



The Watering Can

Number 27 Winter 2011

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

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A warm welcome to the Winter edition of the HAHF newsletter and final publication for 2011.

With the growing season having come to end, now is the time when many of us will look back on the successes and failures of the past year.

The weather has proven to be a real challenge. Following a bitter winter and warm and dry spring, many plants started the year early with many flowers blooming much earlier than usual. We also experienced the warmest October in the last five years, and I am still reeling over the fact that I had a second crop of strawberries producing fruit well into the month of November. I have never experienced anything like this before, and it does make me wonder if these kind of conditions are a one off, or if they will become the norm.

November has been a busy month for the HAHF, with our AGM and the Allotment Competition awards held on the 9th of November at the Civic Centre, Uxbridge. More information on the prize giving, awards and winners can be found on pages 2 - 4.

I would also like to thank our Committee members for their hard work, dedication and valuable contribution throughout the year.

As a Federation we will be changing our focus in 2012, so please check the website (<http://www.hahf.org.uk/index.html>) regularly in the New Year for updates on the events that we will be organising and to find out more information on the ways in which we will be supporting allotment holders in our borough.

Season's Greetings and Best Wishes for 2011.

Vanessa Bonner

ALLOTMENT PRIZE WINNERS

The London Borough of Hillingdon has published the results of the allotment competition. Prizes were presented to the top three winners by the Mayor on Wednesday the 9th of November at the Civic Centre.

The Top Plot results:

Top plot 1- plot 29 - Heathfield Rise - Phil and Maria Seaman

Top plot 2 - plot 16C - Hill House - Anna and Adrian Murisanu

Top plot 3 - plot 46 - The Fairway – Carina Browne

Best Site results:

Best Large site - Hayes End

Best London Borough of Hillingdon site - Glebe Avenue

Best Small site - Hill House. They also achieved 2nd place in the London in Bloom competition.



Best London Borough of Hillingdon site - Glebe Ave (Photos by Cavin Higgins)



Best London Borough of Hillingdon site - Glebe Avenue (Photos by Cavin Higgins)



Best London Borough of Hillingdon site – Margaret Christie- Glebe Avenue



Top Plot – Phil Seaman - Heathfield Rise



Top Plot - Phil & Maria Seaman - Heathfield Rise

London Borough of Hillingdon and Hillingdon Allotment and Horticultural Federation

Allotments Competition 2011 - Top 50 plots

site name	plot nos	grand total	round 1 total	round 2 total
Heathfield Rise	29	240	121	119
Hill House	16C	237	120	117
The Fairway	46	232	116	116
Station Road	47 & 48	231	118	113
Hill House	13	230	113	117
Hill House	16B	228	120	108
West Drayton Cemetery	4	226	116	110
West Drayton Depot	43	223	116	107
Hill House	25	221	118	103
Glebe Avenue	11	219	101	118
West End Road	1	218	112	106
Meadway	11B & 12A	215	107	108
Hayes End	42 & 48	213	108	105
Southbourne Gardens	45A	211	109	102
Heathfield Rise	10 & 34	211	101	110
Hayes End	76 & 79A & 72	210	111	99
The Fairway	20	210	108	102
The Fairway	55	209	103	106
The Fairway	38 & 51	207	110	97
West Drayton Cemetery	0	206	101	105
The Fairway	26 & 35	202	106	96
Hayes End	75	201	109	92
Glebe Avenue	9	201	95	106
Belmore	45	200	100	100
Hayes End	70 & 77	198	112	86
Peachy Lane	27	198	101	97
Wood End Green Road	83	198	100	98
Station Road	83	198	99	99
Hayes End	22	196	104	92
The Fairway	57	196	100	96
The Fairway	56 & 31	196	96	100
Highgrove	38	195	99	96
Wood End Green Road	124	194	107	87
Wood End Green Road	66	194	101	93
Wood End Green Road	53	193	108	85
The Fairway	48 & 39	193	102	91
Field End Road	8	192	101	91
Peachy Lane	38	191	106	85
Hayes End	4	191	100	91
Station Road	30	191	99	92
Wood End Green Road	42C & 59 & 41B	190	108	82
West End Road	8 & 6A	190	102	88
Hayes End	36 & 37	189	98	91
Glebe Avenue	27	188	94	94
Highgrove	22	184	97	87
Peachy Lane	21	183	98	85
Peachy Lane	39	183	97	86
Western Ave	14	182	90	92
Hayes End	23	181	111	70
Western Ave	56 & 55	181	97	84
Meadway	13B	181	92	89

FROM WEEDS TO WINNERS *by P. Seaman (Top Plot)*

When we first viewed our plot in June 2007 it seemed like a daunting task and we didn't know where to start. As ideas to what you can start growing start flooding into your mind, and your imagination starts running away with you, reality steps in, and you are back to a bare plot.

We decided on the small bed system as it would be easier to manage due to our busy lives. It was hard work to start with, but after double digging the required beds, we decided we were ready to start planting the following spring.

Rather unexpectedly we had to deal with heavy flooding on the plot and that's when we decided to build raised beds instead, to alleviate the problem.

A great help and motivation was receiving encouragement and advice from other plot holders on what to grow and how. We tried various types of fruit and vegetables, some more successful than others. But you learn as you go.

We now grow up to fifty varieties of fruit & veg. This year we had a go at growing sweet potatoes with some success.

We were lucky enough to find an old cast iron bath (with plug), on our plot, which we have turned into a wildlife home for tadpoles, frogs and toads.

This is just a very brief overview of what we have experienced so far and hope this will encourage others to what can be achieved in a relatively short space of time.





28 October 2011

Dear Allotment Gardeners,

Welcome to the winter edition of *The Watering Can*.

The opportunity to attend The Annual Allotment Competition prize giving ceremony on the 9th November and celebrate the horticultural achievements of our plot holders will provide a welcome respite from the large number of complaints about the non-cultivation of plots I have had to deal with this year.

This issue appears to have come to the fore this year and I have come to the conclusion that the increase in uncultivated plots can be attributed to the following three factors.

Firstly, I believe the focus on “growing your own” in the media has encouraged quite a number of people to take on allotment plots without fully appreciating just how much hard work is required to make a plot productive.

Secondly, most of the new applicants I meet are young people with children who inevitably have less time to devote to their plots than the traditional allotmentee who tended to be retired and therefore had more time to dedicate to his or her plot.

Thirdly, I tend to find new allotment holders lack the basic horticultural skills that previous generations of allotment holders gained through a lifetime of tending to their gardens at home. This results in many new allotment holders unable to get to grips with their plot and eventually they give up altogether.

As well as trying to identify the causes of non-cultivation, I have also spent time trying to think about ways of addressing the issue. The most obvious method is to enforce the terms of the Tenancy Agreement more vigorously and I can assure you that this approach has been adopted at council managed sites.

However, enforcement action has its limitations, and I think one of the most effective ways to address the problem is through experienced allotment gardeners providing new allotment holders with sound practical advice and encouragement.

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Issuing new plot holders with starter packs, suggesting books and directing them to websites is no substitute for hands on practical advice and positive encouragement whilst on site.

I also think that some experienced allotment holders need to be more accepting and tolerant of the fact that many new allotment holders might not be able to maintain their plot to the same high standard that they are able to achieve. As I have mentioned above, many new allotment holders are inexperienced gardeners and may have less time to devote to their plot so this should be borne in mind when judging other plots.

Finally, I think I should end this article by saying that if you are one of the plot holders struggling to manage your plot, I would urge you to speak to experienced plot holders at your site who I am sure they will be able to give you lots of advice and help. Alternatively, please feel free to contact me for advice on how to get your plot up and running.

Best wishes,

Nicholas Porter
Allotments Officer

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

JOBS FOR DECEMBER & JANUARY by C. Bottello

- To avoid getting caught out over Christmas, it is as well to protect your plants against **frost**. Frost is a serial killer, a repeat offender around this time of year.
 - Earth up your Brussels sprouts and spring greens against wind rock. To protect them from frost, pile on a thick layer of straw, compost, bracken, well rotted manure or leaves around the base but not touching the stem. If you are planning to keep your carrots, parsnips, swedes, turnips and beetroot in the ground (the best way to store them) mulch them in the same way along with the corms of artichokes and cardoons and any crowns of rhubarb that are not being forced his year.
 - Containers of vegetables and herbs that will be left outside should be moved to a sheltered spot and buried in the ground and mulched, or raised up from the ground on tiles or some such. If the weather turns bitter, you may need to wrap the pots in bubble wrap or hessian. A layer of grit around the base of plants will encourage free drainage and help to prevent water logging and freezing.
 - Most outdoor crops will benefit from cloche cover of one sort or another. Even the hardest plants will be less tough to eat given some protection. For small plants, it is easy to rig up your own cloches from recycled plastic milk containers or giant sized plastic cordial or water bottles. Saw off the bottom with a serrated bread knife and leave the top off for ventilation, closing it again on icy nights.
 - To insulate a row of plants a tent cloche will do the trick. It is just two pieces clear plastic sheet or glass (old windows are ideal) joined together to make a tent shape. These can be secured with hinges or duct tape or you can buy professional clips and ties.
 - The invention of horticultural fabrics has revolutionized gardening. Even despisers of plastic will admit these new fabrics have advantages in terms of saving work and time. They are hugely versatile and can be draped large plants, stretched over hoops for mini polytunnels or sown into bags as fleece jackets or drawstring 'cosies'.
 - Double thickness Envirofleece comes into its own as an insulating material for the greenhouse. It works better than bubble wrap as it avoids the problems with condensation.
- Before you put down **tools** for the year, it wouldn't be a bad idea to clean them.
- It would be advisable to **prune** vines to avoid 'bleeding'.
- Take hardwood cuttings from the pruning's to increase your stock.
- Remove any decaying vegetation from the **pond**. Net it to stop leaves dropping in. Float a ball on the surface to prevent it from icing over.
- Plant **garlic** cloves. They enjoy a period of cold and, conversely, a sunny situation. If your ground is wet clay, drop some sand into the planting hole. Alternatively, grow them in containers.



PLANTING BY THE MOON by C. Bottello

In ancient times when man had not quite got round to inventing the wristwatch, the most reliable sources of telling the time were the sun, moon, and stars. There seem to be several opinions of who came up with the moon planting calendar first. Was it the Egyptians or the Babylonians? It is more than likely that each and every farmer had a planting calendar based on the moon phases, and there would be different variations depending on the geographical location. As their calendars were passed on through the generations they evolved to cover the different crops they tried to grow, and the more productive farming techniques used.

It was noticed that different plants grow better when they are planted during different phases of the moon. Each of these phases imparts an influence on the way vegetation grows on the planet through the rising and falling of the moisture in the ground and in the plants.



To provide more accurate records it was noted that certain crops fared better when planted whilst the moon was in a specific constellation. As the moon can take only 2-3 days to pass through a constellation, the planting calendar was a 'cutting edge' technology.

Planting was not the most important time for the farmer. Harvest time also had to be recorded. If you harvest at the correct time your crops will last much longer. It is down to how the plant stores the water in the fruit/crop at different times of the Luna cycle.

Moon planting rediscovered

We in our modern and advanced civilization are rediscovering the benefits of planting by the Luna cycle and various sources are being used to generate Moon Planting systems for us to use. Some of these systems would appear to contradict each other in places, but it is important to remember they are guides for you to use and modify, they are not an exact science.

Three Moon planting methods

There are three methods for planting by the moon. The Synodic, or waxing and waning cycle, the Sidereal, and, the Biodynamic cycle.

Synodic (waxing and waning) cycle

This is a simple form of Moon planting which divides the Luna cycle into four phases or quarters. This cycle takes 29.6 days to complete. It then groups plants into categories, Root Crops, Foliage, Crops with seeds on the outside, and crops with seeds on the inside. Then it assigns plants to the phases of the moon which best suits their growing characteristics.

Biodynamic cycle

Secondly, there is the more detailed method using the 12 Zodiac signs as a method of position the moon, for more accurate planting. This method was developed by Rudolf Steiner in 1924, and the Zodiac signs used where the actual positioning of the signs in the sky, when the moon passed through them. In addition to the position of the moon, Venus and Saturn also played a large part in the Biodynamic farming calendar.

Sidereal cycle

Lastly the Sidereal cycle is very similar to the Biodynamic cycle except only the moons orbit around the earth is used to define the best times to sow and harvest. The orbit is divided up into 12 equal 30 degree sections to represent the position of the moon in the sky, but it may not be the same as the current moon position. The sidereal cycle takes 27.3 days to complete.

Which of the above methods is better is up to you to find out. I suggest starting with the Synodic as a general rule and whilst you record the results, read up on the other two if you start to use Moon Planting for your crops, keep a diary, and add as much detail as you can.

The feed for Moon planting contains a general guide to planting crops through the Luna cycle. The feed is updated once a day and is based on the GMT Time zone.

The Phases of the Moon

The moon has four phases or quarters lasting about seven days each. The first two quarters are during the waxing or increasing light, between the new and the full moon. The third and fourth quarters are after the full moon when the light is waning, or decreasing.

Gravitational pull influences moisture in soil

Planting by the moon is an idea as old as agriculture, based both in folklore and superstition, but there are scientific ideas to back it up. The Earth is in a large gravitational field, influenced by both the sun and moon. The tides are highest at the time of the new and the full moon, when sun and moon are lined up with earth. Just as the moon pulls the tides in the oceans, it also pulls upon the subtle bodies of water, causing moisture to rise in the earth, which encourages growth. The highest amount of moisture is in the soil at this time, and tests have proven that seeds will absorb the most water at the time of the full moon.



At the new moon, the lunar gravity pulls water up, and causes the seeds to swell and burst. This factor, coupled with the increasing moonlight creates balanced root and leaf growth. This is the best time for planting above ground annual crops that produce their seeds outside the fruit. Examples are lettuce, spinach, celery, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and grain crops. Cucumbers like this phase also, even though they are an exception to that rule.



In the second quarter the gravitational pull is less, but the moonlight is strong, creating strong leaf growth. It is generally a good time for planting, especially two days before the full moon. The types of crops that prefer the second quarter are annuals that produce above ground, but their seeds from inside the fruit, such as beans, melons, peas, peppers, squash, and tomatoes. Mow lawns in the first or second quarter to increase growth.



After the full moon, as the moon wanes, the energy is drawing down. The gravitation pull is high, creating more moisture in the soil, but the moonlight is decreasing, putting energy into the roots. This is a favorable time for planting root crops, including beets, carrots, onions, potatoes, and peanuts. It is also good for perennials, biennials, and bulbs and transplanting because of the active root growth. Pruning is best done in the third quarter, in the sign of Scorpio.



In the fourth quarter there is decreased gravitational pull and moonlight, and it is considered a resting period. This is also the best time to cultivate, harvest, transplant and prune. Mow lawns in the third or fourth quarter to retard growth.

For those of you interested in trying out planting vegetables by following the moon calendar, please find more info at the following website which includes a month by month moon planting chart:
<http://ourgardengang.tripod.com/moonplanting.htm>

COMPOSTING HINTS by C. Bottello

What can I compost?

Yes

Uncooked vegetable peelings and fruit,
Rabbit and guinea pig bedding,
Torn, shredded or scrunched up
paper and cardboard (e.g. egg
boxes/toilet roll tubes),
Coffee grinds and tea bags,
Grass cuttings and young or
annual weeds,
Houseplants and flowers,
Finely chopped or shredded
shrub pruning's,
Wood Ash, and
Eggshells.

No

Cooked food,
Fish/meat scraps/bones,
Pernicious weeds (such as
bindweed, thistle, dock roots) or
weeds in seed,
Magazines,
Coal ash,
Large woody branches,
Cat/ dog litter, and
Soot.



Organic waste should be added in layers, some from the kitchen and some from the garden. This way the air pockets help speed up the process and by covering it up with a layer of old carpet or polythene, the warmth stays in too.

Common composting complaints

My compost bin smells

Cause - Compost is too wet. Often due to too many grass cuttings or other 'greens'.

Solution - Add some scrunched up paper or other dry material and turn to let in more air. In future, make sure that a balanced mixture of different material goes in the compost, not too much of any one thing at the same time!

Nothing seems to decompose

Cause - Not enough heat. Lack of air. Too dry.

Solution - Position in sunlight or make a larger heap. Fork through and add material in loose layers. Moisten compost.

I've got rats!

Solution - Rodent proof your bin by putting wire mesh under the base and securing it around the sides. Remove any meat or cooked foods. Prod or stir the contents regularly to lessen the likelihood of them wanting to visit or nest. You can also move things around the bin (rats like familiarity and peace and quiet!)

There are lots of flies when I lift the bin

Cause - Adult flies have laid eggs on your fruit scraps (don't worry, they are harmless).

Solution - Leave the lid off (or half way off) the bin for a while. This allows access to larger predatory insects/creatures, which will eat the flies. Wrap up fruit waste in paper, or bury it in the heap. Make sure you collect fruit scraps in a covered container. Sprinkle some soil or finished manure/compost over the top to suppress them. Alternatively a layer of damp newspaper will do the same job.

What to do with the compost?

Compost can be placed on vegetable gardens and flower beds or placed around trees. It makes excellent mulch to discourage weeds and keeps moisture in the soil. Light soil is improved by the addition of compost and heavy clay soil is made lighter and easier to work by digging in compost. Sieved compost is ideal for potting, window boxes and hanging boxes.



WINTER EDITION RECIPE by C. Bottello

Brussels sprouts gratin with bacon, cream and almonds

Ingredients

- 900g/2lb Brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 20g/¾oz butter
- 4 tsp sunflower oil
- 150g/5oz bacon lardons (or rindless back bacon, cut into short fat strips)
- 20g/¾oz flaked almonds
- 400ml/14fl oz double cream
- 2½ tsp lemon juice
- 5½ tbsp fresh white breadcrumbs
- 4 tbsp freshly grated parmesan cheese
- salt and freshly ground black pepper



Preparation method

1. Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas 6.
2. Place the sprouts into a saucepan of simmering salted water and cook for 4-5 minutes, until almost, but not quite, cooked. Drain thoroughly, allow to cool slightly, then cut in half.
3. Place the butter and oil into a wide frying pan over a medium heat. Add the bacon lardons and almonds and sauté for 3-4 minutes, until lightly browned.
4. Add the sprouts and sauté for a further 2-3 minutes, stirring constantly.
5. Add the cream and bring the mixture to the boil. Boil for 2-4 minutes, until the cream has reduced to a rich sauce. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
6. Remove from the heat; add the lemon juice and spoon into an ovenproof gratin dish.
7. Mix the breadcrumbs and parmesan cheese together in a bowl, and then sprinkle evenly over the top of the sprout mixture.
8. Place into the oven and bake for 18-20 minutes, until the top is golden-brown and the cream visibly boiling.
9. Remove from the oven and serve in the gratin dish (when the dish has cooled slightly).

SEASONS GREETINGS TO ALL OUR MEMBERS



MEETINGS

Federation evening meetings are open to anyone that would like to attend. In the event that something comes to a vote remember there is just one vote per member site. If you want to know more (or anything) about what is going then do come along and contribute.

All meetings are at the Civic Centre commencing at 8pm.

January's meeting will take place in Committee Room 2. March, May, July and September's meetings will take place in Committee Room 6.

The General meetings for 2012 are on:

Wednesday January the 11th; Wednesday March the 14th; Wednesday May the 9th; Wednesday July the 11th; Wednesday September the 12th.

Parking is available

The AGM is on the 14th of **November** in the *COUNCIL CHAMBER commencing at 7.30pm*

No parking is available for this meeting.

Web-site

The Federation's Web-site www.hahf.org.uk contains all sorts of details of interest: news, events and photographs in colour, as well as back copies of these newsletters.

There are many links to useful web sites about allotments and vegetables which can give far more tips or diagnosis of problems than we could ever hope to cover locally in this publication.

If you have any useful links, ideas, contributions, photographs, questions, things wanted or for sale, enquire about advertising then do contact the site at www.hahf.org.uk or the editor of this newsletter, **Claudia Bottello**, Tel: 0208 8240207 Or: cappuccino73@hotmail.com

Copy deadlines for the 'Watering Can' are, - 1st February; 1st June and 1st November, each year. Unless otherwise annotated, all items in this newsletter are produced by the editor.

Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual members of the Federation. They do not necessarily reflect those of either The Federation or The London Borough of Hillingdon.

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