

Newsletter Summer 2019

Guildford Allotments Society
PO Box 1081
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Message from the Chairman

It is now nearly a year since I first became involved with the machinations of GAS! What a year it has been! For those of you who have not had such an experience let me tell you that a lot of hard work is being done, and has been done, by very few in order to keep the allotments in Guildford running. I would like to thank those stalwarts who have helped me through this year.

We have made many steps forward. We now have new toilets at Larch (work planned some time ago and work undertaken by the tenants), Farnham Road and Pewley Down. Asbestos and a large amount of accumulated rubbish has been removed from Dagley Lane, headway has been made on the new formation of GAS into a Co-operative Society, the AGM confirmed a new Committee, hedge cutting at several sites has been done, new gates installed at Aldershot Road, gate at Burpham repaired, trees cut back at Worplesdon Road to list but a few.

On the subject of the AGM which was held on 12th June we were delighted to welcome the Mayor of Guildford, Cllr. Richard Billington, and Cllr. Bob McShee. Sadly the turnout did not reflect the size of our membership and therefore did not show the high level of interest we have in our allotments. I hope next year more of you will arrange to attend. We do need to show the Council that allotments are needed and are well supported and our Association is important to us.

Our computer programme, Colony, has been upgraded to the Cloud and we have had several major issues with it causing delays in getting some of our work done. We still have issues dealing with those on the waiting list and matching them up to sites but I hope we can get these resolved soon and once again be running smoothly on this.

Our next major concern will be dealing with the consequences of the Guildford Borough Local Plan particularly at the Bellfields and Aldershot Road sites. We have established a small group to monitor and act on this and we will keep you informed as and when we have something to report.

In the last month I have reduced the time I spend on GAS matters as my garden and allotment were showing severe signs of neglect! The dry weather has exacerbated this. So my apologies to one and all who feel they are owed a reply or are expecting some action. I will get around to it soon - when the rain starts to fall!

I hope you are all enjoying the fruits of your labours.

Best wishes

Philippa

GAS AGM June 20th

This year's AGM was held again at the Park Barn Centre and refreshments were enjoyed by members in the coffee bar entrance. This enabled guests, members, wardens and committee to socialise before and after the business of the AGM. With thanks to Kim Harriott and helpers for organising these.



Cllr Bob McShee, Philippa Wright, Mayor Richard Billington

Robert Cooper gave a short presentation on progress with the changeover to GAS becoming

a Co-operative Society. Unfortunately there have been delays with the National Allotment Society (NAS) in finalising a new model constitution for groups to use, which has held things up. It is anticipated that there will need to be an extraordinary General meeting later this year to approve the new constitution required for our new status as a Co-operative Society.



In her report Philippa also mentioned the need for more committee members as there are a number of jobs currently unfilled. This makes the work of the existing committee harder. If you think you might be able to help give Philippa a call. Contact numbers are on the back page.

The committee were reelected en bloc, and the accounts for the financial year 2018/19 were approved.

Copies of the Minutes of the AGM are enclosed with this mailing.

Jean Wickens

Site Work programme

This has already been touched on in the Chairman's report, but a great deal of work has been done over the last year to improve sites under the supervision of Les Daubney and John Steer:

The committee are working hard to get improvements done to all our sites, where possible, but it does take time. This is the work that the Committee have agreed to be done and achieved on 3 sites this year.

Dagley Lane site at Shalford - Asbestos removal and a considerable amount of old rubbish and iron cleared away.

Photos show before, during and after the rubbish was removed.



Farnham Road site - Trees, Bushes, old iron and old composting toilet removed, and site prepared for new toilet installation.



Pewley Hill site - Site prepared and a new toilet installed; and new gates erected. by GBC.



Committee members Les Daubney and John Steer oversaw the projects from start to finish; with all of the work undertaken by local contractor Mark Mason and employee Tony who have done an excellent job of it all.

John Steer (and photos)

GBC Parks and Countryside

The committee would like to thank Paul Stacey and his team from GBC Parks and Countryside, for their co-operation in the replacing the main and side gates at Aldershot Road site, the new heavy duty oak post on the entrance to Dagley Lane site and the new replacement gates at Pewley Hill site.

John Steer

Machinery

Tenants are reminded that when they return equipment after use they should let the warden know as soon as possible if:

- There is a problem and it is not working properly;
- If the strimmer cord has run out and needs replacing;
- If the petrol has run out.

It is very inconvenient for the next person wanting to use the machine to find it is not working.

Also please remember our wardens are all volunteers and it may take them a few days to replace strimmer cords, petrol etc.

Sheds, Greenhouses, Polytunnels

If you are planning to install a new shed or greenhouse on your plot, there are rules about appropriate positioning and size and you must contact the Secretary for permission.

Following recent issues with requests for large polytunnels to be erected, the GAS rules have been updated to include new rules for polytunnels to bring them in line with the rules for sheds and greenhouses. Your wardens have details of the new rules.

Tenants contact details

In her Chairman's report Philippa mentioned that our Allotment database Colony has been upgraded (albeit with a large number of teething problems).

However in the course of the work on Colony it became apparent that we do not have full contact details for all our tenants, and this of course may mean that you could be missing out on communications from GAS.

Of particular concern are the details which are missing for joint tenants. Items such as the newsletter are sent to main tenants only and while we hope these are shared - this may not always be the case.

It is hoped that this updating will begin in the autumn. You will be asked if you are happy for GAS to have your full contact details including email addresses and phone numbers for all tenants.

Aside from updating our records, which will of course need to be compliant with GDPR requirements, this will enable GAS in the future to communicate more by email. For example sending you information about the AGM, and electronic versions of the newsletter will reduce our costs for printing and postage.

The upgraded Colony should allow GAS to send out bulk emails which we are unable to do at the moment. We are also hoping to update the website and include more information on this - for example copies of the newsletter, minutes of the AGM etc.

However please do not worry if you do not have email - you will still continue to receive communications by post.

Please remember to let us know if you change any of your contact details.

News from your allotment sites

Burpham

This June, the Burpham Site hosted a visit from Burpham first school. The teacher visited the site to help a friend water their allotment and was amazed at how lovely our site was, and got in touch to ask if she could organise a visit for the induction class at the school. They had entered their school garden in Guildford in Bloom and she thought it would be nice for them to see our allotments .

Luckily the day was dry and sunny as around 60 small children and an army of teachers and helpers arrived at our gates all chattering excitedly. They were split into two groups and shown around. Several tenants were on hand on their plots to talk to the children and show them what veg we grow. They were fascinated by the soft velvety insides of broad bean pods,, and got stuck into tasting peas straight from their pods. They delved into one tenant's huge cabbage looking for slugs, and found ladybirds and all sorts of creepy things everywhere they looked.

They were amazed at Les and Stellas Gold Winning plot which has won best in show and best allotment in Guildford in Bloom. This year the scarecrows are two astronauts standing behind a moon of lettuce in honour of the 50 year anniversary of the first men on the moon.



Eventually they were all shepherded safely back to school and we received a lovely thankyou email from the staff and children who listed their favourite part of the visit. The creepy crawlies seem to have won that one !!!

The school is already planning a visit for the induction class next year, and maybe another years children as well. They were awarded a Gold for their Guildford in Bloom entry and are very keen to continue to teach the children of the benefits of gardening and growing your own veg.

Maybe we are starting the first shoots of allotment tenants of the future.

Mike Flarry (and photo)

Larch Avenue

At the time of writing the newsletter Larch Avenue are planning a BBQ on 17 August with live Country and Western music.

Merrow

Merrow Street held its annual summer BBQ on 20 July.

We look forward to a write up and photos in the next newsletter for both the Larch and Merrow events.

Kings Seeds

As you may know all GAS tenants are members of the National Allotments Society and a subscription of £3 per head is paid for this.

One of the benefits of membership is the discounted seeds scheme through Kings Seeds. The new catalogues will soon be available at your site together with order forms. When you compare the prices from Kings with other suppliers buying just 10 packets of seeds recovers your £3 NAS subscription – so don't miss out!!

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Garden Clippings

...Attack of the Squash people

And thus the people every year
in the valley of humid July
did sacrifice themselves
to the long green phallic god
and eat and eat and eat.

They're coming, they're on us,
the long striped gourds, the silky
babies, the hairy adolescents,
the lumpy vast adults
like the trunks of green elephants.
Recite fifty zucchini recipes!

Zucchini tempura; creamed soup;
sauté with olive oil and cumin,
tomatoes, onion; frittata;
casserole of lamb; baked
topped with cheese; marinated;
stuffed; stewed; driven
through the heart like a stake.

Get rid of old friends: they too
have gardens and full trunks.
Look for newcomers: befriend
them in the post office, unload
on them and run. Stop tourists
in the street. Take truckloads
to Boston. Give to your Red Cross.

Beg on the highway: please
take my zucchini, I have a crippled
mother at home with heartburn.

Sneak out before dawn to drop
them in other people's gardens,
in baby buggies at church doors.
Shot, smuggling zucchini into
mailboxes, a federal offence.

With a suave reptilian glitter
you bask among your raspy
fronds sudden and huge as
alligators. You give and give
too much, like summer days
limp with heat, thunderstorms
bursting their bags on our heads,
as we salt and freeze and pickle
for the too little to come.

Marge Piercy

This poem was referenced by Sarah Salway in an article in the RHS June 'The Garden' magazine. Although written by an American Poet it sums up the familiar experience of a summer glut of courgettes and desperate attempts to use them all.....and force them on relatives, friends, neighbours, anyone.....



Vegetable Seeds

The RHS reported in April that in their plant centres, vegetable seeds are outselling flower seeds. Ten of the top 15 seeds were vegetables. For some years now vegetable seeds have accounted for 60% of seeds sold. Seed potatoes top the list, with onions, garlic and microgreens and chillis among the big sellers.

Other seed merchants including Mr Fothergills have noticed a similar trend, although they point out that vegetable gardeners buy more seeds as an ongoing annual expense while flower seeds are more likely to be one off and occasional buys. Thompson & Morgan believe this is a long term change – due to items in the press about food prices and availability of fresh produce in the context of Brexit, and shortages of lettuces last year due to the heatwave.

However Brexit may bring challenges to UK seed growers and reduce choices. Surrey based seed grower Tozer Seeds who supply seeds to more than 80 countries said that registering new seed cultivars in both the UK and the EU may become too expensive, and may reduce the varieties available for UK growers. This may impact more on commercial, rather than amateur gardeners.

Pick your own from Supermarket Allotments

A Bristol company is in talks with Waitrose and other supermarket brands to develop systems where customers can pick their own salad leaves off the shelf. Lettuce and other salad leaves such as kale, watercress and microgreens can be grown indoors in soilfree aeroponic growing systems. These spray the plants roots with a nutrient dense mist enabling crops to be grown year round, stacked in shelves or on vertical cylinders. These leaves could become available later in 2019 or 2020.

These aeroponic systems are said to give crops with faster growth rates than traditional field growing plus consistent and predictable year-round harvests, and a 95% reduction in water usage. Also pesticides and herbicides are not needed. However the technology remains expensive and it is unlikely to take over traditional farming or food production methods.

The Times March 2019

Foreign Invaders threaten Native Ladybirds

Harlequin ladybirds, originally from Asia carry a fungal disease, which can be transmitted to native ladybirds through mating. Our native ladybirds are already threatened by loss of habitat, and this could lead to their population falling even further, with knock on effects for the rest of the ecosystem. If people are bitten by the Harlequin ladybirds they cannot catch the fungal disease but may suffer a severe allergic reaction.

The Times April 2019



Colours can vary - red or orange with black spots or black with red spots

Obese Hedgehogs

The Times likened 'porky' hedgehogs to the familiar tale of Britain's obesity crisis of too much wrong food, too little right food and not enough sleep to hedgehogs putting on weight, eating too few slugs and losing its prickles.



The founder of a Hedgehog Rescue Centre said 'Competitive feeding' by suburban households to attract them into their gardens is causing a hedgehog health crisis, creating fatter, less spiny specimens that hibernate less'. However the British hedgehog Preservation Society said that nationally underfed hedgehogs are more of a problem than overfed ones and recommended meaty cat food and cat biscuits.

However founder of the centre responded by saying this wasn't a balanced diet and that people should create spaces in their gardens to attract insects for the hedgehogs to eat - however she did acknowledge that this may not work if your neighbour is putting out cat food every night....

The Times May 2019

Marigolds versus Whitefly

Newcastle university researchers have tested the plant lore that says planting marigolds with tomatoes will keep the tomatoes free of whitefly. They found that it works - cutting whitefly infestation by about 60%.

They found that after 50 days, tomatoes grown on their own, had increasing levels of infestation while those grown with marigolds had a much lower infestation rate Why? - they believe it is the smell of the flowers which whiteflies find unpleasant. (Some humans too....)

The Times March 2019

Do Traditional Remedies keep slugs and snails away?

The short answer is NO - they are useless. In recent trials at Wisley, researchers from the RHS tried a number of home remedies to protect lettuces from attack. 108 lettuces were sown in pots and raised beds.

They tested copper tape, horticultural grit, crushed eggshells, pine bark mulch and wool pellets. After 6 weeks the lettuces were examined for signs of damage. Results showed that the slugs and snails inflicted as much damage on those treated with these remedies as those without. However lettuces treated with wool pellets or pine bark yielded a bigger crop as the treatments acted as a fertiliser.

While the rough or sharp textures of some of these traditional methods might appear to be unattractive to slugs and snails, their thick slime works as a protective shield allowing them to glide over the barriers.

One of the researchers said 'Many gardeners could be wasting their time and money by turning to home remedies in a bid to protect their prized plants'. The RHS said gardeners should encourage natural predators such as birds, use traps or slug pellets or physically remove pests themselves. If you use slug pellets the RHS says you should stick to the manufacturers instructions to minimise risk to other wildlife.

I have been trying a mixture of crushed eggshells and filter coffee grounds on my allotment round vulnerable plants and I have to admit they didn't stop the slugs or snails at all! Back to the slug pellets....

Lager lout Slugs

More research from Garden Organic a charity, who decided to recruit 166 participants, who had problems with slugs eating their plants for its 'slug pub' project.

Volunteers were asked to sink 4 glasses below the soil surface among a slug susceptible crop during April to October. Each glass was filled with lager, bitter, water and a drink of their choice.

Twice a week they recorded the number of slugs in each trap. The average number of slugs caught was 6.4 for lager, 5.3 with bitter, and 0.1 with water. Slugs liked cheap lager just as much as expensive brands.

Other drinks tested included red and white wine, cava, cider, and orange squash. But lager was the clear winner.

The Times April 2019

Bees - plants and maths

Two different studies have given more insight into the behaviour of bees. The first was a survey of which plants bees preferred carried out by the RHS, Garden Organic and Bumblebee Conservation, based on submissions from people's gardens and allotments. The three plants most favoured by bumblebees were viper's bugloss, teasel and toadflax.

Coventry University has now developed a free app Blooms for Bees which you can use to identify the 25 UK native bumblebee species and also the flowers being visited. The free app is available for apple and android phones. For a comprehensive list of pollinator-friendly plants visit rhs.org.uk/plants for pollinators.

The second study reported in The Times, showed that honeybees have a grasp of basic mathematics including a concept of zero as a number which puts them on a par with chimpanzees, and four year old children. Apparently humans only fully reached the concept of zero in the third century AD.

Researchers trained the honeybees to distinguish between smaller and larger quantities of black circles and squares on a white background. If the bees got the puzzle right they received sugar water, if they were wrong they were sprayed with bitter quinine. When they reached 75% accuracy they had to choose between a white rectangle with one shape and a rectangle with none. They passed the test 63% of the time.

Bumblebees have also solved the 'travelling salesman' problem of finding the shortest route between dozens of different points, which continues to defy supercomputers.

A Pocketful of Herbs

Well known herb gardener Jekka McVicar has recently had a new book published:

A Pocketful of Herbs: An A-Z.

In her award winning herb farm near Bristol she grows more than 400 culinary herbs. Each of these is illustrated in the book by photos taken by Jekka herself, with details of their culinary and medicinal properties, their botanical and colloquial names, the type of soil and position they like, and their hardiness. .

Jekka's favourite herbs for mind and body are:

Rosemary – A few sprigs steeped in boiled water and left to stand for a few minutes, before straining and drinking is good for lifting the spirits and sharpening the mind. It has also been said to improve the memory.

Lemon Balm – Despite being invasive (as I know to my cost – would anyone like a plant or two?), it has been said to reduce anxiety. Again steep in boiled water, strain and drink.

Fennel seed – can help with indigestion. Use same method.

Sage – A great cold remedy, gargling with sage tea mixed with a little cider vinegar is effective for sore throats, tonsillitis and mouth ulcers.

Lovage – A teaspoon of lovage seeds steeped in a glass of brandy, strained and sweetened will settle an upset stomach. Seed, leaf or root can be infused to reduce water retention (not to be used by pregnant women or those with kidney problems).

Pennyroyal – Rub crushed leaves onto insect bites to reduce the swelling.

In the kitchen:

Lemon Verbena lemon drizzle cake – place some leaves of lemon verbena in the cake tin before adding the mix on top and baking, although it doesn't say whether you should remove the leaves before eating.

Marigold – known as poor man's saffron, add some marigold petals to biscuit dough for a golden flecked effect.

Sweet Cicely – add leaves when stewing fruit and you will be able to use less sugar.

From Yours magazine

Who to contact at GAS

Your site notice boards have details of your warden's email and contact details; please contact them initially with any queries you have. If you need to contact the committee, details are as follows for queries relating to:

Plots, letting:

secretary@guildfordallotments.org.uk

Invoices

billing@guildfordallotments.org.uk

Waiting list:

waitinglist@guildfordallotments.org.uk

Security

security@guildfordallotments.org.uk

General queries:

secretary@guildfordallotments.org.uk

More serious matters:

chairman@guildfordallotments.org.uk

There is also a lot of information on the website:

www.guildfordallotments.org.uk

Please do not copy your emails to everyone on the committee; and remember we are all volunteers and are unlikely to be able to respond to you immediately.

Many of the contact details given in the newsletter and above, use email addresses, however we know that some of you don't have access to email. Please contact us at:

Guildford Allotments Society
PO Box 1081
Guildford, GU1 9HU

Next newsletter

The next newsletter will be available in the spring. Please send any contributions, articles, letters, gardening tips, comments etc to the editor – Jean Wickens - by 31 March
newsletter@guildfordallotments.org.uk