

THE URBAN JUNGLE

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

Issue 25 - December 2011

Introduction

Well, I can't believe that I am already writing the "end of year" newsletter – where has the year gone? And what a challenging year it has been for us as gardeners and we are still facing a possible drought for next year. Our Society, however, seems to go from strength to strength. We have another packed newsletter for you this time, so please read on.

Welcome to

We have welcomed quite a few new members since the summer. On the Starter Plots, we have - in order from the path - Roz, Vincent, Viv, Simon and Majella. Elsewhere, Gemma has taken the corner plot behind Tim; while along the car park path, Peter has taken a plot opposite the Starter Plots, Remus is taking over part of Mike & Jenny's orchard and Zanele has taken a plot at the far end of the path. Several of last year's Starter Plot members have moved on: Chris has taken on part of Sharon's plot; Sue the rear part of Norma's; while John and Andrew are working wonders to open up the long-neglected plots next to the stables entrance.

The 2012 AGM

This will be held on Monday January 30th in the large hall at Fairfield, Windsor Close, Northwood Hills. The doors open at 6.30 and refreshments and raffle tickets will be available before the meeting starts at 7.00. The agenda is enclosed. This is your chance to have your say about how the Society is run for the next twelve months. Last year's attendance was a record; let's do even better this time!

Committee Members Wanted

We now have well over 100 members, so with this increase in membership the Committee feels that we also need more Committee members. We are looking for at least two more new faces. What does it involve? We have about ten Committee meetings per year, plus the AGM. (Currently, like the AGM, Committee meetings are held at Fairfield on a Monday evening.) We want people who are willing to chip in with ideas; and we are always happy for Committee members to take on responsibility for specific tasks. In particular, we are looking for a Minuting Secretary; Jenny Clark has done this job for the past two years, but pressures of work are such that she would like to pass it on to someone with more time. But, above all, we need people who will be the "face" of the Committee to the membership as a whole: there are too many of us now for this to be done by just one or two people, as was possible in the past. So, don't be shy! This is your chance to help decide how the Society develops in the future! If you are interested, please contact Trevor as soon as possible for a nomination form. (The cut-off date is Friday January 27th.)

Fees for 2012 (Barbara)

As you probably are only too well aware, inflation is currently running at about 4%. It was 5% when the Society's rent to the Trustees was calculated, and fuel, water, insurance and maintenance costs for the site will inevitably rise over 2012. However, we do have a fair amount of reserve funds so there's no immediate need to pass all the increased costs onto the members. I think we can manage by raising rents by only 10p per pole – an increase of 3.85%, to £2.70 per pole. This will allow us to continue with the drainage works and fence improvements that need to be done around the site, as well as pay the usual bills. Please pay your invoice by 31 January, or at the AGM, and remember to make cheques payable to the Society, not to me personally.



A Date for your Diary

To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, Northwood and Northwood Hills Residents' Associations are planning a Jubilee Celebration at Northwood Recreation Ground, Chestnut Avenue on Saturday June 2nd 2012 and we have been invited to take part. "The purpose of the event is to showcase all the many and varied activities that take place in our area, presenting Northwood and Northwood Hills to our own residents and of course to have some fun, for children and adults alike." We have already offered a plant sale, but if anyone has any more suggestions.... Step forward those with bright ideas!

Starter Plots (Angela)

On Saturday 15th October we had our first Starter Plot Session for the new members; Mary and Chris, who joined too late to attend last year's sessions also joined us. Chris has now moved on to a 5 pole plot, but Mary has decided to stay with her starter plot for another year.

We began with a talk about essential tools. As they have no storage facilities on site, I showed them my little Mary Poppins bag of necessities which travels from home to the plot and back again. The contents vary with the season, but this handy bag with 6 exterior pockets contains a trowel, hand fork, secateurs, snips, scissors, wire cutters, a small knife sharpener, and a folding collection of secateurs from which appear a miniature knife, saw, serrated knife and a tool to get stones from a horse's hoof! (very useful for cleaning boots prior to driving home!) The central compartment contains 2 pairs of gardening gloves, one for weeding and planting and a leather pair for cutting back bramble, a ball of string, some soft tie, matches and - most important of all - a small notebook and pencil. Often my mobile phone and keys fit in there too. All of this is very light to carry to and from our plots.

I should explain that when we had our first plot in the '70s, we had no locker or car and had to wheelbarrow all our tools back and forth. It was extremely annoying to arrive with the wrong tools for the totally unexpected job that faced us! I now note what I need to pick and bring back with me to the house BEFORE I set out to the plot. The last thing I do at the plot is to decide what job needs to be tackled next time I come. The good news is that nowadays I don't usually need to write it down!

Each of the new members had been asked to write a list of the plants that they wished to grow. As most of them will only be using the ground for a year, no perennials or biennials may be grown as the change-over will take place next Autumn. Each introduced themselves and gave a brief resume of their gardening experience. We looked at the main rotation groups, potatoes, cabbage, roots and onions and I asked them to fit their list of vegetables into these groups. They all realised that they had a number of crops that didn't fit any of these categories! We also discussed varieties of potatoes and suggested that early varieties would suit their small plots because they would be lifted early to make way for another crop. Climbing beans have a greater yield than dwarf. At our next session in Spring we will be looking at rotation more closely.

An information sheet about soil preparation and improvement was circulated. This also contained a list of the Committee Members and Key holders to the Machine Shed. Many thanks to the Committee Members - Ines, Sue and Michael - who came to introduce themselves and welcome the newcomers. Special thanks go to Sue and Michael for showing each member how to use the grass trimmers. This was invaluable as most had never used a petrol trimmer.

NSALG Membership

As a Society, we are affiliated to the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners, which gives us each individual membership. This is important because their advice on allotment issues is available to all members, not just the Committee. So what do we get for our £2.00 annual fee? For the Society, the main benefit is the advice of their legal team, which we are able to call on when dealing with any potentially tricky or difficult problem. As we are an independent site, we have to deal with matters that on other sites the Council would deal with; this is our only source of informed help, and has been invaluable to the smooth running of the site. We also have the wider benefit of belonging to a national organisation that is actively promoting allotments. But there are several benefits for all of us as individual members. The website - www.nsalg.org.uk - contains a



mass of down-loadable information: our username is D5840; password 3451. Their quarterly magazine is also available to download in the Members' area of their website, or for an extra £6.00 per year, can be posted to your home address. Members are entitled to take part in the cut-price seed scheme run by King's Seeds, for which the Society also receives a percentage discount. In previous years our insurance was also obtained through NSALG, but with premiums rising we have decided this year to insure through the RHS. This covers us for Public & Employer's Liability and for all communal buildings. It also has extra perks: more news at the AGM.

Site Tidy Up

There were two sessions held in October to "put the site to bed for the winter", i.e. mowing paths, clearing the central trench and generally tidying up around the site. As a result, we hope you will agree that the communal areas of the site look much better. We have also assembled enough rubbish for another skip. Many thanks to all those who gave up their time to help: Richard, Eddie, Tim, Sue, Ines, Robert, both Jennys, Roz, Joanna, Roger, Graham and Janice, Andy and Maxine, Chris and Lesley and Angela and Trevor.

Sensible Composting (Renate)

As we all know, clay is not the easiest soil to work on, but by adding a yearly dose of good compost, the soil will dramatically improve over time. Water – and any additional nutrients - will be absorbed more readily, whilst also providing more efficient drainage. No allotment, therefore, should be without its own compost heap. For no cost, the holder is able to produce a humus-rich soil conditioner and at the same time recycle vast amounts garden debris and uncooked kitchen waste.

A practical composting arrangement can be created with a relatively little effort. All that is needed is a three-sided rectangular container – the free wooden pallets often available on-site are ideal for this purpose. If possible, two such containers are to be preferred; one being full of decomposing material, the other being filled with fresh material. By the time the second is full, the compost in the first should be ready. The bottom of the compost heap should be in contact with the earth; worms will be attracted into the heap and play their part in the overall decomposition process. To speed up the process, the internal heat generated can be retained by covering the heap with a plastic sheet, or an old sack.

Many different recommendations abound regarding the composition, structure, air access, etc. However, simple easily-managed guidelines work best for the amateur. Things to put on the compost heap are:

- Lawn mowings (not too much in one go, unless thoroughly mixed in!)
- Hedge cuttings (cut small)
- Prunings (also cut small, or shredded)
- Annual weeds
- Autumn leaves (mix well with softer, greener material)
- Vegetable peelings, and other uncooked vegetable waste.
- Tea leaves and coffee grounds, as the only cooked vegetable waste.

Certain plant-derived substances, such as tough evergreen leaves, pine needles, sawdust, wood shavings, and newspaper can also be used provided they are not piled on in large quantities, and again are well-mixed with softer greener material.

In fact, regular mixing of a compost heap is strongly recommended; it ensures that a well-aerated and balanced composition is maintained. Moisture is also important; a compost heap should neither be too dry, nor too wet.

A final word - a well-managed compost heap has a really pleasant smell. Happy composting!

Recipe for Apple Spice Muffins

I like to cook these at this time of year because a lovely cinnamon smell pervades the house while they are cooking.

Makes 10 -12 standard sized muffins

Ingredients

9 oz or 250 g plain flour
3 teaspoons or 15 ml baking powder
Half teaspoon or 2.5 ml salt
1 and a half teaspoons or 7.5 ml of mixed spice
3 to 4 oz or 85 g to 110 g white granulated sugar
1 egg
5 fl oz or 150 ml milk
6 oz or 170 g finely chopped apple (any type, peeled and cored)
3 fl oz or 90 ml corn oil or 3 oz or 85 g butter, melted
2 to 3 oz or 60 to 85 g raisins or chopped walnuts, optional (I leave these out!)

Topping

2 to 3 tablespoons or 30 to 45 ml soft brown sugar
2 oz or 60 g walnuts, chopped

Method

Prepare muffin tins. Preheat oven to 375-400 deg F or 190 to 200 deg C.

In a large bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, salt and spice. Stir in sugar.

In another bowl beat egg with a fork. Stir in milk, followed by chopped apple and oil / melted butter.

Pour all of the wet matter into dry. Stir until just combined, adding raisins / walnuts during the final strokes. This batter is thicker than most : apple releases juice as it cooks. (However if the apple is especially dry, a little extra milk might be needed.)

Spoon into tins. Sprinkle with topping. Bake for about 20 to 25 minutes until tops are lightly browned and spring back when pressed gently. Cool for several minutes to make removal easier.

Bon Appetit!

And Finally

Next year we hope to give you some more information on green manures and “no dig” gardening – so watch this space.

I also have for you four Christmas cracker jokes which have a very tenuous connection with gardening, (I’m finding these more difficult to find each year!) Answers are at the bottom of this page.

1. What do you get if you cross a Christmas tree with an apple?
2. Where do chilli beans grow?
3. Why was Cinderella such a poor footballer?
4. On which side of the house did Jack’s beanstalk grow?

Hope you enjoy the Christmas break.

Jenny Jessup

Answers to cracker jokes: 1. A pineapple. 2. The North Pole. 3. Because she had a pumpkin for a coach. 4. On the outside.