

February 2007

ISSUE 20

# THE GROWER

Information for Chesham Town Council Allotment Holders

*Inside this issue:*

- 1** Greetings  
Open Meeting  
Allotment Survey  
Vandalism:  
Cameron Road  
Britain in Bloom  
Competition  
Quiz Night and  
Fish 'n' Chip  
Supper
- 2** Your Group  
Representatives  
Dates for your  
Diary  
The Best Kept  
Allotment?
- 3** What To Do This  
Month  
Chesham  
Horticultural  
Society and  
Allotment Holders'  
Association
- 4** Information Panel  
Feedback  
A Change of  
Climate

## Greetings

**Welcome to 2007 and a Happy New Year to you and your family.  
We hope that it will be a successful and fruitful year for everyone.**

## Open Meeting – 12th April, 2007

An Open Meeting will be held at the Town Hall on 12th April, 2007, commencing at 8.15 pm – this is to give members who work outside the Chesham area time to attend. Please make the effort to come and let us know in which direction you wish the Group to proceed.

## Allotment Survey

Some tenants have returned their survey forms and it is disappointing to note that the response has not been as good as we would have liked.

The number of survey forms returned is as follows:

Amersham Road: 4  
Asheridge Road: 9  
Cameron Road: 30

The Council is only able to analyse the result according to the forms returned.

## Vandalism

Problems have been experienced on the Asheridge and Cameron Road sites. Nets have been badly torn, bean canes broken and plants damaged.

Vince caught three youths on the Cameron Road site and reported the matter to the police. In the event of any future damage will you please report the damage by telephoning 0845 8505505.

## Britain in Bloom Competition

As you will recall we entered the allotments as part of the submission by the Chesham Town Council. We have decided to enter again and to this end we ask tenants to make a special effort to keep their plots tidy. We were disappointed that not many tenants made the effort to erect scarecrows. Please make a special effort this year and where possible involve the children.

## QUIZ NIGHT AND FISH 'N' CHIP SUPPER

**April 14, The Town Hall at 7 pm. Tickets £5**

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

No. of tickets required:..... Tel: .....

*Please make your choice:*

Fish 'n' Chips:.....Sausage 'n' Chips:..... Bring a bottle and glass

*Please send cheque made payable to 'Chesham Town Council' by 6th April to:*

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

**Tel: 01494 774842**

## Your Group Representatives

### 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**

## Dates for your Diary

### April 14

Quiz Night and  
Fish 'n' Chip Supper,  
Town Hall  
at 7 pm.

### July 18

Cheese and Wine  
Evening,  
Plot 38,  
Cameron Road.

### August 18

Open Day,  
Cameron Road.

### September 27

AGM,  
Town Hall.

Please support these  
events.

## THE BEST KEPT ALLOTMENT?

By John Stephenson

THE judging of a best-kept allotment is always a matter of opinion. Beauty rests in the eye of the beholder. If asked I doubt any of us would agree which plot is the better. The best-kept allotment award is not given for neatness only, but as an appreciation of general care, and in recognition of a wider range of crops. It's not an award for housekeeping. It's an award for being a gardener.

### **Gentle disarray**

Neatness doesn't come easily to most of us. Especially me. Most of us don't have the time to attend to the meticulous tidiness that defines a good gardener in the eyes of the Mrs Bucket's of this world. Gardening to some is pristine lines of lettuce and orderly rows of onions. Not me. The plumb line and spirit level gardeners can keep their abnormally neat lines. I prefer the gentle disarray of nature. If a wind blown seed wends its way to my plot I don't lose sleep over it. A slight imperfection is often the flaw that adds a happy eccentricity to a garden that might otherwise be bland and uninteresting. And who knows what good fortune the wind might bring. I've several very good plants that appeared from nowhere. I am not a delicate gardener. I know what a marigold is and it's not a rubber glove. A gardener should have his hands in the earth and a head full of freshness and colour. There's something in a gardener communing with nature that answers a need to be a part of a greater whole. And you can't do that if you're worried about getting a bit of dirt under your fingernails. Most of us are from peasant stock, and we follow the same instincts that took our fathers and grandfathers to the fields.

### **Diversity**

For me, the real pleasure of gardening is the plants themselves: the diversity of form and flower, and the array of texture and flavour. I grow a few old roses for their blousy flowers and perfume, and the aroma of rose 'Mme Louise Odier' rambling around our door is a joy on a still summer's evening when the aroma hangs in the air. And dipping my nose into the striped petals of 'Rosa Gailica Mundi' on an early morning when the bloom is freshly opened is not something that can be garnered from a shelf of chemical perfumes. If they could bottle the smell of a dawn rose the world would be a happier place. Gardeners don't know much about aromatherapy. They're too busy enjoying it.

Plots change every year, and in the autumn of last year my wife and I made an attempt to revitalise our section of the old allotment hedge. This was partly due to a nursery I've dealt with in the past having a plant sale on their web site. It's the first time I've seen a plant sale on the Internet and I was tempted enough to bid some ridiculously low prices for a few shrubs. To my astonishment my bids were accepted, and having no space in our home garden we used the plants to refurbish the allotment hedge. The hardest part of the replanting was removing the rubbish that had accumulated over several decades. The old watering cans and lawn mower that had been dumped there were held fast by tangled ivy and wild hop, but once we'd got rid of the broken glass and the sections of rusting iron fence we were surprised to find that the hedge was nothing more than a mound of ivy. Most of the real hedge had died years ago. The rotting stumps came away fairly easily, but there's still enough material left to provide a habitat for the insect life that's a part of the ecological chain.

### **New hedge**

The new hedge is a mix of deciduous and evergreen specimens, and berries and flowering types. The planting looks a bit sparse at the moment, but a couple of seasons from now it will have filled out, and the thorny rambling roses I've used as fillers will deter vandals and provide us with cut blooms for the house. I grew the roses from cuttings so they cost nothing more than a bit of care and attention. Hopefully the mixed hedge will provide year round interest for us, and shelter and food for the wild life. There's enough room for all of us, and my wife and I don't mind sharing our plot with a few butterflies and small animals. Especially the frogs who return the favour by consuming a few slugs. I'll build bird, hedgehog, and bee boxes from any scrap wood that comes my way as the year progresses.

I am always mildly surprised when a non-gardener tells me that vegetables aren't worth growing because they're cheap enough to buy. The non-gardeners seem to miss the point. I don't care if a blind tasting shows that I can't distinguish an organic strawberry from one fed on the latest artificial fertiliser. I know that the sun warmed fruit I picked from the plant a half second before it passed my lips is superior. I grew it. It's something I did. It's mine. And I wouldn't believe the blind tasting anyway. What would those that seek to negate the satisfaction of

growing your own know anyway? They can keep their plastic wrapped trays of weary supermarket fruit. I would rather stand in the shade of a tree and pick a crisp apple straight from the bough. A trickle of fresh apple juice running down my chin lightens my soul.

Because I am a gardener my allotment plot is a minor extension of me. It reflects my mood. There are times when I can't be bothered with the digging and weeding. In winter my plot looks as if it's been neglected for years. But spring breaks and something in me brings me back to the smell of damp earth and the pleasure of seeing the first seedling break from the soil. And I bend my back to the hoe and the task of removing the worst of the weeds. If it's fine day I'll have the radio on and listen to whatever attracts my attention. My plot is my sanctuary. Sometimes I am there, but can't be seen because I am crawling along the rows of vegetables. And if I roll onto my back and let the sun warm my face and my eyes close for a moment – who cares? Gardening is not about worrying that you haven't staked the dahlias. It's about peace and contentment.

I'll be growing the old favourites again this year. The tried and tested varieties that have shown themselves worthy: 'Aquadulce' Broad Beans, 'Gardeners Delight' Tomatoes,

'Sugar Snap' Peas. But I'll also be growing something new. The optimist in me keeps me browsing through the seed catalogues in search of something different. The purple Brussels Sprouts I grew last year were a disaster, and I barely saw a single seedling from the sowing of mixed salad crops, but the carrots and parsnips were excellent and the plum coloured cauliflower flourished despite the drought.

### **Experimental**

This year will be more experimental than most. I've found a seed catalogue that offers 60 varieties of peppers and 140 types of tomatoes and restricting myself to a few varieties proved difficult. In the end it was too much of a temptation and I spent even more on seed than last year. I am looking forward to growing the variegated leafed tomato, and the green and yellow cauliflowers should associate well with last year's red. And there's the mix of purple, red, white, and yellow carrots, and the land cress with pale green leaves splashed with a dark green heart, and the striped orange aubergine, and four new lettuce, and the new hot peppers that threaten to blow my socks off, and the purple tomato, and the two tone harlequin squash, and the . . .

## **What To Do This Month . . .**

All leaves that have fallen, along with the ones under bushes and hedges, should be cleared away as they give protection for snails and slugs during the winter months. Also remember that falling leaves can clog up greenhouse gutters. All the raked up leaves may be left to rot down in a leaf bin. To let in more light, the greenhouse roof can be washed down removing dirt and grime. It is also a good idea to empty and clean water butts.

Any areas of ground that are presently empty can be dug over forking in plenty of rotted manure or compost. Should conditions prove wet, and we have certainly had a good deal of rain lately, a polythene sheet can be used to cover the area helping to keep any further rain off, then once the soil has dried out digging can begin again.

### **Vegetables**

Seed potatoes should be stored in trays, in a light, cool, frost-free place to chit ready for planting in March or April. Sowings can still be made of Broad Bean Aquadulce Claudia and The Sutton (under cloches) if conditions are suitable. In the greenhouse, sowings can be made of Aubergine and summer maturing Cauliflower. In colder parts of the country, and for exhibition, sowings of Onion should be made in the greenhouse, harden off the plants in March prior to planting outdoors in April. Prepare a deep trench, for where Runner Beans are to be grown next summer, by digging out and filling with rotted compost from your compost bin, plus during winter you can carry on adding kitchen waste. Then in late spring cover with soil and sow your beans on top.

### **Flowers**

Sowings can be made of Antirrhinum, Begonia, Dianthus, Geranium, Gloxinia, Lobelia, Salpiglossis, Statice, Sweet Pea and Verbena. Some perennial plants such as Anemone, Auricula, Aquilegia, Hollyhock and Kniphofia can also be sown at this time.

Sweet Peas that have been raised from autumn sowings can be encouraged to form sideshoots by pinching out the seedling tips. Cut down flowering perennials to ground level.

When leaf shoots begin to show on Crocuses, remove the pots from the beds where they had been placed, clean the pots of any old compost and place them in a cold greenhouse for the flowers to develop.

### **Fruit**

Continue to plant Raspberries and other soft cane fruit, however, if soil conditions are unsuitable when you receive your plants, plant them temporarily in a spare piece of land or pot to prevent the roots drying out, until there is an improvement. Established fruit bushes and trees should be pruned.

## **Chesham Horticultural Society and Allotment Holders' Association**

The Association has an active group of members and run a hut where they sell compost. 6X fertilisers, etc.

On February 17, 24 and March 3 at 9.30 am, the hut will be open for the sale of seed potatoes, onion sets, shallot sets, etc.

Please go along early if you wish to purchase a particular variety of potato as stocks go quickly.

A number of trips have been arranged for this year and dates are as follows:

### **August 4:**

Southsea

### **September 22:**

Edgbaston Botanical Gardens, Birmingham

### **May 5 or 12:**

Chelsea Pensioners Hospital Gardens

### **March 28:**

Social at McMinn's Centre

Molly Wright the Social Secretary will be happy to give you further details of the trips and can be contacted on 01494 785989.

Mike Allenby the Secretary of the Association can be contacted on 01494 784391.

Membership fee is kept to a minimum: £1 for a couple, 65p for singles and 50p for senior citizens per year.

**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.*

## A CHANGE OF CLIMATE

It's official. Well as official as it's ever going to be. British weather is becoming milder. I know that there's a small body of scientists that disagree, but if David Attenborough says it's getting warmer that's good enough for me.

A warmer climate means that gardeners need to adapt to the new conditions. The gardening wisdom passed down from our fathers is not as relevant as it was, and that old reference book you've been using for years is virtually useless. Check the original publishing date. It's probably forty years out of date. Climate change didn't exist when it was written.

We need to think our rethink our gardening strategies, and the most obvious consideration has to be the change in the rainfall pattern. Last summer's drought and this winter's excessive rainfall is an indication of things to come. The changes will be irregular of course. There will be some wet summers and some dry winters. But overall we need to plan for the broad changes that are a result of the havoc to the world that man is creating.

The first thing we need to do is save water. If you haven't got a water butt on your plot, get one as soon as you can. Plastic is the obvious non-corrosive choice and if you ask around you'll find someone somewhere that knows where to find an old plastic barrel. Ex-fruit juice containers are the best, because you know they've not had any harmful chemicals in them, and they're relatively cheap.

Save what rainwater you can. Not only in a water butt, but also in the soil itself. The more absorbent vegetable matter you can add to your plot the better. The water will be held in the soil longer, and that means less watering is needed. Use your compost heap to create a good rich humous to spread under your vegetables as you plant. Use animal manure rather than chemical fertilisers. Animals are a processing plant for vegetable matter and a load on manure adds humus to your plot.

Use garden peat only where absolutely necessary. Peat is a depreciating natural resource and it won't last forever. Conserve it.

Even in a drought the law provides for the continuing use of hose pipes on allotments, but Chesham Town Council have banned the use of hosepipes other than for filling individual water butts. Don't cheat. Use water sparingly.

Adapt the crops you grow to the warmer and dryer conditions. The tender vegetable that wasn't worth growing two decades ago is now a worthwhile crop. I've had good outdoor crops of tomatoes, sweet peppers and grapes the last few years. But make sure you grow the varieties bred for outdoor conditions. Planting a greenhouse tomato outside won't work, and it's unlikely that you get a significant crop for the unnamed plants you bought on the market. The hybridists have been busy breeding varieties that crop well in our climate. Read the seed catalogue and grown your own from seed. Look for the types that crop earliest. The best outdoor tomatoes are the low growing bush types. Try 'Oregon Spring', 'Siberian', and 'Alaskan Early', that crop 55-60 days after planting. If you are still growing the tomato 'Moneymaker' get your head examined.

Think about increasing the number permanent, rather than annual, crops you grow. A single fruit tree and a few soft fruit bushes will last your lifetime and beyond. The apple, plum, and pear varieties that were once an unreliable crop because of spring frost damage to the blossoms are flourishing in the warmer climate. Culinary herbs are best used fresh, and a perennial herb will last forever. Asparagus can be easily grown from seed and a bed of asparagus will crop for twenty years.

Concentrate your main efforts on fruit and vegetables that are best eaten fresh, when they're full of vitamins. Root crops that are eaten from store are less valuable and should be a secondary consideration. Grow an epicurean type by all means, but don't waste your effort on growing main crops that are unreliable.

Adapt and conserve.

**Happy Gardening Tadcaster**