

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2019
Tommy's Field Allotments

THE growing season is just around the corner with hopefully a spell of warm weather to encourage both us and our fledgling plants to get active. Looking around Tommy's Field we can all feel a sense of satisfaction at the condition of our plots and the fact we now have security in the form of a 25year lease linked to a peppercorn rent to preserve the long-term future of our allotments on this site.

We await the start of roadworks adjoining the top of our site for the construction of a major new roundabout, latest word is that it is likely to start towards the end of July. We hope there will be minimal impact on those of us close to the work where we have clearly marked out the extent of land that will be required both for the roundabout and adjoining working zones.

It's not a load of old rubbish!

Let's talk compost. Not the kind that you buy in bags in the garden centre, marked 'multi-purpose' or 'peat free' but the kind that you can make yourself. This kind of compost is usually made in plastic bins, pallets or chicken wire and posts.

Compost is vitally important to all the little, too-small-to-be-seen creatures that live in the soil that, in turn, feed the soil and then feed the plants. At least, they will live in the soil if we make sure there's something for them to eat; nothing's going to come to an empty restaurant!

Compost making isn't a dark art and it isn't an exact science either. Too much carbon and the heap will be too dry and will not rot down quickly; too much nitrogen and it will become airless and dense and you will start to notice an unpleasant 'rotten egg' smell when you dig in to it. This is caused when the oxygen has been forced out of the heap. Turning the heap from time to time will help to fluff it up and aerate it.

Ideally, compost should be about 30% carbon-based material to 1% nitrogen, often referred to as the 'brown/green' ratio. Carbon materials are the brown stuff, whichis mostly the dry element: straw, paper (including shredded junk mail but not glossy coloured paper), newspaper and egg cartons. Egg cartons are especially useful as they trap air in their pockets which keeps the heap 'open' and stops it becoming airless and smelly.





Nitrogen based material is the green bit comprising vegetable peelings, fruit, litter from pets such as rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs (I had fabulous compost during the years I had a dwarf lop-eared rabbit), tea bags – but tear them open first, all the material you cut from your veg before taking them home, and, of course, the manure from the heap at the top of the allotments. Don't be picky here but take the lot as the straw adds the carbon element and the urine it contains acts as a great compost activator.

But ... do not add cooked food of any type, dog and cat poo, or plant material and lawn mowings which have been treated with weed killers or pesticides. Citrus fruit shells and peelings should be added in small quantities as they can make the compost too acidic and the little beasties that will be doing all the work to turn your waste into lovely, friable compost aren't keen on anything too acidic. Eggshells are an excellent source of calcium in the compost bins but the egg white that remains in the

shell can attract rodents. If you do decide to add them, crush them in to very small pieces so that they rot down more quickly.
Adding material to the heap little and often, as most of us do, will not lead to a 'hot' compost heap that will cook the materials quickly but it will lead to very acceptable quantities of compost that you can use to enrich your plot. Give it a try!***Muddy Paws***

Weedkillers

A controversial topic and one that can get gardeners quite passionate when debating the rights and wrongs of their use. We know some systemic weedkillers can have long lasting effecrts within the soil and when used close to boundaries overspray can drift onto plants and soil on the adjoining plot.With many of our allotmenteers turning to natural remedies chemical methods are an unwelcome intrusion onto their plots.



Path maintenance is a bind and so a quick spray rather than a short back and sides can be an easy solution. The problem here is this can end up with a "scorched earth" result where all growth is killed on the path leaving a bare, soggy and unsightly stretch of path.
So please think about how you use weedkiller and consider your neighbours when making that decision.

Keep your path clear

AS the growing season gets under way vigorous growing plants can start to encroach on paths making it extremely difficult for members to get to their plots. It is each person's responsibility to make sure paths are clear and safe to use, particularly when pushing a wheelbarrow or buggy. Make sure you are not the one to cause anyone to trip or fall through overgrowth of your plants.

.Number your plot



TO help identify your plot we are asking all members to clearly identify it. This can be done by sticking a transfer to your water butt or a simple post with your plot number clearly marked on it.

All together now!

A group of 12 willing volunteers got down to some hard work in the Community Garden on 24TH April to help give it a bit of a makeover. We managed to repair the raised flower beds, dig the beds and sow summer flowering seeds in some and plants from volunteers' gardens in others. By the time you read this we hope to have some perennial plants kindly donated by Heighley Gate Garden Centre.





All in all a very worthwhile and enjoyable couple of hours. The pictures alongside show the results and I think we can all agree an excellent job by everyone who came along.





If you would like to join us at a future work party and can spare a couple of hours, please email our Secretary with contact details and when you are able to help

Trevor Hulbert

We were all sorry to hear of the sudden death of Trevor Hulbert. Trevor had had an allotment on Tommy's Field Allotments for many years. He had also been a member of the management committee and a previous Treasurer. His health had not been good in recent years but he was always friendly and good-natured. His regular appearances working on his allotment were testament to how important it was to him. Whenever I sent out an email to all members, Trevor was invariably the first to reply – always with a positive and encouraging response with a welcome touch of humour.
Secretary (On behalf of the management committee)

Waterbutts



Did you know open waterbutts are a potential death trap to our friends the bee. To prevent bees

getting trapped in them how about covering them with lace netting or fine mesh – but not solid tops.

Bees and other good bugs

Pollinating insects are an essential part of food production, both commercially and on your allotment! Different pollinating insects are active throughout the year so, if you want to help them, it's a good idea to grow a few plants which have open-headed flowers and which flower at different times throughout the season. Plants that you might consider for your allotment include:

Spring: Crocus (honey bees collect its pollen for the new season's larvae); Marjoram & Lungwort (a low maintenance plant with deep blue & purple flowers loved by the hairy-footed flower bee).

Dandelions are often demonised as weeds but are visited by bumble bees, solitary bees, honey bees, hoverflies, butterflies & beetles for food. If you can leave a few dandelions to flower (you can remove the flowerheads before they turn to seed) you'll be doing pollinators (and your fruit & veg) a big favour!

Summer: Phacelia, proclaimed by Prof. Dave Goulson as "the single most attractive plant for bees on the planet", is easy to grow and along with clover, can be used as a green manure. Chives & strawberries are great for pollinators too, and bees will also take nectar from vegetables such as broad beans and runner beans. Don't forget lavender too! Famous for its perfumed scent, lavender is loved by bumblebees, leaf cutter bees, flower bees & mason bees.



Late Summer / Autumn: Honeysuckle is loved by the Garden bumble bee and Carder bumble bee, both of whom have a long proboscis (tongue).

Autumn / Winter: If your plot is on the boundary of the allotment site & is edged by ivy, leaving it to flower before pruning would be beneficial because it is an important source of nectar for honey bees before they cluster for winter & for queen bumble bees who will be fattening up before hibernation.

Snowdrops contain vital pollen for bumblebees emerging from hibernation and honeybees venturing out on sunny winter days.

Water matters

As many of you know who attended the recent AGM we had a steep increase in our water rates last year due to the long hot spell last summer and massively increased usage of water to keep our plants alive. The water supply is on a meter so it is encumbant on us all to use water wisely. We do have a rule that says hose pipes can be used to fill our water butts but not to water our plants. The vast majority do just this so please keep up your considered use of water.

To preserve the underground pipework during winter we turn off the supply in October and then turn it back on at the beginning of April when all chances of a frost are but a dim memory. Please leave the turning on and off of water to your committee and don't attempt to turn it on yourself.

Step this way

Step-over trees are a space-saving way of growing apple and pear trees. A quick way to achieve this effect is to buy trees which have already been pruned and where the branches have grown to a reasonable length. These will be delivered looking a bit like a 'Y' shape: a stem and two upward facing branches. The branches are quite flexible and can be lowered (carefully!) in to a horizontal position and tied to wires. Although all fruit should be removed in the first couple of years to allow the tree to develop a strong root system, fruit can be allowed to mature in following years.

Should you want to experiment and go the DIY route, this is how it's done: the central stem of a one year old tree is pruned where the tier (the step over) is required. The pruning cut should be made just above buds which are ideally on opposite sides of the stem. These buds will grow away the following spring and can be tied in horizontally to wires (tied in *very carefully!)*.

Although step-over trees will not provide enough fruit to feed a family of four for a year, they will provide a selection of different flavours from a range of trees grown in a restricted space. Each year, the number of varieties available increases and there is now a wide range from which to choose. It is important, however, to ensure



that the tree has been grafted on to the correct root stock and, because of this, it is advisable to buy from a reputable fruit nursery. These include: R V Roger (www.rvroger.co.uk) who are based in Pickering and have a huge display of fruit at the Harrogate Flower Show each year; Pomona Fruit (www.pomonafruits.co.uk) and Reads Nursery (www.readsnursery.co.uk).

Ruth Laws

Ruth has after many years working on behalf of us all decided to hang up her boots and focus on her allotment from now on. Ruth has been both Chair of Tommy's Field and a long serving committee member.

Care when parking your car

WE are located in an area where we have very limited car parking. The main road adjacent to our stone wall has a public footpath and cycle way, both of which are clearly marked. It is an offence under Highway Law to cross or park on either, so can we ask that you bear this in mind and park with consideration for pedestrians and cyclists please.

Heighley Gate do support us with donations of plants from time to time so do please reciprocate!



