



HARLOW HILL ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN 2023 NEWSLETTER

For all Plot Holders and Associate Members

Welcome to the Autumn 2023 newsletter. 2023 has been quite a good allotment year, peas apart, which for most plot holders and certainly for me have been an unmitigated disaster. The wet July and August didn't suit holidaymakers, but both veg and flowers loved the long days of warm wet weather (and so did the weeds). In September there were some very colourful plots, a delight to behold.

Storm Babet has just receded into history and wherever else heavy spells of rain eventually go. It dumped over 2 inches of rain on our part of Harrogate in mid-October and more is forecast in the next few days. Not a very good prospect for allotment gardening. However, it's a good time to set broad beans, and they should be cropping by the end of June – the first crop of the season. Aquadulce Claudia is the variety recommended for an autumn sowing. I've hedged my bets this year – set some straight into my allotment plot, and about a dozen in pots eventually to transplant.



It's a good time to tidy up the plot and to get rid of any remaining annual plants that are now well past yielding anything remotely edible or ornamental. It's also a good time for getting rid of any remaining annual weeds. My method is to use the spade. Skim off the weeds by getting the spade as horizontal as possible and running it along the surface of the soil to remove all the vegetation. Most easily done one-handed. Compost the vegetation and leave the roots in the ground (the weeds are only annuals). But don't do this with any of the nasty perennial weeds such as mare's tail and bindweed – just keep digging them up and hope they will eventually give up, and certainly don't compost them.

HARLOW HILL ALLOTMENTS GAIN GOLD AWARD IN SITE JUDGING

Our allotment site gained a Gold Award in the Harrogate & District Allotment Federation site judging and came second with just 4 marks fewer than Pine Street who came first. The judging took place on 29th June and our site looked good. The judges commented in "Areas of Achievement" it is a "very well-managed site with good community noticeboards" and in "Areas for Improvement" the comment was "Aim to establish links with local community groups/schools". The top plot on the site was 37A. Thanks to all the plot holders who put in that special extra bit of effort. The criteria for the site judging takes into account the different sizes of sites, and the proportion of poor plots to good/satisfactory plots. The mark scheme included range and quality of the plants across the plots, maintenance of the site, environmental diversity, community participation and overall impression. Well done everyone.

HARLOW HILL ALLOTMENT SHOP NEEDS YOU



Our allotment shop is in the garage at the upper end of the large site and is open to plot holders and associate members. We sell composted manure, composts, fertilisers and various sundries e.g. canes, string, plant labels, fleece etc. The majority of our prices are cheaper than garden centres and there is the convenience of being very close to your allotment plot.

We used to open every Saturday and Sunday 10.30 -12.00 from the start of February until the end of November. Then Covid-19 came, and we couldn't open at all, so we introduced ordering by email and collecting your order from outside the shop at a set time. Once we could open again, we decided to cut down the number of days that the shop was open, but still keep the regular email orders. For 2024, we're going to open more frequently - every Saturday from February to June and September to November and once a month in July and August, which are usually the quieter months. Opening dates/times will be put on all the gates, on the noticeboard and on our website www.harlowhillaa.org.

The shop is run by volunteers. Chris and I order the stock – mainly from Acorn Garden Supplies about 3 or 4 times a year- with some composts ordered from Dalefoot, perhaps once a year, and an occasional delivery of Strulch. Volunteers kindly help to unload the deliveries.

When the shop is open, we have a rota of volunteers to serve the customers. I usually organise the rota at the start of the year, but volunteers can swap their duties if necessary. Chris, as Treasurer, organises all the paperwork for the shop and banks the money. Customers at the Shop are encouraged to pay by bank transfer but can pay by cheque or cash too.

If the shop is well-used, it makes a good profit for the association, so helps to keep rents low and helps to pay for any maintenance work on site.

If you haven't been to the allotment shop, come and have a look around when we're open to see what we have for sale. We also have a pile of gardening books and magazines available to borrow or you can just come and have a chat.

Finally, Chris and I would like to step down from looking after the shop sometime next year. I've been helping to run the Shop for over 11 years, so I feel it's time to hand it on.

If you:

- could help unload the deliveries,
- are interested in joining the rota for helping serve in the shop, or
- might be interested in taking over the management of the shop,

please let me know (email: dicken.angela@hotmail.co.uk). I'm happy to provide more information. There will be no allotment shop without volunteers. Your Allotment Shop needs you! *Angela Dicken*

USING THE SHOP AND THE SEED AND POTATO ORDER BENEFITS US ALL

The Committee is keen for all plot holders to make use of the shop and the seed and potato ordering schemes. This is with good reason. The profit the shop makes and the discounts we get from bulk ordering seeds and potatoes all go to reducing our plot rents. We think that you'll be surprised and pleased to hear that in 2022 (this wasn't the best year) these contributions to the site were equivalent of almost £11 per plot! So it is to everyone's benefit to make use of the shop and the seed order.

This year's seed order closes on Monday 6th November. Hurry! There's still time! Catalogues in the mower shed next to the shop. *Steph Byrnes*

PLOT SIZES – ISSUES AND CURRENT POLICY

Traditionally, a full allotment plot is 240 sqm. Over the years plots have been split in half so we now consider a standard plot to be 120sqm. However, on the Harlow Hill site we have plots of many sizes and shapes and a lot of the standard plots have been split to form smaller plots. This has occurred because nowadays a lot of people want a smaller plot – they just can't manage a larger one. We have also created some smaller plots where long-standing plot holders needed a smaller area to work as they grow older. So over the last six years, the number of plots on the site has risen by 10%.

We are now at the situation where we only have two large plots and just 16 in total larger than the standard 120 sqm. (many of these only just a bit larger). That leaves 107 plots being standard size or less (49 being standard, 32 being $\frac{2}{3}$ of a standard plot, 26 being $\frac{1}{2}$ of a standard plot).

There are, however, still people who do want a standard size plot. Given the fact that the site now has many smaller sized plots, the Committee has decided that the remaining plots (except for the two large ones when one day they become available) should not be further split.

So, if you get to the point where your plot is too big for you, you can contact the plot letting manager and be put at the top of the list for the next smaller plot to become available and then move to that one. This then frees your existing plot for a new plot holder.

Similarly, if you have a small plot and wish to have a bigger one, let the plot letting manager know and as long as you are on top of your current plot you can then be next in line when one becomes available. Unfortunately, with a long waiting list and a big demand for plots, we cannot just let you have a second plot.

Chris Dicken

WAITING LIST

The Committee meeting of 19th October was informed by Lettings Manager, Richard Wriglesworth, that there is a current waiting list of 55 people. The most recent person to receive a plot had been on the waiting list for 2 years and 5 months (up from 2 years and 3 months).

BEE'S LINES

I have had two hives of bees on the allotment site throughout the summer and they have been busy recently, mainly bringing in ivy pollen. I hope I might get them through the winter but there is no guarantee - the conditions at Harlow Hill are not ideal i.e. the highest point in Harrogate and somewhat exposed. But we will just have to wait and see and hope for the best.

Peter Gregory

WE'RE ON FACEBOOK



If you are on Facebook, please do look up our page called “Harlow Hill Allotment Association”. It is an extra channel of communication, where we can encourage one another, share tips and experiences, social events and meetings. Having an allotment, whilst sometimes solitary, can actually be a vibrant community activity, and the Facebook page is another way to get to know and support one another.

Search for “Harlow Hill Allotment Association”, answer 3 questions (this is to ensure only plot holders are in the group) and request to be added. This is a private group, so only allotment holders will be admitted. If you are not on Facebook, this will not replace emails, so you will not miss out on vital information.

Jayne Mitchell

MANURE DELIVERIES

The Committee has been considering the policy for on-site manure deliveries. Whilst some plot holders do like to have manure delivered from local farms, this does present some problems for the site. A tractor and trailer on site are a considerable weight and unless the rides are bone-dry can cause damage – this has happened in the past and of course has had to be repaired, by the committee. In addition we have had occurrences of plot damage too as there is not much room for manoeuvre. Deciding on the firmness of a ride is very difficult – it may seem firm, but as noted above a tractor is very heavy.

The Committee has decided therefore that if a plot holder wishes to arrange a manure delivery it should only be to the main gate, where it should be unloaded and then immediately wheelbarrowed to the plot holder's plot, so as not to block the entrance nor cause nuisance for those plots near to the gate. This should be arranged after obtaining a committee member's permission.

Note: the allotment shop does stock high quality composted manure in 50 litre bags – no worries regarding the provenance of the ingredients and no waiting to ensure it is fully composted.

Chris Dicken

LEEK PRIZE



The inspection for the annual leek prize will take place in the next two or three weeks – before the leeks start to be eaten in large numbers. Now is the time to tidy them up and make them presentable. This year there seem to be some very good leeks on our site.

Keith Wadd

MYSTERY SHRUB

For those who may have wondered how that holly or that hawthorn or even that yew got into their garden, the answer is almost certainly that it arrived by bird, its seed passing through before being excreted and then germinating. Something similar explains how a mystery shrub became entangled in the roots of the Victoria plum tree on my allotment plot. I had no idea what the shrub was, and my plot predecessor apologetically had no idea either. By trawling through the pages of Hessayon's "The Flowering Shrub Expert" I am now 99% certain I have tracked it down. It's called *Leycesteria* and nothing to do with Leicester City. Its other names are Pheasant Berry (which suggests an avian origin), Flowering Nutmeg, and Himalayan Honeysuckle, and its flowers are claret-red and white. Hessayon says *Leycesteria* was a favourite shrub in Victorian times, but "now illustrates how plants can go out of fashion". Only the birds keep it going.

How to grow it. Don't. How do get rid of it. Looks as if getting rid of the plum tree too is my best bet. For the curious, there is a mature *Leycesteria* on the footpath between the Green Hut and the Pannal Ash roundabout. It's on the right just after the green open space.

Keith Wadd

WILDLIFE AREA



Our allotment site has had a wildlife area for many years, with a small pond, which is full of frog spawn each spring. Hopefully, the many frogs that result will help to keep the slugs under control!

The pond and wildlife area have recently been renovated with the pond now enlarged and surrounded by a new fence, plus proper path to provide better access. The pond has been planted up with Marsh Marigold, Flowering Rush, Frogbit and Fringed Waterlily which will all provide shelter and diverse habitats for a wide range of creatures – nymphs, water beetles, large and small frogs and pond skaters have all been spotted.

The area surrounding the pond has started to be planted up with wildflower species to encourage butterflies, bees and insects. This will continue to be done using plugs raised from seed. There is also a birdbox which has been used by blue tits for the last two years, and a bat box.

The wildlife area is on our small allotment site. Come and have a look at it. *Tricia Wilson*

ALLOTMENT SHOW VERY SUCCESSFUL

The Harrogate & District Allotment Federation Annual Show on 20th August in the Sun Pavilion in Valley Gardens was very successful. It was a warm, sunny day and there was a good attendance. £500 from the profits of the Show has been donated to Ripon in Bloom for the refurbishment of Bedern Bank. The Harlow Hill tombola stall raised £260.60. Many thanks to everyone who helped on the day and who donated prizes. Jane Ayre and Gerry Hansford collected red produce from around the allotment site and Jane put together an excellent arrangement for the Simply Red Competition, which was judged by Tim Kellett formerly of Simply Red. The winners were Kirby Road Allotments in Ripon.

8 people from Harlow Hill entered the Show, which was down from previous years. Angela Dicken won the Margolis trophy for most points in Show by a member of Harlow Hill and Beatrice Treetops won the Harlow Hill Junior Cup. It would be great if more people from Harlow Hill could have a go next year.

For 2024, HDAF are introducing a new class into the Children's Section – 'A tree grown from an acorn or nut'. We hope that lots of children and grandchildren of plot holders will enter. Any resulting trees will be donated to local groups who are involved with tree planting/



Next year's Show will be on **Sunday 18th August 2024.**

YOU MIGHT BE CREATING A MONSTER!

Maybe think twice before setting a sapling tree or large shrub on your allotment plot. It may plant very easily as a sapling, and give much pleasure as it burgeons in its early years with flowers and fruit, but what's it going to be like in 20 years? By that time it can be a serious problem, not only to those who have created a monster on their plot, but to neighbouring plot holders. It is an issue the committee have discussed on several occasions.

Amongst the problems it creates are that:

- i) the bigger it grows the more it keeps the sun off nearby plots, not only the plot holder's but neighbouring plots,
- ii) it draws moisture from the surrounding cultivated area, and not only the plot holder's,
- iii) its twigs and branches, both pruned and unpruned, can be sharp and dangerous,
- iv) the weeds that grow in its roots, particularly the nasty perennial ones such as bindweed, mare's tail and couch grass, are almost impossible get out, and this also applies to what are normally regarded as benign growths such as Leycesteria.

Worst of all the problems is getting rid of the monster, much as we all love trees. You won't be able to by normal allotment gardening methods, it has grown too big and become too deep rooted. It has now become a problem not only to the plot holder who planted it, not only to neighbouring plot holders, but to the unfortunate next tenant who takes over the plot.

It also creates a problem for the Committee. Should the committee require that plot holders remove any trees and large shrubs at the end of their tenancy? And if so, how? The only way, it seems to me, is to bring in a mechanical digger. And who pays? Maybe from the deposit that plot holders pay at the commencement of their tenancy.

These are personal views. Comments welcome.

Keith Wadd

CASH – WHAT'S THAT? ?



When I took over as treasurer 9 years ago, everything the allotment association did financially was either by cheque or cash. This of course required much effort and was very time consuming. Not only were there all the rents to deal with in this way, but also the seed orders, potato orders, the weekly shop takings and many other one-off transactions that plot holders never see.

Over the years I introduced paying rents by bank transfer and then this fed through to the seed orders and to the shop. I'm pleased to say that almost everyone now pays their rent by bank transfer, saving me a considerable amount of work. During Covid we also made it mandatory to pay shop purchases by bank transfer too. As things have settled down, plot holders have somewhat moved back to paying by cash at the shop.

So the purpose of this article is to ask you whenever possible to please pay via bank transfer. It may not seem like much of an effort for you to pay cash (or by cheque), but please remember I then have lots of 'little efforts' to deal with, which all add up. Thanks.

Chris Dicken, HHAA Treasurer.

BUYING FRUIT TREES

If you are considering buying a fruit tree for your allotment plot, make sure that you buy one that is grafted on to dwarf root stock so that the tree doesn't get too big e.g. Choose M27 - Rootstock for Apple trees. Very dwarfing, Approximate height 1.8 metres when mature. Choose VVA-1 - Rootstock for Plum trees. Dwarf 2.5 metres when mature. Growing fruit trees as cordons, espaliers or fans all helps to keep them to a manageable size too.

Angela Dicken

THE SHED ON PLOT 35A



Plot holder, Anthony Rogers, told the newsletter that "it is in honour to my grandfather. He was a true pitman, and he built many similar structures in his gardens and allotments. I have amazing memories of sitting in similar scratch-built greenhouse/sheds. I resisted the temptation to build mine completely from old doors (the usual northeast miner approach) – after all it is 'Harrogate, darling' so I tried to create something he would have loved. But looked a little more classy."

"I was determined to build with only re-cycled materials. Paving was an old patio from a neighbour, the structure is roofing materials from a Victorian conversion in Leeds, found on Facebook and delivered by a local builder (generously free), the outside cladding is an old oak floor – taken from a skip (with permission), the windows were secured from a double-glazing company who did some work for us and had them in the back of their workshop as the order was incorrect (missing the lead beading). I only bought some screws, roofing felt, and silicon for the windows. Everything else is re-cycled, free, and now not in landfill.

The solar panel is re-cycled and is wired to a leisure battery to give me 1.5kw of power. I hope to use it for heated mats in the winter to bring on some seeds (rather than have on the windowsills at home).

I submitted full-scale drawings and plans to the committee as there was a question about combining the allowable 6x4 shed and greenhouse. The overall size of the greenhouse/shed is 6x8 in line with what is allowed. I placed it in the middle of the plot so as not to shade other plot holders.

During the day I sit behind a desk and have no trained building experience, bar usual DIY, but got total pleasure out of having the struggle of making it work with the materials I had. There was a risk that I would not have enough floor to finish it, but it seemed destined that I did, as I was on my last full boards as I finished cladding the old door.

I need to finish the roof line edges, but this year I have managed to grow cucumbers and tomatoes and the kiwi is growing well (but may need a mate if I am to get any fruit).

The rumours are not true – I am not intending to rent it out, move in, but sitting in the far corner, radio on (softly of course), drinking a coffee, gives me total pleasure. Roll on retirement."

Anthony Rogers

FAREWELL TO JOHN AND LINDA GRAHAM

Nearby plot holders will be sad to learn that John and Linda are leaving us. They have been plot holders for many years, and Linda was formerly our Lettings Manager. Their friendship and conversation have been much appreciated, and they grew good stuff, particularly their tomatoes which were much envied. Hope to see you around.

Keith Wadd

AUTUMN FLOWERS ON THE ALLOTMENT SITE



Please feel welcome to submit articles (even of a controversial nature), news, plant trials, photos etc.

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Harlow Hill Allotment Association website: www.harlowhillaa.org

On Facebook we're Harlow Hill Allotment Association.