

# THE URBAN JUNGLE

The Newsletter of the Ruislip-Northwood Co-operative Small Holding and Allotment Society  
Limited

Issue 19 - August 2010

## Introduction

What strange weather we are having this "summer". It has been really topsy turvy. We had a long, dry spell just as we were trying to get our seeds to germinate and young plants established. Now we have it cloudy and cool, just when we want the sun and warmth to ripen things like tomatoes and corn. At least we haven't any blight yet – or to be more precise, we didn't have any when I last looked! (Whoops! I spoke too early. I notice Trevor has just sent out a full blight alert.) Mind you, the way it is raining today, the allotments could be flooded by the time of my next visit.

I know some of you have been asking what happened to the July newsletter. I'm afraid family needs and holidays interfered with the editing schedule, so I'm a month late. I have kept this newsletter short as I wanted to focus your attention on three important areas. The first is the Kings Seed Scheme, which needs action by 26th September. Cathy Brushfield has supplied the information for this article. Then Angela has written two articles – one about using the composting toilet; it is very important we get this right. The second, on site news, includes the background to the recent committee decision to ban the use of carpets on site.

## Seed Orders

We have now received the Kings Seed Scheme 2010/2011 catalogues, a copy of which can be obtained from all Committee members, or Cathy your Seed Secretary.

Onion sets and shallots can be ordered for this year's planting and will be delivered from early October 2010 onward, seed potatoes will be despatched early to mid January 2011 onwards, subject to weather conditions.

Completed order forms must be submitted together with the correct remittance **before** the Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2010 cut off date. Please note that to avoid unnecessary work, we are selecting the "Individual Packing" option on the order form, which for only an additional £1, ensures that your order is packed individually rather than in bulk to the seed secretary for onward distribution.

We would urge you to check out the highly competitive prices offered by this scheme, which we believe can't be beaten by any local suppliers. **Don't forget – orders before the 26<sup>th</sup> September please.**

## The Composting Toilet

OK, so now we've all had a peep into our new lottery present - and more than one has tried the seat for comfort - have any of you read the poster inside the building to see how it all works? I leave you to your comfortable reading....but it is nevertheless important that we all understand the principle behind it. This is a highly-specialised, environmentally-friendly, DRY-composting toilet, which produces a dry, odourless compost suitable for use to regenerate our ageing hedgerow. Water does not need to be added, even in cleaning it. In fact, pouring water down the toilet would slow down the composting process and encourage smells which would attract flies. Only toilet paper may be introduced. Remember, there is no water closet barrier as in a plumbed toilet, but there is no smell because of the air-drying chimney. It is important to use the cleansing gel provided after using the toilet. On leaving, close the toilet lid and close the door to keep flies and dust at bay.

An environmental friendly powder is used with a brush to clean inside the bowl. The outside can be wiped using a disposable cloth and a bucket of water in which the brush can also be cleaned. These items will be available from a member of the Committee. No gloves are provided. Water from the bucket can be emptied along the hedge. On no account empty water into the toilet. And don't even think about using disinfectants or other chemicals, as that would kill the enzymes which make the whole thing work.

## More Site News

New Addition to Terms and Conditions - Carpets

The Committee has decided, after much deliberation, to ban the use of carpet on site. This medium was cheap and readily available and was formerly recommended to suppress weed growth during the growing season until the plot holder was ready to plant the area. Unfortunately, successive generations of plot holders have left behind layers of carpet which have been suppressed by the very weeds they were intended



to control; discouraged, people have abandoned their plot and a new plot holder has laid yet another layer of carpet on top.....and so on, ad infinitum. Anyone who is sceptical about Roman remains being discovered – intact - six foot down, needs only to visit one of our neglected plots with a spade to discover just how quickly nature can re-invade our space. And how well preserved the layers of carpet are. And how unfit for purpose. Carpets that were laid, (with good intentions), to smother the weeds on the cross path two years ago, will require a strong man with a pick-axe to clear! Nothing "weedy" about weeds!

Unfortunately modern manufacturing has replaced the natural content of carpets with man-made fibres. These do not decompose in the soil. More worrying is the possibility of soil contamination from modern chemical dyes. Should you need to use a weed-suppressing membrane for a couple of months, use black plastic. Please remove this before the onset of the dormant season - winter.

The skip that Kazuba kindly left us half-full, has been filled with rubbish left on site, together with a further large skip ordered by the Society to dispose of carpets on plots. We are aware that a number of you still have carpet on your plot. Please take this to the dump by the end of the year. Unfortunately the Society's funds cannot run to another skip in this financial year as this is a very expensive drain on resources.

Of course, depriving the weeds of light by covering them is only intended as a short-term measure to prevent re-growth of weed seedlings on land recently dug and weed-free. Weeds are dormant in winter. A thick mulch of well rotted compost protects the surface of the soil and its micro-organisms, as well as feeding it. It also delays early weed germination while allowing the weather to do its beneficial work of breaking down the clay soil beneath. Many gardeners recommend warming the soil on prepared ground with clear plastic for two or three weeks before early sowings of parsnip and carrot. This encourages early weed germination which can be hoed off before sowing. The plastic is replaced until the seedlings emerge, then removed completely to allow the rain to water them.

#### Paving

Covering ground intended for cultivation with paving is also contrary to the Terms and Conditions as it destroys living organisms in the soil and compacts it, impeding future cultivation. Paving set on sand has been permitted in the past beneath sheds (for stability) and also along paths between neighbouring plots where there has been risk of flooding. Cement must NOT be used. Permission for permanent structures has to be obtained via the Committee from the Trustees. Any violation of this rule could affect our lease.

#### Parking

No vehicles may be parked on any allotment plot, or anywhere where they may block paths providing site access. There is more than adequate parking for able-bodied members in the upper car park. Allotment members may use the cross path to unload only, but must remove their vehicle immediately afterwards. Please leave the cross path free for less mobile members to park. Remember it could be you needing to park here in a few years time! The area immediately in front of the stable gates is needed for constant access to traffic entering and leaving the premises. Visitors should check with Tim or Gayle before leaving their vehicles in this area. At weekends parking space is available along Joel Street.

#### Trench

Clive has kindly donated a short section of drainage pipe to fit in the trench next to Lynne's plot, which Gerry has in filled with shingle; this was considered a necessary safety measure because of Lynne's visual impairment. Further work will be carried out to complete the central trench in October. Would those members who have covered over the trench adjacent to their plots please remove the covering, as the area is becoming dangerous. As stated in an earlier newsletter, a two foot wide path both sides of the trench must always be kept clear for access. Weeds have re-invaded covered areas, making access to clear the trench very difficult, the cover is weakening the trench sides, and we are unable to install appropriate bridges to span the boundary paths. Unless the trench is cleared before the onset of winter, flooding will recur.

#### **And finally .....**

If anyone has had a success (or failure) this year with a particular type of vegetable, fruit or herb would you please let me know so that I can pass on the message via this newsletter. For example I know that Mike and I have found over the course of the years, that red skinned potatoes seem to do better on our soil and in our weather conditions than the paler skinned varieties.

Hopefully the next newsletter will be published towards the end of October.

Jenny Jessup