

THE URBAN JUNGLE

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

Issue 22 - May 2011

Introduction

Here is another packed newsletter with lots of dates for your diary. In fact there is so much information that I am having to make the font smaller and smaller so that it all fits on two sides – and I have been unable to include all the articles!

Welcome To

Emlyn and Joanna have each taken a plot near the entrance to the stables; Dave and his son John have taken a plot half-way down the other main path; while at the end of that path, Jonny has taken half of Rabinder's plot. Finally, Karla and Antony have each taken half the plot opposite the main locker block.

Feedback from the 7 May Fun Day

This was the second annual Fun Day organised by the Chamber of Commerce in Joel Street, and this time not only was the weather good, but we were able to sell plants. We did warn the organisers that early May wasn't the best time to guarantee much in the way of surplus plants, but a combination of hot and sunny weather in April and the usual generosity of plot-holders meant that we had plenty to sell. So thanks to everyone who contributed, and thanks to all those who turned up to help on the day: Ines, Gordon and Euan; Adam, Rabinder, Grant and Pramilla; John, Fiona and Ellie; Robert and Jenny; Graham and Janice; both Angelas, Colin, Sandra, Andre, Cheryl, Penny, Renate, Hanna, Dan, Ted and Trevor. We added two people to our waiting list, sold over £100 worth of plants and gained some very valuable publicity for the allotments. And we are already booked for another plant sale at Harlyn School's Summer Fair on Sunday June 26th: put it in your diary now and start planning what to grow! Billie has offered to provide a collection point on her plot, so look out for further information.

Summer BBQ

This will be on Saturday July 16th. Food provided; bring your own furniture, drinks and guests. Tickets will be on sale from the end of June - pre-booking essential (to save the catering team from a last-minute nervous breakdown!). We are proposing another raffle and a sale of preserves, jams, chutneys and cakes. Judging by your amazing efforts for Fun Day, this will phase none of you! It would be great if you could label your contribution with your first name as well as the name of the product, in case some of us come looking for the recipe. Look out for further details.

Keeping the site tidy

As usual, we will be organising working parties during the summer to tidy up the public areas of the site. Hedge-cutting sessions will take place in early July – exact dates and times to be arranged. We have a "heavy brigade" in place doing the actual cutting, but we need plenty of volunteers to help clear up and vanish the waste; if you can help please see Peter, who is organising the sessions, or any of the committee. And keep an eye on the notice boards!

We will also have the usual site 'tidy-up' session the weekend before the BBQ, ie. the weekend of July 9th/10th. There is always plenty to do to make the site look good, so the more helpers who turn up, the quicker it all gets done!

Some time before that we will be having a skip to finally clear all the bulky rubbish on site which won't fit into cars. We have done this for the last two years, but - as it's a rather expensive undertaking - it won't be a regular occurrence, so this may be your last chance to get rid of bulky rubbish from your plot. When a date has been fixed, we'll put up notices and send out emails to warn everyone.

Annual Walkabout

Every year, we invite Ken Guy - the chairman of the Trustees of Ruislip Combined Charity (i.e. our landlord) together with Eileen Bowlt, our local historian, who is also a Trustee - to walk round the entire site, both allotments and smallholdings. This has been fixed for the afternoon of Saturday May 28th. As well as being our landlords, they have both been good friends of the Society and want the site to continue and to thrive. They also welcome the chance to talk to plot holders and it is an opportunity for you all to meet them. We're sure most people will make a special effort to make their plots look good!

Machinery

We have one Hayter mower for use on the main paths and similar smooth areas, and we are planning to purchase a second in the near future. There are also two older mowers for use on slightly rougher areas. But if the ground in question is too rough - or the grass too long - please use a strimmer instead: we have two Stihl trimmers for edging or clearing rougher areas (not bramble, etc!).

Most of the Committee have keys to the Machine Shed, as do Ted, Peter and Joe, and will let out equipment. Please note: if you have not used an item before, ensure you are given instructions, as all machines differ slightly, especially regards starting. (And make sure you use the correct fuel!) All machines must be returned to the person who let them out, in a clean condition and any problems reported. We are investing members' money in good-quality – i.e. expensive - equipment because we feel the site looks better for it. Please look after it!

Trenches

We hope to complete this work this summer. It will involve refurbishing the existing trench to the south of the path leading to the stables, cutting a new channel beneath that path, and making a new trench along the upper side of the cross-path to link with the central drainage trench. Most of this can be done using a digger. As it will obviously involve some upheaval - especially when cutting across the path we will give advance warning nearer the time and try to complete the work as quickly as possible. Not only will this benefit the plots along that path, which have suffered flooding for several years, but the upkeep of all the drainage on the site is a specific condition of our lease. The Trustees have been involved throughout with the planning process and are extremely pleased with what has been achieved so far.

Raised Beds and Green Manures

Like many others on the allotment, Mike and I ventured into using raised beds on our allotment last year. It is really too early to say whether it has been a success or not, but here are our first thoughts. The paths between the beds are a problem for us. At the moment they are full of weeds, (like other areas of our allotments!) and we cannot make up our minds what to do with them. Putting down weed suppressing fabric is one option, but it is expensive. Planning and practising crop rotation is a lot easier with beds. Likewise it is easier to plan work to be done when you pay a visit to the allotment. It is good for the morale to be able to go down to the allotment and weed a couple of the raised beds – you really feel that you have completed the day's task. Also I really like the idea of not walking on the soil in the beds and not digging it. However we are having to go into the production of our own compost in a big way. This brings me on to the subject of "green manure".

Because of our need for a lot of compost we tried these out for the first time last autumn. The first lot of mixed green manure we sowed, grew so quickly that we had to dig it in before the winter. The two beds of winter tares, (supposed to be good for clay soil) grew well and did seem to suppress a lot of weeds. The other beds of mixed green manures were more sparse and we had reservations about them. Because of the exceptionally dry spring digging in these manures was difficult and we have had to work hard on the soil in order to get it into a situation where we could sow or plant. The bed which had the green manure dug in last Autumn is brilliant! One thing you do have to think about when using these manures is your crop rotation plans. I will continue to report on our findings in subsequent newsletters.

And Finally

..... we still have had no substantial rain. Remember, if you are watering your vegetables, it is better for root development to give plants a really good soaking less frequently than to sprinkle on a little water each day. Hopefully, by the time the next newsletter is out (early July) we will have had a soaking or two.

Jenny Jessup