

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Spring 2016

Talking Tomatoes

*The next meeting of the Bridport and District Allotments Society will be held on **Thursday 10th March 2016, 7.00 pm as usual in the Marriage Room at the offices of Bridport Town Council, Mountfield.** We will have a guest speaker, **Michael Michaud**, from Sea Spring Seeds, who will talk about growing **Tomatoes and Peppers**. All members welcome.*

At the Society's last meeting in December, the guest speaker was Brian Hesketh, who gave an informative presentation on the subject of Organic Growing—an account of Brian's talk is included on pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter.

A reminder that this newsletter is now distributed by email, and that if you are unable to receive it electronically you should contact the Secretary, Lynne Atkinson, on 01308-250260.



Can YOU grow the heaviest tomato?

Michael and Joy Michaud (of Sea Spring Seeds) run a growing competition for vegetable gardeners each year, and this year the competition is to grow the heaviest tomato.

Joy Michaud writes: To enter the competition simply put your prizewinning tomato on digital kitchen scales that measure to the nearest gram. Take a photo of it and send the photo to us by email or by post, with the tomato's weight, the variety name and your name and contact details. The winner will receive a £20 voucher to be spent on our website to buy seeds.

While any tomato variety can be used for the competition we recommend growing Ovi's Romanian Giant.

Last year the majority of the fruit we picked from our crop of Ovi's Romanian Giant tomatoes weighed over 1 kilo, but one fruit came in at 1.72 kilos (see photo). Seed of Ovi's Romanian Giant can be bought from our website (www.seaspringseeds.co.uk), where you can also find more details and rules for the competition.

Prize

The prize is a £20 voucher to be used on our website.

We will be growing a few plants of Ovi's Romanian Giant ourselves, and will attempt to get a record breaking fruit. If anyone beats our attempt the prize will be doubled to £40 voucher!

Joy Michaud

Photo: A fruit of Ovi's Romanian Giant that weighed 1.72 kg

Next Allotments Society Meeting

Thursday 10 March 2016, 7.00 pm, in the Bridport Town Council offices at Mountfield, Rax Lane. All members welcome..

Organic Vegetable Growing

a talk by Brian Hesketh

At the December meeting of the Bridport and District Allotments Society, **Brian Hesketh** gave a talk on the subject of **"Organic Vegetable Growing"**.

A summary of his talk is given on these two pages (Notes by Brian Atkinson)

Brian explained that he was introduced to gardening at a very early age, but converted to organic gardening after he retired from the Dorset Police force (and moving home frequently) and moved to Drimpton - where the plot was already organic in nature.

Brian attended courses on organic gardening at Wye Valley held by authors Patrick & Shirley Rivers.

Liebig's Law

In his talk, Brian used **Liebig's Barrel** as an illustration of plant nutrition being dependent on the most deficient element.

Liebig's Law, also known as **The Law of Limiting Factors**, derives from a discovery made by a German botanist named Carl Sprengel and later popularised by the German chemist Justus Von Liebig.

This law states that a plant's performance is affected not by the most abundant resource, but by the most deficient one. Essentially a plant will only yield as much as the least available nutrient allows.

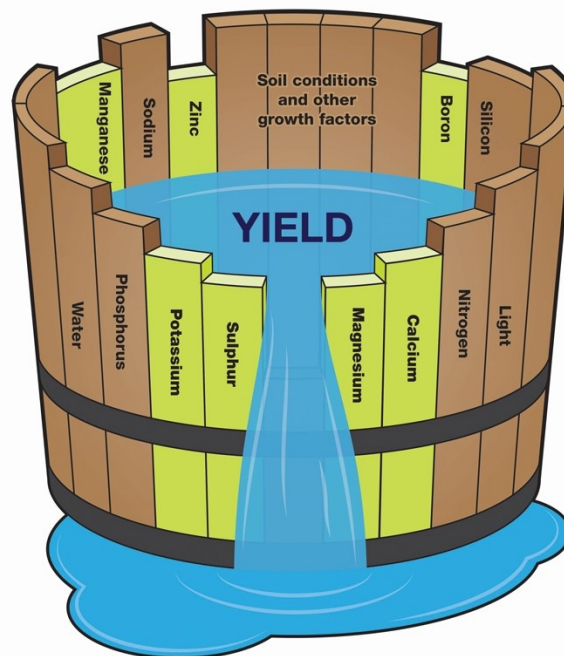
Liebig illustrated the concept of limitation using a metaphorical barrel with each stave representing a different element.

A nutrient stave that was shorter than the others would cause the liquid contained in the barrel to spill out at that level. Illustrated otherwise, a cooper that built his barrel ten feet high would have worked in vain if his last stave was only five feet long.

With this visual aid, the notion of limiting factors is intuitive and seems almost obvious, but is easily overlooked when attempting to remedy problems or improve yields.

More information about Liebig's Law can be found at the website of a North Carolina-based company, Fifth Season Gardening:

<http://fifthseasongardening.com/liebigs-barrel-a-paradigm-for-thinking-about-nutrients>.



Liebig's Barrel

Crop rotation

Brian explained that crop rotation is the heart of any organic growing system.

Potatoes are the usual start of any rotation system; they require heavy manuring, and are followed by peas, beans and onions. Manure or compost adds nutrients plus air to the soil and helps water retention.

Legumes tend to add nitrogen, particularly if their roots, which contain the nitrogen fixing bacteria, are left in the soil after harvesting.

Brassicas then follow and finally root crops.

No dig systems

There are also "no dig" systems where the soil is dressed annually with manure/compost and the worms do the work instead of digging. Some also utilise sowings in the moon waxing cycle (see <http://www.charlesdowding.co.uk>). The soil is treated to a cycle of continuous improvement.

Raised beds are required and you must never walk on the soil itself. When organising a garden always opt for South Facing aspect – North is totally wrong.

All organic gardening relies on your relationship with the soil and on constantly improving it. Soils vary in composition; they may be sandy, silt or clay based – they are all different and will need to be treated appropriately. Similarly some crops will flourish in some soils and not others. (continued on page 3)

(Talk on Organic Vegetable Growing, continued)**Pest Control**

Yes, you do get pests, but if kept in natural conditions nature tends to keep things under control i.e. an increase in Aphids is normally associated with an increase in ladybirds which are their natural predators.

Other natural biological controls are available as a treatment, such as “nemaslug” which contains millions of naturally occurring microscopic nematodes that kill slugs both above and below ground. This is completely harmless to birds, hedgehogs and other wildlife as well as pets and children.

The best defence against cabbage white butterfly and leek moth is netting such as wonder mesh (or enviro mesh) which can be 100% effective. Organic slug pellets are totally useless, in Brian’s opinion — the best way is to spear the slugs with a penknife on a stick!

Green manures

An excellent technique. These are of different types: Nfixing, high fibre, or deep rooted to add minerals.

An interesting technique is to plant brassicas in cleared circles in a green manured bed – this protects the young plants - the green manure being cut down later on. You can even use excess seeds – always cover the soil with something growing.

Note keeping

This is important as results of experiments should always be kept for future reference.

A good example is the upright courgette (Black Forest) - two stay in the greenhouse and the rest are planted out. Brian finds the “Dymo” system to be very good – doesn’t fade.

Permaculture

Permaculture is a system of agricultural and social design principles centred on simulating or directly utilizing the patterns and features observed in natural ecosystems

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permaculture>).

Permaculture involves growing what is appropriate for the soil, being sustainable (without external inputs) and not fighting nature—and is good for the planet – of which gardens are a small part over which we have stewardship.

The garden should have a healthy ecosystem without such things as weed killers that can exist in the soil for up to nine months. Genetic diversity is also extremely important.

Commercial growing for uniformity leads to a reduced gene pool and can give rise to susceptibilities to disease – for instance the Incas, who grew potatoes before Europeans, did not have blight as they grew a wide number of varieties.



Brian Hesketh speaking at the December meeting

Health benefits of organic produce

Evidence is now emerging that shows that organic methods have definite health benefits. For instance, in 2014 a Meta study carried out by the University of Newcastle found that nutrient levels were higher and cadmium and pesticide levels were lower in organically grown produce.

(Barański et al, 2014. “Higher antioxidant and lower cadmium concentrations and lower incidence of pesticide residues in organically grown crops: a systematic literature review and meta-analyses”. *British Journal of Nutrition*, 112, pp 794-811).

Final message

Brian’s final message was “Don’t lose heart!”

Even when not using chemicals, vigorously growing plants are intrinsically disease resistant.

Brian has found that reusable “root trainers” are a good aid to unchecked growth. When the roots appear – slide the plant out into the soil with minimal disturbance. Not recommended for parsnips, although the variety “roundhouse” may stand up to this treatment.

As an example, Brian had some blight on his tomatoes which were growing “like a train” – he removed the affected parts; the tomatoes recovered and ultimately had an excellent crop!

Suggestions for talks or subjects members would like to see at future meetings will be welcome—contact the Chairman,

Colin Sparkes

or Secretary,

Our new website

The Allotments Society has a new website .

www.bridportallotmentsociety.co.uk

which is still under construction. We would welcome any comments and suggestions regarding the layout, content etc. Comments and suggestions please to bridportallotmentsociety@gmail.com

We would welcome photographs of the different allotment sites and any other content, hints, etc for inclusion.

News from Bridport Town Council

No news this time from Bridport Town Council except that the waiting lists stand at 39 from within Bridport parish boundaries and 42 from neighbouring parishes.



Potato Day and “Grow your Own”

Another successful Potato Day was held on 9th January. Hundreds of people, both experienced and new gardeners, came along to enjoy the vast array of potato tubers as well as loads of other exciting plants and seeds brought to Bridport by Pennard Plants.

Trade was good and a generous donation was made to Friends of Julia's House, the organisers' chosen charity for this year, who were there with information and goods for sale.

Together with the profits from our very successful cafe, serving delicious homemade cakes and jacket potatoes, £320 was raised for this wonderful charity.

Our next event combining lots of plants for gardeners and raising money for charity, is our very popular **Grow Your Own** stall.

We will be outside Bridport Arts Centre on **Saturday 7th May**, giving away donated plants.

Do come and join us, and bring your surplus veggie plants for the stall, and maybe take away something you've never tried before.

Jude Hopkins



Seed Swap

This year's seed swap (at the Ropemakers' Arms, Saturday 13th February) was full of promise as 40+ gardeners came along to swap their surplus seeds.

Gathered from people's own seed store, their gardens and foraged from the local environs a great range of seeds arrived, including the "Jewson Poppy" so named as it was gathered from poppies growing near Jewson's building suppliers! The conversation held much promise for the year ahead as people shared ideas and recipes. Grated courgette and ricotta fritter and fennel blossom Prosecco being two ideas I'm looking forward to trying out!

See you at next year's seed swap for more stories.

Eileen Haste

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 01308-250260 or send her an email at bridportallotmentsociety@gmail.com

Receiving the newsletter by email: We now send out the newsletter, meeting agenda and minutes by email — if any member is unable to receive these by email, please contact the Secretary, Lynne Atkinson, on 01308-250260.

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 or email entries to bridportallotmentsociety@gmail.com. Contributions to next edition (articles, news items and/or photographs) are welcome at any time, but by

10 May 2016 please Many thanks for contributions this time - please keep them coming.