

Compton Allotment News – February 2018

Welcome to the February edition of the Compton Allotment News under new editorship.

Articles, pictures, photographs, open days, recipes, news, advice on growing, etc.....
Please send to: Colin and Val Venton at colin.venton@gmail.com

Firstly the committee would like to thank Sue Day for all the hard work that she has put into forming the Newsletter as we know it today. Personally, Val and I have a huge task in matching the high standard that Sue has set in making the Newsletter interesting, informative and visually pleasing. And also in matching the amount of work that she put into it. I hope that we can come close to what Sue has achieved.

Hopefully you won't see many changes apart perhaps from typefaces – having loads of typefaces you never seem to have the one that exactly matches! We have some ideas about making some small additions but the format will basically stay the same. If it ain't broke don't fix it! Bill and Heather have very kindly agreed to continue their page and an Allotmenteer Answers Questions will still be there. Susan Kimber has promised to continue with her interesting articles on bees, as and when there is something to report.

January seems to have been the most dismal of months as well as being wet. Small lakes have appeared at the allotment at times and the ground is very wet so please take care in the car parks. The high winds have caused some realignment as to where things are. John Benwell's compost bin lid was eventually found but he is still missing two lids to his incinerators. If you find anything that you are not sure where it has come from, please put it on or by the produce tables. Hopefully now we shall see some better weather.

A reminder that Butterflies in the Glasshouse at RHS Wisley continues through February and ends on the 4th March.

The hedge around the allotment has had its winter trim.

Tree Surgeons have cut down another big tree in Withies Lane which hopefully will give those plots at the bottom better access to the sun.

A date for your diaries:

The committee has set the date for the Spring Working Party Day on Sunday 25th March from 9am to 1pm.

Access to the men's urinal has been improved:



Jonathan Draper answers questions

How did you hear of the allotment?

I knew about the allotment when I was a boy (a long time ago!) when visiting my Gran & Grandad just opposite in Oak Cottages and always remember the tobacco leaves hanging up to dry.

How long have you been on the allotment?

Some may say toooo long, but about 3 or so years.

What are your three favourite things to grow?

New potatoes (always try to dig a.s.a.p. I am very impatient and try to beat the Supermarkets)

Beetroot (but plant too close and in raised beds the slugs just love them as well)

Tomatoes (just love the small ones , Gardener's Delight, always scrumping)

What has been your greatest growing success?

First sowing of Sweet Peas, everyone who passed our previous plot just said what a wonderful colourful scented show, (Bet I can't do that again!)

What notable failure do you recall?

My new potatoes last year -- bought 5 or 6 bags new and old and just got them all muddled up after chitting and still left one bag in the shed to go mouldy (Lesson learnt, don't buy too much seed)

What tips for growing would you give to others?

Don't give up if it all goes wrong, just plant back up and enjoy the time spent at the office talking and chilling with your fellow allotmenters.

Anything you would like to grow but our climate is against us?

Pineapples, coconuts

What are your favourite fruit and vegetables?

Runner Beans, Brussel Sprouts, Marrow

Raspberries, Strawberries , Blackberries, pears & apples

Any particular event that sticks in your mind that happened on the allotment?

Just look at the photo taken Thursday morning 18/1/2018 (wind , --what wind !!) I know the committee would like the sheds on the perimeter but calling on the Almighty is a bit too much!!



New Varieties to Try

I am keen to feature new varieties to try in which we don't just rely on hype from the seed/plant suppliers but having tried and tested them ourselves we feel others might like to try them.

I'm kicking off with a new strawberry variety which has the unusual name of **Just Add Cream**.



New varieties often make small improvements over older varieties but I think this variety makes a bigger step forward than is usual. Firstly, it is claimed that each plant will give up to a kilogram of fruit. Secondly, that it doesn't really have a season. As soon as the weather warms up it will start flowering and will fruit in early May, all through the summer until the first frosts. Hence the massive production of fruit. Lastly it is claimed that it has a unique flavour.

I bought twenty plants back in June/July and they quickly bulked up. Its growing habit is very different from normal strawberries in that its leaf stems are quite short so that the plant develops a ball shape and it does not produce runners so I guess propagation would have to be by crown splitting. The flowers are an attractive pink colour. I did not want my plants to form fruit as I wanted the crown to really bulk up. The problem was they just wanted to flower and flower! Every few days I was cutting off masses of flower stems. I went away in the latter half of September and came back to find three decent sized strawberries. One got taken but we eat the remaining two round about the 10th October. Considering it didn't have the benefit of summer sunshine and heat, the taste wasn't bad!

Two other allotment holders have been so impressed by these plants that they have ordered some too.

My early conclusion is that regarding quantity of production and length of season the suppliers are absolutely correct. I look forward to seeing whether the taste matches all the hype.

Just Add Cream strawberry plants are available from Thompson and Morgan.

Bill and Heather's Page

February : Spring is just around the corner and we will be giving our beds a dressing of compost and covering them over with black plastic sheeting to keep the weeds down and warm the soil.

Most of our leeks have been harvested and the last of our kale we be picked before it goes to seed, but we will have purple sprouting broccoli to look forward to.

The old canes of our autumn-fruiting raspberries will be pruned back to allow the new shoots to grow through and strengthen.

This is the time of year when new seed catalogues land on your doormat and there have been some interesting new seed varieties on offer this year.

Dobies have a new pink-hearted Chinese cabbage called '[Scarvita](#)'. An attractive and very versatile vegetable that can be used both raw in salads or cooked in stir-fries.



In the Suttons catalogue is an interesting heritage variety of squash, '[Honey Boat](#)', that tastes like a sweet potato. It can be baked in the oven and eaten without being peeled as even the skin can be eaten.

Thompson & Morgan have a new, blight resistant tomato '[Oh Happy Day](#)', an F1 cross between a very blight resistant North American line and a French Marmande type.

From Mr. Fothergill comes '[Trinidad Perfume](#)' a pepper with an authentic habenero flavour, but without the heat !

Drop us an email if you have any questions (bill.fordham@gmail.com) or come over to visit us on Plot 28D !

Microbes: Key to carbon storage

An interesting article that appeared in the RHS Garden magazine for September and I quote it verbatim:

“ In RHS Advice (July ,p37), it was suggested planting anything green (preferably with big leaves) can help capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and reduce global temperatures. How gardeners manage their soil is, however, critical in ensuring that this captured carbon stays locked away, potentially for thousands of years.

The stability of carbon depends on many things, including the presence of soil organisms due to their role in maintaining good soil health. Each species has many functions; worms , for example, create passages to allow aeration, whereas microbes break down organic material such as dead leaves or compost into smaller compounds that can be used by plants (or other microbes) for energy. One teaspoon of garden soil can contain many microbes, including 1 billion bacteria, several metres of fungi and many other species.

The carbon that remains after microbes have broken down organic material is extremely stable, and can remain in the soil for between 1,000 and 10,00 years. Microbial cells themselves also make up an important component of the carbon stored in a soil.

Microbial populations, however, are vulnerable to particular management regimes.

Microbes like the moisture that is contained in organic matter, and when the surface is turned over, such as after digging, they become exposed to the comparatively drier air, and also to harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun. Thus the population is reduced. Also, microbes cannot use nutrients in synthetic fertilisers: they need the application of organic matter to sustain their populations. Therefore, the most effective thing gardeners can do to lock up carbon is to add organic matter - **and to avoid digging soil wherever possible.**”

Text that is highlighted is my own doing. There is no creditation given or scientific sources quoted in the article.

Food for thought!



Improving Your Soil

A further item in The Garden magazine for this month has an article on improving your soil.

I quote:

“The sheer volume of soil improver you need for the best results can be surprising – typically 5-10kg of organic matter per square metre, or 11-22lb per sq yd, or half to one full 15-litre (3 gallon) bucket per sq m. **Dig or mulch sandy soils in spring** (my highlighting).

In later years, to avoid disturbing soil organisms consider switching to no-dig mulching – by adding organic matter to the surface.”

I have been wondering for some time when is it best to manure my plot – Autumn or Spring? Seeing that many plot holders having ordered manure from the Compost Centre in the Autumn leave the bags on their plot – in some cases holding down plastic covering/weed fabric – I have been wondering whether to place two orders – one in the Autumn and one in the Spring. This would give people the option when to order their manure. Provided we ordered 50+ bags we would get them at the reduced price.



This month is probably the last month to prune your apple and pear trees.

Many seeds can be started now in heat.

Peter Quinlan has a redcurrant bush, a blackcurrant bush and a goose berry bush to give away. If any one is interested please see or contact Pete.

The Allotment Newsletter has spread all over the world, not just in our little part of Surrey.

A few weeks ago a lady from South Africa contacted Sue Day, as the Editor of the Newsletter, trying to contact a long-lost neighbour. She thought that her once neighbour was working on the Compton Allotments. After an e-mail and a phone call to ascertain that she was genuine, they are now in contact with one another.