

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Winter 2013-14

Winter Work

For once the reports we have received on the 2013 growing season have been favourable, if not downright ecstatic. Gardeners not complaining... whatever next?

Many people seem particularly to have been successful with fruit of all varieties, while others report bumper seasons for squashes and courgettes and even outdoor-grown tomatoes, plagued by blight nine years out of ten. Beans of all kinds seem to have been more variable, perhaps because of the late, cold spring, but those who have persisted seem to have done well at least with runner and French beans.

With the year coming to an end so are most crops, but we've now had the first frosts so it's time to harvest sprouts and parsnips. This year my sprouts (though on the small side) have not blown open, which may be because I read somewhere that it's even more important with sprouts than other brassicas to tread them in very firmly when planting. The NSALG website recommends regular picking to prevent them blowing open.

Onion seed can be sown in trays or pots in a gentle heat. NSALG also recommends that top of the work list for December and January should be to clean up the plot and dispose of all damaged and rotten crops, clearing the way for soil preparation if the weather permits in February and March.

The weather was better this year than last for autumn digging, and March is the time to dig in overwintering green manures like grazing rye.



End of Summer

A photograph from the Community Orchard, which had a successful growing season in 2013, described by Jenn Baker on page 2 of this Newsletter. We also include a report from Mary Keens on the Skilling season and a reminder from the town council about payment of annual allotment rental fees (page 4).

Next Allotments Society Meeting

Thursday 12 December 2013, 7.00 pm

at Mountfield (Town Council offices) (in the Marriage Room)

Christmas nibbles and drinks, and a free raffle with the prize being a £10 voucher from Groves' Nurseries.

Guest speaker will be Jill Lloyd (with friends) talking about the early years of the Community Orchard.



Raised bed at the Community Allotment

Community Allotment News

We have had a splendid summer in the Community Allotment and this year have welcomed nine new members in total. All of our raised and traditional beds were well utilised, producing a good variety of vegetables and soft fruits for everyone to enjoy.

In September the Community Orchard and Allotment were included in Mayor Maggie Ray's Civic Day. We showed several of West Dorset's dignitaries around and explained how the site was run for the benefit of the community.

The Orchard's annual Apple Day was a great success again this October with the Community Allotment taking part by welcoming visitors for 'guided tours'. Also, some of the year's produce, notably the butternut squashes, were used to make soups for the Church House Cafe.

The allotment is now in winter maintenance mode and we shall only be meeting monthly until next spring just to keep everything ticking over and tidy. This year we are experimenting with different types of green manure on a couple of the large beds to enrich the soil and, hopefully, keep them weed free.



Grapevine

Finally, we had an excellent end to the year when the orchard/allotment team (called Core Blimey!) won the Mayor's charity quiz night. It was a close run thing but we just managed to pip (!) the Transition Town team in the final round.

For further information visit

www.bridportcommunityorchard.co.uk

Jenn Baker

Bridport's Third Annual Potato Day

*Saturday 11 January 2014, 10-3pm
United Church Hall, East St, Bridport, DT6 3LY*

Please note the change of venue this year for Bridport's third annual potato day. Pennard Plants, a nursery based in Somerset, specialising in heritage and heirloom seeds and plants, will be coming along with 60+ varieties of potatoes. Their wealth of knowledge about the varieties they sell and which specific soil conditions they thrive in, make Bridport Potato Day a must in the gardening calendar. Pennard will also be bringing onion sets, garlic, heritage seeds, fruit trees and bushes.

Entry is free and refreshments are available. Proceeds will go to Dorset Wildlife Trust. For more information call Jude Hopkins [REDACTED]



Potato Day, January 2013

Bridport Seed Swap

*Saturday 15 February 2014, 10-12am
Ropemakers, West Street (back room)*

Having developed from the seed swap held at Potato Day, this event provides an opportunity for gardeners to come along and enjoy the value of sharing experiences with other local gardeners. Whether you have surplus seed from the free seed packet offer on a magazine, have saved seed from an unusual bean variety, or would simply like to see what others have brought, it would be great to see you there. Come along, have a drink and share in the successes and failures of your gardening season in anticipation of the new one to come. We will be gathering in the back room of the Ropemakers.

For more information call Eileen Haste [REDACTED].

Bumblebees

An article by BADAS Chairman Colin Sparkes

Everyone in the countryside is familiar with the Bumblebee or Humble Bee. Large and furry, they cannot be missed in spring and summer feeding on flowers in fields and gardens.

They fly even when the temperature drops to near 6 degrees centigrade but they have to have a body temperature of 30 degrees. This is where the "buzz" comes in. It is not the wings that make the sound but the muscles under the wings vibrating and, until their body temperature is 30 degrees, they cannot fly.

There are two common types, white-tailed and red-tailed, but there are about seven other types in the UK. The queens hibernate in holes in banks or old birds' nests. All the workers die in the winter so she has to start by feeding herself and then forming a small nest in which to lay her eggs. She keeps them warm until they hatch then forages for pollen and nectar to feed the youngsters. These workers then feed her so she can lay more eggs. As the season progresses males are produced along with young queens which often kill the old queen before going off to find a place to hibernate.

Bumblebees do not compete with honey bees because they have longer tongues and can access flowers honey bees cannot get into.

All insects are having a hard time nowadays with changes to farming, sprays, etc. This includes all bees, but the humblebee has also to put up with natural enemies such as voles and badgers. The latter can dig out the nests - they seem immune to the stings. In fact a farmer friend told me of seven nests being dug out in one of his fields over a period of two days. With the increase in badger populations in recent years we are in danger of losing one of our main pollinators, thus having an effect on our food supply, so please, do not destroy any nests you may find.

This article was first published in The Bridge magazine.



NSALG calls for more support for allotments

The Chairman of the National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) has called for more Government support for allotments, if it is serious about its concerns about our 'broken society' and 'obesity' issues.

"All I wish," he writes, "is that the Government would wake up and smell the carrots as it were – allotments already do all the things the Government is trying to achieve but just in a more structured way. If they would only give the local authorities the money to create more allotment plots and sites, then I promise the Prime Minister his society would begin to mend and our waistline measurements would shrink because the model of allotments has worked for hundreds of years and will continue to do so for hundreds more."

The Value of Allotments

The NSALG Chairman goes on to emphasise the financial and environmental value of allotments.

"If there is still the need for further evidence as to why allotments work, then let me shine a light on the financial and environmental arguments. The approximate value of a well cultivated allotment plot, in relation to the food it produces over a year, is £1,500, the equivalent of 0.64 tonnes of produce. Obviously you would need to deduct the cost of the seeds, compost and fertiliser etc. from this amount but still this means an allotment really could go a long way to feeding a family of four for a year, helping to make the budget go further.

"And if you look at the issue of food miles, then the 0.64 tonnes being produced, times the 330,000 allotment plots in the UK, equates to over 200,000 tonnes (assuming everyone is fully cultivating their plots) of food being produced locally and not having to be imported - the equivalent of 116 forty tonne articulated lorry journeys not having to take place every week, emitting harmful CO2 gasses into the atmosphere. I rest my case!"

News from Bridport Town Council -

Reminder to pay tenancy fees

Town surveyor **Daryl Chambers** reminds town council allotment holders: "We have issued tenancy agreements for the coming year and we are still waiting for a considerable number to be returned.

"Tenants who have not been in to pay will receive a reminder and will then be given a week to pay. After that we will have to assume that they have given up their allotment and we will re-allocate to someone on the waiting list.

"I will then be inspecting allotments to inspire people to prepare for the new season."

The demand for town council allotments continues to rise. The waiting list has increased to 39 from within the parish boundary, and another 32 from neighbouring parishes.

Lynne Atkinson, BADAS Correspondence Secretary, points out that the town council turns off water supplies to the allotments if the weather turns very cold, so this is a reminder to all those who have a greenhouse or polytunnels to make sure they have some water stored.



News from Skilling

Well we are well and truly in the throes of winter and any non-hardy vegetables will have bitten the dust by now.

Always resilient and reliable the curly kale is looking good on the Skilling plots and is a great standby for winter picking when everything else is over. There are also a few sprout plants around, and hopefully will grace Christmas tables. There has been a lot of planting going on and winter onions, garlic, broad beans, cabbages and peas are going well and hopefully will survive the extreme cold that has been forecast. Some have already covered plants with fleece and others have the protection of polytunnels, so cross fingers spring will show the rewards of autumnal hard work.

Recapping, it was a great year for fruit with bumper crops and squashes too yielded very highly. In fact, everything from beans to cabbages grew well and even the tomatoes and potatoes escaped the dreaded blight. It was a very good summer.

Mary Keens

News from BADAS Annual General Meeting – September 2013

At our AGM it was decided to give a small donation for allotment holders who have installed bee hives. The criteria are that they must have permission from Bridport Town Council, preferably have completed a bee hive keeping course, and the hive must be up and running.

Our Christmas meeting - Thursday 12 December - will be in the marriage room. Our guest speaker will be Jill Lloyd talking about the early years of community orchard. We are having a few nibbles and drinks, and there will be a free raffle with the prize being a £10 garden voucher from Groves Nurseries.

We had a good turn out for this AGM - but we still could not fill the two vacancies for BADAS officers, Richard Edwards did not seek re-election, so Brian Atkinson agreed to be the minutes secretary, which still leaves us one committee member short.

Lynne Atkinson, Correspondence Secretary

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 February 2014** please. Many thanks to those who submitted contributions this time - please keep them coming.