2006.

If you think that you may have materials containing asbestos on your plot, it is important that you do not disturb them or damage them. The Council will write to you if asbestos has been identified on your plot, with details of when the work will take place.

If you believe there may be asbestos on your plot and you have not received a letter from the Council by 10 November, please do call us on 01494 774842 or come and speak to us at the Town Hall. If you have any further questions, please do get in touch.

What To Do – Autumn . . .

Harvest:

The first brussels sprouts and the last of all crops likely to be destroyed by frost. Lift and store all the root crops as they mature. Complete lifting potatoes and put in store for use through the winter.

Sow – outdoors:

Lettuce and round-seeded peas and broad beans (towards the end of this period) to overwinter, ideally under cloches.

Plant:

Spring cabbage before soil conditions get very wet and cold.

Cultivate:

Start autumn digging and cut down the old stems on asparagus. This is a good time to dig in well-decayed compost.

Recipe – Pumpkin Chutney (makes about 6lb)

<i>1½ pounds pumpkin, peeled, de-seeded and cut into chunks</i>	<i>2 teaspoons ground ginger</i>
<i>1 pound cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped coarsely</i>	<i>½ teaspoon ground black pepper</i>
<i>12 ounces onions, chopped</i>	<i>2 teaspoons ground allspice</i>
<i>6 ounces sultanas or raisins</i>	<i>4-6 garlic cloves, crushed</i>
<i>2 tablespoons salt</i>	<i>1 pint malt or cider vinegar</i>
	<i>1 pound granulated sugar</i>

Put all ingredients except sugar in a large pan, bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally until contents are very soft. Stir in sugar until dissolved and continue to simmer, uncovered, for about 1 to 1½ hours until chutney is very thick and there is no liquid left on the surface. Spoon into sterilised jars and seal. Store for 6-8 weeks before using. Eat liberally! It tastes like mango chutney.

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

Chemical Sprays

There have been complaints about the use of chemical sprays, used by some tenants, drifting onto adjacent plots and causing damage to their crops.

If you must use chemicals, spray only when there is little or no wind, making sure that what you spray is confined to your plot, and restrict treatment to plants where a pest or disease is visible.

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENTS

Chesham Town Council manages three allotment sites at Amersham Road (6 plots), Cameron Road (176 plots), and Asheridge Road (45 plots) in association with the Allotments Group. An adequate supply of water is provided (taps and tanks), but where tenants provide their own water butts they are allowed to fill these from the mains supply, but the use of a hosepipe to water the allotments is strictly prohibited. The Council is also responsible for maintaining the main paths and undertakes repairs such as water leakage, damaged fencing, etc.

The Town Council decided it was time to get the tenants more involved in the running of the allotments and consequently the Group was set up to act as an important communication link between allotment holders and the Town Council. On the 29th October 2003 the Group held its first meeting with representatives from the Town Council and the allotment sites at which a Chairman and Secretary were elected. The meeting agreed that it would be useful to draft terms of reference in order to operate efficiently. This was subsequently done and approved by the Council.

Looking back at the time of the Group's inception in 2003 23.4% of the allotments were not cultivated. Faced with such an unacceptable large number of unproductive plots the Group examined a number of options in order to reduce this figure. It was eventually agreed that the way forward was to hold an Allotments Open Day, the first ever in the history of Chesham. The event was well publicised in the local press and notices were exhibited at the Town Hall, Library, Shop windows in the Town Centre, Allotment Gates, etc. The event was held in August 2004 to coincide with National Allotments week. The site was decorated with bunting, a stall displaying some of the vegetables grown, refreshments provided at a reasonable cost, and arrangements made for games and face-painting to keep children amused whilst there were conducted tours of the allotments by group members for attendees who wished to take advantage of the facilities offered. The Town Mayor opened the show.

The Group were encouraged by the response from the public which generated interest in allotments uptake. They therefore held a second Open Day in August 2005, and the third in August 2006. The Group is considering making the Open Day an annual event.

As a Group we are conscious of the environment and for the past two years we have organised an "allotments tidying up day". The response has been good and helped in encouraging prospective holders to take on an allotment.

The Group has recently updated the Tenancy Agreement which has been approved by the Council. Each tenant will shortly receive a copy of the updated agreement which he/she will sign and return to the Council. They will receive a copy for retention. The Group were also involved in the setting up of the website.

Security on the allotments is good with the Council investing in wire fencing and lockable gates. Each tenant is issued with a key for which they pay a small deposit. This is refundable when the tenant terminates the tenancy and returns the key. The Group keep checks to ensure that allotments are not neglected by undertaking in conjunction with the Parks and Premises Manager two inspections a year, one in the Spring and the other in the Autumn. Tenants who do not comply with the Tenancy Agreement are sent letters reminding them of their obligation. If after two warning letters they fail to take remedial action reluctantly they are served with a notice to quit by the Council.

The Group is aware of the importance of good communication and therefore keep tenants informed of issues through "The Grower", our newsletter which is sent to each tenant four times per year. Stimulating interest is also paramount and each year a competition is held to select the best allotments. The judging is undertaken by members from the Chesham Horticultural Society, our sister organisation in the Town.

The winners (large and small plots) are presented with a Trophy at the Annual General Meeting. In 2005 we also held a scarecrow competition which aroused great interest. On 29th July we held a cheese and wine party on the allotment. We have come a long way since 2003 and are pleased to state that there is now a waiting list for allotments.

We are not complacent and intend to strive to ensure that every allotment which becomes vacant in the future will be cultivated as quickly as possible.