

# Compton Allotment News – May 2018

Welcome to the May edition of the Compton Allotment News.

Articles, pictures, photographs, open days, recipes, news, advice on growing, etc.....

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## Compton Fete – Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May 1pm to 5pm

The Fete is fast approaching and we would be grateful for any flower, veg or herb plants to sell on our stall. Any preserves that you are able to donate would be most welcome especially if produce from the allotment is used in them. **Please donate as much fresh rhubarb as you are able because that sells really well.**

Secondly, we need as many volunteers as possible please (a) to help set up the stall - which will start at about 9am and (b) to help sell from 1pm to 5pm. "Many hands make light work" and if we have plenty of people then we can make the shifts shorter. You don't have to do long spells, an hour or two would be a great help. **Please either e-mail me or speak to any of the committee if you are able to help and what times you are able to offer.**

The fete is a really important event for the Allotment Association as it provides us with money to purchase machinery and finance, to maintain the site which without the fete would have to come out of member's pockets.

## The Weather

Spring started to come with a bang, and then disappeared! Please be aware that we are not safe from frosts until after the second week in May. Butterflies appeared in the warm weather and then disappeared like the bees in the colder weather. I have seen Cabbage Whites, Brimstones, Orange Tips and Peacocks.

# Further News

## Pigs

The second batch of pigs arrived on 19<sup>th</sup> April and have settled into the nursery compound talking to the other pigs through the fence! There are six new ones which are two different breeds to what we have already. They are of different ages - one being quite small and another quite large.



I love this time of year at the allotment as it looks so pretty with all the fruit blossom. I've been telling everyone that "I am worried about my blossom!" Last year we had a late heavy frost that completely destroyed the fruit harvest. As I write this we have had two fairly light frosts which don't seem to have harmed either blossom or fruit set. Occasional bees have been seen but hopefully, with warmer weather we should see more doing their work.

# John Benwell answers questions

## **How did you hear of the allotment?**

Our allotment has been in the family for a long time.

## **How long have you been on the allotment?**

It's been years shared with dad and then I took over when dad died.

(In actual fact John is a third generation Compton allotmenteer! The Benwells moved into Compton in 1933 and although it is unknown exactly when John's grandfather had an allotment, it could have been before the war. John's dad took over sometime after 1946.

Editor)

## **What are your three favourite things to grow?**

My three favourites are potatoes, broad beans and runner beans - especially broad beans - I grow a lot of them!

## **What has been your greatest growing success?**

Broad beans we grow enough to last the year!

## **What notable failure do you recall?**

We can not grow parsnips true and gave up on brussel sprouts - they never stayed firm.

## **What tips for growing would you give to others?**

To keep the ground as clear as you can through the Winter, then you have less to do in Spring.

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

No we are happy with what we grow in this climate.

## **Your favourite fruit and vegetables?**

Broad beans of course (John is the Broad Bean King of the allotment!) and potatoes. Fruits I like to grow are raspberries and strawberries.

## **What are your earliest memories of being on the allotment?**

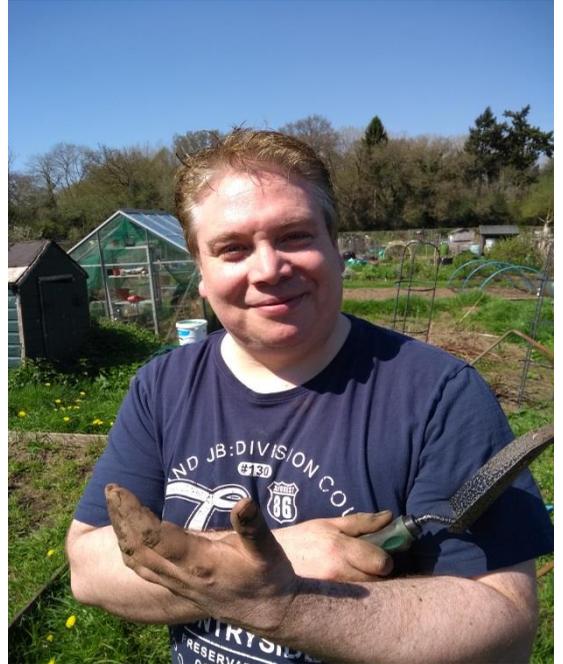
My earliest memories are being with my dad and Uncle Geoff when I was small.



# Philip Friend

I have been an eager cook for about 40 years, stemming initially from the love of eating(!) and the desire to be able to make what I could otherwise buy. But as an adult, I love to be able to make a dish from scratch, often using modest ingredients – although I do like to push the boat out from time to time.

I took on the allotment many years ago mainly to be able to use seasonal produce, which is very important to me: I mean, if anyone served me an imported strawberry in November, or tried to feed me asparagus in January, I would probably throw them back at them with great force! I also love to grow most of my fruit and veg for the flavour benefits you get from home-grown produce: and actually, it is flavour that is crucial to me: a freshly picked tomato, for example, is a million miles away from any that can be bought; with great quality produce, simple cooking is often all that is needed to bring out the best in the ingredient. And that is an important part of my approach to cooking.



Although I love all types of cooking, baking is the key area of cooking that is my “escape” for me, baking epitomises comfort and in many ways is my therapy. A few years I started a blog of my own baking-related recipes. Initially it was a place for me to store my own scribbled down recipes in a more formal, tidy way, but it has grown somewhat since its creation! My blog link is:

<https://bakingfanatic.wordpress.com/>

I applied to the BBC’s Britain’s Best Home Cook programme last autumn because I wanted to push myself with my cooking and to experience a real challenge: not least, cooking to a brief and, most scarily, to strict time limits. To have got through the application process and the auditions and to be selected as one of the 10 contestants is something of a miracle - and I still have to pinch myself to believe it!

Britain’s Best Home Cook involves 10 of us as keen home cooks, cooking our way through a series of challenges. Nothing too cheffy or over-the-top; just good, home-style quality food done as well as we can. We get judged by Mary Berry, Chris Bavin and Dan Docherty – all of whom are experts in their respective fields: Mary (well, what more can be said about the wonderful Mary Berry!), Chris is a produce expert and Dan is a top London chef.....so no pressure for us at all then!! Not forgetting the fabulous Claudia Winkleman who presents. Each was a total joy: to meet any of them would be a thrill, but to cook for them (and to lark around a bit with Claudia) was a dream come true.

**The show airs from Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May at 8pm on BBC1 and is an 8-week series, with one contestant being eliminated each week. The book of the series is out now, and contains many of the recipes from us as contestants.**

Obviously I cannot go into much more detail about the programme, but suffice to say I loved every moment and would do it all again in a heart-beat! To say it was the most exciting experience of my life is something of an understatement.

Philip and his husband Simon are on plots 26c, 26d, 27c and 27d. More about Simon next month!

# Bluebells



**Pictures taken at Polsted Lane woods.**

- The first bluebells appeared after the Ice Age.
- Bluebells are a sign of ancient woodland. Bluebell woods demonstrate that they have been continuously wooded since the 1600's.
- It takes five years to collect enough energy for a bluebell seed to grow into a bulb.
- In the Bronze Age feathers were stuck onto arrows with glue made from bluebell bulbs.
- Britain contains more than half of the world's bluebell population and our bluebell woods are unique to us.
- Our native bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. If you dig up and sell a bluebell you can be fined £5,000 per bulb!
- Bluebells thrive in undisturbed woodland. Walking on them crushes the leaves which are then unable to photo-synthesise and the plant dies.
- They do most of their growing before the tree canopy closes over them.
- Bluebell roots contract and pull the bulbs deeper into the soil by up to 3-5 inches. Because of this they do not grow so well on shallow, chalky soils commonly found in the south-east of England.
- Bluebells are poisonous and contain 15 biologically active compounds to defend themselves from animals and insect pests.
- However, some scientists are researching how the bluebells could one day help to treat cancer.
- Some people used to believe Fairies used bluebells to lure and trap people walking past the woods, especially children. Hence they were called "Fairy Flowers."
- Another myth was that if you wore a wreath of bluebells you were compelled to tell the truth.
- Bluebells are a lifeline for hungry insects emerging from their dormant winter state. They are vital for feeding bees, hoverflies and butterflies. Bees sometimes "steal" the nectar by biting a hole in the bottom of the bell.
- There are rare "albino" flowers which are white because they lack the blue pigment.
- During Queen Elizabeth I's reign starch was made from the crushed bulbs to stiffen their big ruffled collars.
- **The UK is home to a significant proportion of the world's population of bluebells. The Woodland Trust would like your help to find out where they are. Go to [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) to map where bluebell woods are.**

# Rhubarb Recipes

With rhubarb being harvested now here is a suggestion for using rhubarb in two recipes.

## Rhubarb Yoghurt Fool

### Ingredients:

700g of rhubarb

75g of caster sugar

200ml of real Greek yoghurt

### Method:

Mix rhubarb with caster sugar, and bake in a shallow baking-dish, without covering, in a pre-heated oven at gas mark 4, 180C, for 30-40 minutes. This rhubarb compote can be eaten on its own. Or you could add the zest and juice of one large orange, or 1 heaped teaspoon of grated fresh ginger (the ginger flavour works best with soft brown sugar rather than white sugar).

To make the rhubarb yoghurt fool, whizz the compote to a puree in a food processor together with the real Greek yoghurt. You can garnish with some preserved ginger or a slice of orange.

Serves 3

For a healthier version you could use a sugar substitute, such as xylitol, or a mixture of xylitol and sugar. The best yoghurt to use is Total or Waitrose full fat yoghurt.

## Rhubarb and Custard Cake

### Ingredients:

1 Quantity of Roasted Rhubarb \*

250g of softened unsalted butter

150g of ready-made custard (not the chilled kind. Ambrosia is a good brand)

250g SR Flour

½ teaspoon Baking Powder

4 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

250g Golden Caster Sugar

### Method:

Make Roasted Rhubarb\*: Wash, dry and cut into pieces 600g of rhubarb. Put in a shallow dish, or a baking tray & sprinkle over 75g of caster sugar. Toss together. Needs to be in a single layer. Cover with foil. 200C/fan 180C/ Gas mark 6. Roast for 15 mins. Remove foil. Give it a shake & roast for 5 mins more, or until tender & juices are syrupy.

When cooked drain off the juice & leave to cool. Grease & line a 23 cm cake tin. Heat oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas mark 4.

Reserve 3 tablespoons of custard. Beat rest of custard with the butter, flour, baking powder, eggs, vanilla & sugar until creamy & smooth. Spoon 1/3 of mix into tin, add some of the rhubarb. Dot 1/3 more cake mix over & spread it out. Top with more rhubarb, spoon over last of the cake mix. Doesn't have to be too neat. Scatter rest of rhubarb over & dot with the remaining custard.

Bake for 40 mins until risen & golden. Then cover with foil & cook for 15-20 mins more.

When skewer comes out clean it is cooked and leave to cool in tin.