

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Spring 2013

Allotments Under Threat

Committee member Richard Edwards writes:

We in Bridport and surrounding areas are fortunate enough to have a town council that has provided many new plots in recent years to try to meet the ever-growing number of keen gardeners. I thought I would share a story I came across about some allotment holders in Watford who haven't been so fortunate. It shows how the threat of development is never far away.

Farm Terrace Allotments were allocated 106 years ago in West Watford to support the burgeoning working class population. In June last year however, the Elected Mayor of Watford, Dorothy Thornhill, wrote to plot holders to say that the land was needed for a housing development to help pay for a new hospital.

600 homes in total would be built, 60 of them on the allotment site. According to the *Watford Observer*, the land was initially protected from the development but councillors now say it is needed to increase the number of homes. The report says that "Mayor Dorothy Thornhill said the recession had changed the plans as it had made the project more challenging for developers." She says on her website, "the scheme does not stack up without the value that the allotment land brings in".

The borough council cabinet has voted it through, and the local MP has backed the scheme, but the decision rests with Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who must authorise a change of use of the land.

One of the Watford campaigners, Sara Trebar, says on her blog, "at least once a week we all go down, plant, weed, or harvest crops. We enjoy meeting and chatting with other plot holders. For my husband and me, it's our chance to try our hands at 'The Good Life' and for our kids it's an invaluable space for them to enjoy, explore, run about on and get dirty on! We live in a small terraced house about a 5 min. walk away. The allotment has been a lifeline for us."

The campaign group has now put in a submission to make the land a community asset, which means that it is valuable



Watford allotments
campaigner Sara Trebar
with a young helper

to them and they could have the right to buy it and run it themselves, but it is not clear how much chance this has to succeed.

Councils are obliged to provide new land but it is often poorer quality and further away from where people live. Georgie Willock, spokesperson of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) says, "less than half of the new sites created will be statutory, meaning that even less allotment land is now protected by law".

The sad truth is that the allotment site does not generate money, and that is the only "value" recognised by some politicians. If you wish to show your support for the campaigners, there are online petitions or you could always write to Eric Pickles to make your views known.

Richard Edwards

Website: www.farmterrace.btck.co.uk/

Twitter: @SaveFarmTerrace

Date of the next Allotments Society Meeting:

Thursday 7 March 2013, 7.00 pm, at Mountfield (town council offices), Rax Lane, Bridport (Speaker — Chris Smith, Pennard Plants — see page 4).

Vegetable Growing Tips

*In the first of a series of talks planned for the quarterly meetings of the Bridport and District Allotments Society, at the 6 December meeting, **Bob Symes**, from Dorchester, gave members some valuable advice on growing vegetables.*

Bob likes to grow some vegetables for show and brought along one of his carrots and a parsnip. They can be seen in the picture opposite being used in a fencing duel between the Treasurer and Secretary of the Society. Apparently they are quite good to eat too.

Richard Edwards took notes of Bob's talk and these are reproduced below.

Onions and shallots: - Bob said that shallots can be planted in a 3" pot in Nov/Dec and then planted out in February. By planting shallots early you should get a good shallot by the end of June before any fungal diseases start becoming a problem. Shallots like hard ground. You can sow onion seeds on Christmas Day – if you want an excuse to get out of the washing up! This is in a pot of course.

Brassicas: sow them in pots, not in the soil, because if you sow in soil then you have to transplant and the small water roots will dry out and die and the plant will likely not come to much. Sow seeds singly in a pot and then transplant the whole thing. Likewise, avoid brassica plants sold in newspaper round the roots, as these will at best be checked by the process and, at worst, will not survive. Brassicas require hard ground. Tie tops of cauliflower to improve the curd.

Lettuce: sow just a few seeds in a small pot, then in a few weeks sow some more. Bob advised against the idea of growing vast surpluses of vegetables only to give them away.

Carrots: sow together with radish seeds which germinate quickly and mark your carrot row. Sow carrots as thinly as possible to avoid having to thin them, a process which will attract the carrot fly.

Peas and Beans: Do not over-water your peas: water a trench before you plant the peas and then don't water again until you see the pea seedling. Peas should be sown in a drill 2" deep and one spade's width.

Peas and broad beans don't need any dung because they make their own Nitrogen from the air. After harvesting, cut the tops off to leave the root nodules containing Nitrogen in the soil. Plant your winter greens here after the peas and again the greens will be happiest if you plant into hard soil.

Runner beans – you can prepare for beans by making a trench, putting vegetable waste in it and leaving it to rot. That way it draws nitrogen out of the air and breaks down – if you cover it up too early it will draw Nitrogen from the soil in order to break down. "White lady" excellent and self-pollinating.

Dwarf French beans – start these off in a pot on a windowsill in Feb/March. The variety Safari was recommended. Use superphosphate to increase crops later when planted out after last frosts.

Leeks – the leek moth is now so bad in the area that the only real protection is to cover with fleece.

Courgettes – Bob advised against watering these after planting. These plants grow in hot climates so should survive periods without



Allotments Society Treasurer Mandy Rathbone and Secretary Lynne Atkinson fight it out after the meeting with Bob Symes's show vegetables. Photo Richard Edwards.

rain. Water the manure you put at the bottom of a pit when planting, and then leave it and don't water. Otherwise the cold microclimate beneath the leaves is ideal conditions for fungal disease on the leaves.

Pumpkins and squashes which put out runners—Bob suggested putting a weight on the leaf axils as the plant can produce new roots from these and provide itself with extra water intake and nutrients. After planting out, avoid watering as this can produce mildew.

Potatoes: Sarpo Mira, a red potato, is blight-resistant and the only potato Bob did well with last season.. Also, Blue Danube is supposed to be pretty good. After some disastrous harvests in Russia, breeders crossed wild potatoes with known varieties to produce some blight-resistant varieties.

Fertiliser: dig in your well-rotted manure in early Winter, or if not well rotted, spread it on top of the soil. Do not manure where root crops are to be grown, but you can trench, sieve and add silver sand.

Digging: Over winter you should get your soil dug but don't worry about creating a Harrod's soil right now – leave it in lumps so that the frost can break it down and it will also receive more warmth from the sun this way. After autumn digging do not dig again in the spring – give a light rake before planting out. Raised beds are ideal and require no digging if mulched on the surface with compost/manure.

Feeding: NPK – Nitrogen (N) for leaves for early growing, Phosphate (P) for the roots, and Potash/potassium (K) for flowers and fruit. Blood Fish and Bone will do the whole lot of nutrients – good all-round slow-release fertiliser – superphosphate is good for legume crops. Otherwise, a Nettle tea supplies nitrogen. Or Hoof n Horn is an alternative and also provides phosphate for the roots. Then potash for flowering and fruiting – comfrey tea (remember it is for the soil – you don't drink it!). Mare's tail is said to make a good fungicide.

Pests: Make a tea from Rhubarb leaves against slugs, or soot from your chimney sweep, or spray half a teaspoon of washing up liquid mixed with 5 litres of water.

Insects don't have lungs – they breathe through the pores in their skin. The fatty acid in washing up liquid blocks these pores and kills the insect.

One tip from the audience at the end of the talk was from Arrol: put an organic sweet potato in a jam jar with water half-in half-out using cocktail sticks and you get chits. You then plant these and they should do well since pests should leave them alone.

Community Allotment Group news

Just a reminder that with Spring (hopefully) just around the corner, the Community Allotment Group is meeting again on Thursday afternoons from 2-4 pm at the allotments next to Bridport Community Orchard. Our broad beans are up, some under mesh, and so is the garlic, and we are making plans for the new growing season.

We welcome anyone with limited growing space who would like to have a go at growing vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs, and sharing their gardening experience and ideas with us over tea and biscuits. We have some raised beds so it's not necessary to get down to ground level to join in, and no gardening experience is needed, just come along.

For more information contact our Garden group leader Jenn Baker at [REDACTED], or our chair Jill Lloyd [REDACTED]

Gill Massey

Bridport's second Potato Day

St Mary's Church Hall was a hive of activity on a wet January day as people came in anticipation of the coming growing season. Pennard Plants, a nursery based in East Pennard, Somerset specialise in heirloom and heritage vegetable and flower seeds and seed potatoes. They travel to communities across the south west with their potatoes and arrived in Bridport with trugs filled with over eighty varieties. With their specialist knowledge and trays filled with heritage seeds it made for a great start to the gardening season. For those unable to come to the day, potato varieties Cara, Picasso and Majestic are those suited to wet conditions, which could indeed be very useful information!

Organisers Jude Hopkins and Marion Palmer were delighted so many people came along to make the most of the opportunity. Keen gardeners themselves, and organisers of the plant swap held in Bucky Doo on a Saturday in early May, they hope the event will encourage more people to grow their own food. As with the plant swap, they are hoping to make the potato day an annual event and a regular part of Bridport's gardening calendar, so watch this space for news of Bridport's third potato day!

Eileen Haste



Bridport's second Potato Day at St Mary's Church Hall on Saturday 12 January



New Zealand Yams

I decided to try to grow New Zealand yams last year. (These are not really yams, sweet potatoes or potatoes, by the way).

They need quite a long growing season. They seemed rather expensive at regular online sites, and I only wanted a few plants to test. I asked Groves and they specially got tubers in for me - and I could have as many or as few as I liked. How brilliant is that? They said they were also going to have a go with them.

I only bought three little tubers (they look very like tiny pink fir apple potatoes). I planted them when I thought the foliage would be ok and miss the frost (you want the long growing season, but the foliage will have to be protected with fleece if we get a frost).

They are in the oxalis family and you will recognise the foliage when it appears as like our wood sorrel, or some of those pretty but exasperating weeds - so don't go forgetting what they are!

The leaves are edible - very tangy and lemony. I liked them but would only put a few as a garnish in salad as they are quite strong. I also didn't want to take much from the plants and affect the tuber yield.

The plants just looked very healthy and happy despite a disastrous growing season for just about everything else. The slug and snail plague did not affect them. I then completely forgot about them. Just before Christmas, I remembered! I found the old stems, destroyed by frosts and so on. I just lightly turned the compost and got a big amount of "yams" in moments. They weren't down deep. They were undamaged by constant rain and slugs etc. When I went back for last plant, one or two very small holes had been made in a few tubers, but no real damage. Almost as if the creature didn't really like them.

You can boil or roast them and there are plenty of recipes - I decided to try them boiled (removes the oxalates) and with little seasoning, to see what they were really like. Whole family including very conservative husband really liked them and requested more.

So I'll be devoting a whole bed to them this year. They seemed to keep back weeds, by the way.

Laura Dron



News from Bridport Town Council

We still await the land transfer from West Dorset District Council for the new allotments at Rivervale.

There will be skips in all town council allotments in the first week in March for anyone to get rid of their rubbish.

We will be pollarding 4 trees in the Skilling allotments.

I have delayed my usual inspections of allotments till the first week in March as it has been a testing year due to the flooding. By then I would hope to see signs of preparation for the new season on all allotments. We have taken action on untended allotments resulting in 20 being available, and we will be looking to let these by early March.

The waiting list for allotments stands at 46 (Bridport council tax payers) and 40 from surrounding parishes.

Daryl Chambers, Bridport Town Surveyor

News from Skilling

There is not much to report. I know that some holders are bringing on garlic and broad beans in large pots to get an early advantage in spite of the weather.

The ground is far too boggy to work on right now, but people are happily picking kale, sprout tops and digging up leeks. Have noticed some good rhubarb coming on too, so they obviously enjoy the wet conditions. Hopefully soon we will get some drier weather and get some sun on our backs in order to get the allotments ready for the seedlings which are being raised on window sills or greenhouses. Cross fingers that the season coming will be better than the last.

Mary Keens

News from Burton Bradstock

Fortunately we have not been flooded this time but the ground is absolutely saturated and digging at the moment is not an option for most holders.

All vacant plots have now been taken and the National Trust have leased us some adjacent land for future use as

allotments, which now needs to be fenced, divided up and rotovated as and when the ground is workable.

David Barnikel

Seed discount offer

Sea Spring Seeds are offering a 10% discount on all seed and plug plants ordered from its websites. Go to www.seaspringseeds.co.uk (for seed) or www.seaspringplants.co.uk (for plug plants), register and make your order.

When you go to check-out, the website will ask for a Coupon Voucher; type in the code and 10% will be deducted from the total. Voucher code: BADAS-10%.

Sea Spring Seeds is a vegetable seed company owned by Michael and Joy Michaud. All varieties on sale have been tried and tested at their nursery in West Bexington. If you have any queries please contact them at email address [REDACTED]

March meeting speaker

Following the success of Bob Symes' talk at the December Allotments Society meeting, the Committee have arranged for another speaker at the next meeting. Chris Smith of Pennard Plants will speak about potatoes, types, preparation of the ground, planting and care. The meeting will be at 7 pm, Thursday 7th March, at Mountfield (town council offices).

Bridport and District Allotments Society

Membership of the Bridport & District Allotments Society costs £2 per annum. Our Membership Secretary/Treasurer Mandy Rathbone will be pleased to receive your subscriptions. Please contact Mandy on [REDACTED] or send her an email at [REDACTED]

Receiving the newsletter by email: If any member who currently receives the newsletter/minutes of meetings through the letterbox could receive them by email (and save us delivery cost/time), please contact Lynne Atkinson - [REDACTED] (Email recipients get the pictures in colour!)

Newsletter contributions welcome: if you have any items you would like to see included in future issues of our Newsletter (which comes out quarterly) or if there are subjects you would like us to cover, please contact the Editor, Charles Wild, [REDACTED] or email entries to [REDACTED]. Contributions to the next edition (articles, news items and/or photographs) are welcome at any time, but by **10 May 2013** please. Many thanks to those who submitted contributions this time— please keep them coming.