WAHGA Spring Newsletter 2020

Diggers

Featuring all the usual news and articles. Plus, details of upcoming events, including: a potato competition; a Spring quiz; a talk, aimed at “New and other interested gardeners” and other local gardening events. We wish you all a happy gardening season in 2020.

Best Allotment winners
The winners received their cups from WAHGA President, Harold Mitchell.

Mike Allwood, Best Allotment

George Peacock, Best Small Allotment

Faye Fulton, Best Newcomer

Digest

Changes on the Committee
Many thanks to everyone who braved the cold weather to attend the AGM in January. Since our last AGM we have lost two members of the Committee.

Frank Hovell, who has been active in the Association for many years, has decided it is time to retire. He joined the Committee more than 30 years ago and was Treasurer for around 20 years. He was also Fete Treasurer and a regular helper at the Maidenhead Road trading shed. He and his wife Barbara were responsible for setting up the membership database that is still in use today. A big thank you to Frank for all his efforts on behalf of the Association.

Thanks also to Jane Kerr. Jane joined us just a few years ago, but new commitments mean she no longer has time to be involved.

Three members have come forward to join the Committee. Mike Allwood and Faye Fulton, who featured above as winners in the Best Allotment competition, and Bryan Steel who will help with the management of the bar at Gardeners Hall. Our thanks to all the new Committee members.

Shed news
The list of seeds can now be seen on the web site (seed list). It is a complete list of what was ordered, but not of what is currently in stock as some items have already sold out.
This year’s “Single Seed Potato” Competition

Following last year’s successful Potato growing competition, we thought we should do it again this year. It is very simple - each contestant gets one seed potato and on the chosen harvest day (Sunday 30th August), whoever has the heaviest crop from the single seed potato is the winner. Yields can range from 10kg to 40kg, but some growers have a magic touch for a lot more. Apparently, one hundredweight (112lb) or 50kg can often be achieved! Further details on how to enter are available from the sheds.

Basic Guidelines – Start by chitting the seed potato as normal. Whilst that’s chitting, prepare the ground. Apparently well-rotted horse manure is the magic ingredient although cow will do. Add copious amounts – a heaped barrow load per square metre. Work it in well and mix it thoroughly. The soil needs to be really friable (easily crumbled) and open as well as rich in organic matter for at least 30cm deep. It needs to feed the crop and hold plenty of water but not be waterlogged so the potatoes drown.

Advanced Techniques

Pots or Soil? – You can grow your competition crop in pots if you prefer but pot or sack growing is trickier. One slip-up with watering and you can lose the plants or dramatically reduce yield. Another problem with pot growing is that the pots may get too warm. If the temperature rises above 24ºC the plant will stop forming tubers and put its energy into forming seed heads and haulm instead. However, high yields from one-potato competitors typically start the growing process in pots.

The weigh-in, to determine the winner, will take place at the trading sheds on Sunday 30th August.

Spring quiz

We have another quiz night coming up on Friday 20th March at Gardeners’ Hall with quiz master Dave Morris. The bar will open at 7pm and the quiz will start at 7.30pm. Teams will be 6-8 people and entry is £2 per person, payable on the night. Also, please bring a plate of finger-food for a shared buffet at the interval. All proceeds will be donated to the Thames Hospice.

To take part please contact Caroline on 07740 806015 or by email at membership@wahga.org.uk. If you haven’t got a team, don’t worry, you can join others looking for team members on the night.

Revival of the Summer Show?

A few members have expressed interest in reviving the Summer Produce Show and others are keen to bring back the Fete. In order to make this happen a group of individuals would need to be willing to take on the organisation and running of the event. Others would have to be prepared to take part and attend.

We are therefore asking for your feedback. Would you like to bring back the Summer Produce Show or Fete? If so, please specify which and how you would want to be involved. Would you compete in the produce show? Would you be prepared to help on the day and with contributions? Would you be prepared to help organise the event?

To respond please email membership@wahga.org.uk, telephone Caroline on 07740 806015 or speak to a Committee member at one of the trading sheds.
George Peacock talks about his veg gardening life

My first allotment was in the early 1970’s in Caversham. However, I had always had a veg patch in the garden, following the example of my parents. They had a farm in North Yorkshire, where I was brought up. The farm had a veg garden and orchard and they grew things like new potatoes, peas, cabbages, sprouts, carrots, rhubarb and parsnips, good staple food. Plus, apples and soft fruit for storing and bottling.

We moved to Twyford in the late 70’s and had an allotment which provided veg before moving to Windsor 7 years ago. We were lucky enough to get a plot in Bolton Road which not only provides Diana and I with a source of food but, as we now live in an apartment, a lovely recreational area with lawn, seating and flowers. After 50 years of working in industry and living for periods in Saudi Arabia and Libya, where nothing but dates will grow in the desert, this is a completely different lifestyle and brings great pleasure.

We spend probably 5 or 6 hours a week on the plot in the summer and 2 or 3 in winter. I end up with all the hard work whilst Diana has a good eye for detail and guides me when sitting in the sunshine with a good book!! We enjoy raising our own produce and the benefits of fresh veg together with a pleasant recreational area.

The plot itself is near trees which shelter many hungry birds so lots of netting is needed. The soil is heavy clay and wet which is quite a challenge.

For anyone who is thinking about taking a plot or has just started I would say enjoy the fresh air, physical exercise, seeing your own seeds and plants mature and enjoy fresh produce. Do not be put off that your carrots are twisted and bent, your potatoes are a bit scabby, not like those in the supermarket, but are fresher and tastier and you can be proud of your results. It is nice to meet others for a chat and compare notes. Your neighbour will look after your plot when you go away and you can return the favour to them. It is nice to experiment and grow something new, this year we are going to try asparagus for the first time and give up on those pesky peas.

Talk for new and other interested people

There will be a talk for New and other interested Allotment holders: Working Effectively, Useful Tools and Other Tips
Sunday 12th April, 10.15 @ the Rose Bar Gardeners Hall.

As usual, the bar will be open from 12pm until 2pm, so why not stay for a pre-lunch drink and chat with other members.

Gardening Events
Sunday 29th March - Daffodil Show

A reminder that the Mid Southern Daffodil Group is holding their annual show at Gardeners’ Hall on Sunday 29th March. Staging of blooms will be from 9am to 12.00 noon. The show opens to the public between 2.30pm and 4.00pm. Presentation of awards starts at 3.30pm. There will be refreshments available.

There are special classes for WAHGA members. These include a class for one all yellow daffodil or one all white daffodil and a class for one bicoloured daffodil. Entries for these classes will be accepted on the day. Vases and assistance will be provided. Please contact Alex Burke by email at anb4937@btinternet.com with questions or if you would like a show schedule.
Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th April - RHS Spring Ornamental Competition
At the Savill Garden. Competitors from all over the South will be displaying Camellias, Rhododendrons and spring flowering plants in the hope of winning prestigious prizes in the Royal Horticultural Society's competitions. Learn more about these fantastic plants and quiz the experts from the Camellia Society and the RHS Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group.

Ticket Prices, £12 per adult and £6 per child. This includes all-day entry to The Savill Garden. For RHS Members: Entry to The Garden is free for RHS Members who present a valid RHS Membership card. Free entry is for the named card holder only and normal car parking charges apply. See the website for how to get there and parking charges http://www.windsorgreatpark.co.uk/en

Tuesday 7th April - Windsor and Slough Chrysanthemum, Fuchsia & Pelargonium Society Spring Show
At Gardeners Hall from 6pm – 10pm. See the website for the show schedule and entry form http://wscfpsociety.btck.co.uk/ or contact Elizabeth Gray on 01628 625293

The climate friendly allotment
By Jane Burns
A few weeks ago, I happened across a booklet from the RHS about the impact of climate change on our gardens and allotments. I’m no expert on the matter but was curious about what that impact might be and perhaps more importantly what I could do at a personal level.

The RHS claims that climate change will be one of the defining challenges of the 21st century and will force us to change our ideas about what we can and can’t grow. Many questions arise as we start to face climate extremes of more rain in the winter and water shortages in the summer along with hotter summers and warmer winters. What will be the impact of longer growing seasons? What will this mean for pollinators? And, what new challenges will we face from pests and diseases?

The RHS advice seemed to focus on six areas of advice on reducing our impact. Though they do not say exactly how our planting will change to cope with different weather patterns.

1. CO₂ – Reduce emissions through burning less allotment waste, particularly ‘wet’ burning. Avoid some chemicals that have a high carbon cost such as the fertiliser Ammonium Nitrate (the production of 1kg of NH₄NO₂ creates 2kg of CO₂)

2. Waste – Compost allotment waste or recycle allotment waste, where possible. Buy recycled garden equipment.

3. Water – Collect rainwater in butts, use water wisely.

4. Soil – Dig and tread soil as little as possible, apparently this releases carbon back into the atmosphere. Plant nitrogen fixing plants such as peas and beans (but don’t forget to leave the roots in the ground after cropping). Consider moving to peat free compost. Consider ground cover planting, again, to keep the soil moist.

5. Sun – Consider screening to protect plants from strong sun and prevent the soil from drying out