



HARLOW HILL ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

SPRING NEWSLETTER MAY 2022

For all Plot Holders and Associate Members

Hello Everyone, welcome to the Spring newsletter. It has been a very dry April, the good side of which is that we have been able to get on our allotment and do things – despite the cold east wind. It has also, from early March onwards, been a brilliant spring for blossom and flowers – not only on the allotments, but in gardens, parks and the countryside.



Early Spring blossom



Newly set veg with a background of tulips

However, some watering has already had to be done. For those new to gardening, bear in mind that it's particularly important to water newly planted seedlings, but be careful not to over-water. Keep the ground damp but not soaking wet is a good rule of thumb. Newly-set seeds will benefit from a light watering - ideally through the “rose” of the watering can. Beware of spring frosts: they can ruin any plants of tropical ancestry such as runner beans and courgettes, and they won't do potato shoots any good at all. There has been an anti-cyclone close-by for much of April, and anti-cyclones in spring bring frosts. Familiarity with latest weather forecast is highly recommended.

MOWERS NEED PROTECTION

There are frequent occasions when our mowers have to be taken out of use because plastic, twine or wire gets tangled round the blades, and this not only means plot holders have to wait longer to use a mower, it means unnecessary time is taken on repairing it (sometimes cost too in serious cases). Stones or bits of metal can also damage mower blades.

These are three things that plot holders can do to reduce the problem:

- First, please take home (or wherever) all packaging and other material not in immediate use for horticultural purposes.
- Second, before mowing a path, please check it carefully and remove any plastic, stones and other debris that might damage the mower blades.
- Third, the rides are mown too, so please do not put stones and other rubbish on them.

The wind of course is one of the culprits and we often find on our plots rubbish that has blown in from elsewhere. This we can do nothing about. But please try to attend to the things that we can do something about.

If a mower is damaged or not functioning properly, please report it to the secretary.

Keith Wadd

THIS YEAR'S AGM HELD IN PERSON

This year's AGM was held at the Green Hut on 17th March, and attended by 33 members. It was "in person" though many people wore face masks. Refreshments were provided and much appreciated. The AGM started with an interesting and informative talk on "No -Dig" Gardening (see separate article) by Andrew Willocks of RHS Harlow Carr (standing in at the last minute for Joe Lofthouse). Amendments to the constitution were agreed, and the annual hosepipe licence was increased to £15. The prohibition of the use of weed killer on the allotment site was approved.

The Roland Buckton Trophy for Most Improved Plot was presented to Steph Byrnes, plot 44A. Mike and Jean Lowsley, plot 26Ai, were the winners of the Harry Newport Trophy for best leeks.

Phil Massey and John Hammerton both stood down from the Committee. Phil has been a plot holder and a member of the committee for many, many years. His experience and knowledge will be greatly missed on the committee and his long service is much appreciated. Phil was also a trustee of the association and we will aim to replace him in that role shortly. John has been a member of the committee since 2013 and has been particularly effective at supporting his group of plot holders. Many thanks go to both for their valuable contribution over several years.

Steph Byrnes who was co-opted on to the committee during 2021 was formally elected to the committee at the AGM and Jane Ayre was also elected to the committee at the AGM. The committee still does not have a Chair, and members are taking it in turns to chair the meeting.

The committee for 2022/23 is

Chair:	vacant
Secretary;	Angela Dicken
Treasurer:	Chris Dicken
Lettings Manager:	Richard Wriglesworth
Site Maintenance Manager:	Paul Knight
Minutes Secretary:	Steph Byrnes
Committee Members:	Jane Ayre, Sian Gamble, Keith Wadd, Tricia Wilson
Co-opted members:	Tony Gamble, Gerry Hansford

Each committee member has a small group of plots to oversee and act as first point of contact. We have re-allocated Phil's and John's plots to other committee members and the plot holders who are affected will be informed shortly.

WATER BUTT ADDITION TO SHED AND GREENHOUSE APPLICATION FORM



The form to "Request to erect Garden Shed or Garden Greenhouse on your plot" was amended at the last committee meeting to include the addition of "You are encouraged to attach a water butt to your shed or greenhouse to collect rainwater. This will help to keep our use of mains water to a minimum, thus reducing our water charges and the impact on plot rental fees and on the environment".

HOSEPIPE USE

As mentioned earlier, an increase to £15 in the annual cost of the hosepipe licence was agreed at the AGM. A hosepipe is to be used for no more than 30 minutes. The reason for this is to keep our water bill as low as reasonably possible. Hosepipe users are requested to ensure the water butt is full before they use the hosepipe. This is to ensure that during hosepipe use there is plenty of water available for watering can use. Watering can users are requested to fill up the butt after they have used it.

HEALTH & SAFETY

It is a good idea to have a basic first aid kit handy in your shed or greenhouse, or in your car. For the safety of everyone on site, please report any health and safety accidents or any health and safety concerns to the secretary, Angela Dicken.

OVERHANGING VEGETATION

Plot holders are requested to cut back any vegetation that overhangs allotment rides and shared paths. This particularly applies to fruit trees and large bushes. It is strongly suggested that the planting of a new tree or bush should be at least a yard away from a ride or shared path, and the same applies to any supporting structures. The tenancy agreement states that the plot holder "shall not plant trees or shrubs which will impact adversely on the adjacent allotments".

"NO DIG GARDENING" REDUCES LABOUR AND IMPROVES THE SOIL

Among the points made by Andrew Willocks in his talk on "No-Dig Gardening" at this year's AGM is that no-digging reduces labour by 40% (probably reduces the number of back injuries too). No-Dig means that compost can be left on the surface of the soil from November, and as this mulches, it prevents weed seeds from germinating and established weeds from growing bigger. Spread compost to a depth of about 5cm and, if need be, supplement with well-rotted manure.

Andrew pointed out No Dig protects the soil, and leaves worms and other beneficial organisms undisturbed; worms are particularly valuable as they aerate the soil and reduce drainage problems. Nitrogen-fixing bacteria have been found in the gut of worms.

Digging disrupts mycorrhiza which creates symbiotic relationships with plants, reducing drought, encouraging pest resistance, and helping plants to access nutrients.

It is claimed that No Dig increases the yield of turnips, spinach, cabbage and lettuce, though may not be noticeable until the second year. The mulch needs to be finely raked when seeds are set.

Despite the above points (which I fully accept), I have to say I'm still a digger. It goes back a long way with me, so it's a deeply ingrained habit. My dad (who also had an allotment) taught me to dig when I was very young. Get a good trench, push the weeds (the annual ones, that is) into it, make sure they are well covered, and let them rot. In Spring, particularly if there have been plenty of winter frosts, you get soil that's well nourished, easy to work and set seeds in. The word "friable" comes to mind. However, I readily admit that a lot of digging is not good for worms, and I try to be protective of mine.

Keith Wadd

LOOKING AFTER THE ALLOTMENT SITE

This is a list of all the jobs that have to be done to keep the infrastructure of the allotment site well-maintained for the benefit of all plot holders:

- Maintenance and Repair of Gates, including repair and replacement of gates, gateposts and fastenings;
- Maintenance, Repair and Replacement of Padlocks;
- Maintenance, repair and replacement of Fences;
- Maintenance of Hedges and Trees, including organising equipment and volunteering members to cut hedges, together with arranging for disposal of cuttings, and, where this is not possible, arranging for a contractor to undertake the work;
- Maintenance and Repair of the Water System, including repair and replacement of taps and water butts, plus turning the water on and off and recording meter readings;
- Maintenance and Repair of buildings and communal sheds;
- Maintenance and Repair of Rides including deciding if rides are firm enough for vehicles to access the site, and dealing with damage to the rides;
- Maintenance and Repair of Mowers, including arranging for the repair (not infrequent) and replacement of mowers, and ensuring that there is an adequate supply of petrol available;
- Maintenance and Repair of Site Drainage, mainly the bottom ditch, but responding to any other site drainage issues;
- Maintenance, Repair and Replacement of Plot Marker posts;
- Organisation of Work Weekends, including defining the tasks to be undertaken, organising materials and equipment, and supervising tasks on the day.

All of the above has to be done to enable us to enjoy our allotment gardening and grow good vegetables, fruit and flowers. As a self-managed site it is our responsibility to keep the site in good order and it doesn't happen by accident. Over the last few years Paul Knight has taken responsibility for it all. Paul notified the AGM that he would be stepping down as Site Maintenance Manager at the end of this year.

Paul has worked hard over recent years to improve the drainage on the site, so this should not need much work in the next few years.

Rather than expect one person to take on all of the above tasks, the committee thinks it would be quite possible for different people to take on different tasks, e.g. someone could volunteer to take on looking after the mowers and providing the petrol, someone else might be willing to look after the padlocks. **If you think you could help, please contact a member of the committee.**

OPEN DAY

Open Day will be on **Sunday 29th May, 2022, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** There will be a plant and produce stall, a cake stall and refreshments. Members of the public will be welcome to walk round around the site to see what we grow, and a conducted tour is being considered. The Harlow Hill Allotment Association site is an important local resource and part of the local community, and we want local residents to have the opportunity to have a look at what we are doing. A flyer to publicise Open Day will be distributed to nearby residents.

We will need volunteers to help on the stalls on the day, and donations of cakes, plants and produce will be much appreciated. Please contact me if you can help.

Angela Dicken

HARROGATE & DISTRICT ALLOTMENT FEDERATION

Competition: The theme for the 2022 HDAF Site Competition is **“PURPLE”**. Each allotment site is challenged to produce a purple arrangement to include one variety of purple fruit, one variety of purple vegetable and one variety of purple flowers. As many examples of the chosen vegetable, fruit and flower as you wish can be used. The arrangement must fit in in a 2ft x 2ft square.



The arrangements will be displayed at the Allotment Show and will be judged by Simon Collier, recently retired Head Gardener from Valley Gardens. There will be a prize of £30 for the winning site.

Think about growing some purple fruits, flowers, or vegetables this year as we will be asking for contributions for our ‘purple arrangement’ in August.

Allotment Show The Allotment Show will be in the Sun Pavilion in Valley Gardens on **Sunday 21st August**. Plans are already underway. As usual, there will be commercial, charity and allotment stalls around the Sun Colonnade. 15 commercial/charity stalls are already booked.

Harlow Hill will be doing the tombola stall again, so we will be looking for donations – unwanted gifts, bottles, confectionery, toiletries etc. - nearer the time.

The Show Schedule, which gives all the classes that you can enter, will be on our website www.harlowhillaa.org and on the HDAF website www.thehdaf.co.uk in the next couple of weeks

Chairs’ meeting The Chairs of the Harrogate & District allotment associations met on Tuesday 26th April for their annual meeting. The discussions included the renewal of our management agreements with HBC, which are due for renewal in 2023; vandalism; Health & Safety audits; waiting lists and site judging.

Harrogate in Bloom The year, Harrogate is entering Yorkshire in Bloom and the judging is likely to be in 3rd week of July. Once again the judges will visit Harlow Hill Allotments as it is on the judges’ route. We will aim to have a display at Harlow Hill to showcase all the allotment sites and each Harrogate site will be invited to send a representative to meet the judges. More details will be given nearer the time.

Angela Dicken

WILDLIFE AREA

Tricia and Steph have started work on the wildlife area. They are doing this work when they have time. They also have their own allotments to look after, which take priority. If you'd like to help then do get in touch with them - an email can be sent to stephbyrnes0109@gmail.com.

The area around the pond is looking significantly tidier and at the time of writing it looked very attractive. There have been some frogspawn and tadpoles in the pond. The downside is that the pond leaks so they're adding water when there is no rain to try to help the frogspawn and tadpoles survive. They're looking to repair and enlarge the pond in September/October of this year.

Some snowdrops, (all native UK varieties) have been planted in the wildlife area in six or seven patches. It is hoped that they will flower next year and also multiply to provide wider coverage.

In addition to the snowdrops they've also sown some ragged robin seeds, which will be planted as soon as they are ready.

There is currently a lot of crocosmia in the area. Some has already been removed and more will be taken out. They've also attempted to remove some of the cleavers (aka goosegrass). Obviously it will take more than one season to remove all of this.

A bird box has been placed on the silver birch tree. Fingers crossed we get some residents!

The next tasks include continuing to remove the crocosmia and cleavers, hanging the bat box and tidying up some of the grass and dead stuff from last year.

Steph Byrnes

STRULCH

At the AGM, during his talk on no-dig gardening, Andrew mentioned using Strulch as a top dressing or mulch.

As explained on the Strulch website www.strulch.co.uk :

*Strulch is a light and easy to use **garden mulch** made from wheat straw for organic gardening. A patented process developed by Dr Geoff Whiteley at The University of Leeds, is used to 'preserve' the straw so that it lasts for up to two years and gives an earthy brown colour.*

Strulch has a neutral pH and can be used throughout the garden on borders, raised beds, around cultivated fruit and on vegetable plots.

Strulch mulch reduces weed growth by up to 95%, helps retain moisture around plants and enriches soil and its structure. Strulch is suitable around flowers, shrubs, fruit and vegetables. The physical properties of Strulch, together with the embedded minerals, also deters slugs and snails.



Chris and I have used it for a number of years and definitely feel that it lives up to these claims. We asked everyone if they would like us to organise a bulk order. 31 people expressed an interest and we had two pallet loads (96, 13.5litre bags) delivered to the site. Many thanks go to Paul for helping us unload it. There are a number of bags in the Allotment Shop and these will be on the price list when we do the email order and have the shop open on 7th May.

Angela Dicken

TIME TO SET RUNNER BEANS

About a third of the way through May, I shall set my first batch of runner bean seeds, two or three beans to a fairly large plant pot in a mix of soil and compost. Around the end of the month I shall set a second batch, and, early autumn frost permitting, the second sowing will keep us in beans till early October. Transplant the newly-germinated plants into the allotment when they have grown 2 or 3 leaves and keep watering them well as runner beans are thirsty plants (this means keeping the soil moist round the roots, but not to the extent that the roots are standing in water). Runner beans are heavy croppers and will keep you in fresh veg for several weeks.

Keith Wadd



USE OF WEED KILLER IS PROHIBITED ON SITE

The Committee is trying to create an allotment site that is not only a place for members to enjoy, now and in the future, but a site that is friendly to wildlife too; so the use of weed killer is now prohibited on our allotment site. But what about the wildlife pests, such as pernicious weeds?

The two worst ones on our allotment site are mare's tail (also called horse tail) and couch grass. The only way to get rid of them without the use of weed killer is to dig them up, and, when you dig them up, dig deep and try to make sure you get every bit out. Mare's tale is by far the worst as its roots go very deep, and you'll be lucky if you get every bit out first time. Whenever a shoot appears dig it out. You may never be able to get every bit out, but if you keep digging it out when it re-surfaces you will be able to keep it under control and grow crops. If you are a digger as opposed to a "No dig gardener" and when you are digging you feel something deep down in the soil tugging at your spade, almost certainly it is a mare's tail root, a long, straggly dark-coloured thing. The tug tells you where it is, and dig as much out as you possibly can; also search for further bits of root in the soil you have just dug up. Do NOT try to compost mare's tail roots. Take them home and do what you can to destroy them, including forwarding them to the municipal eternal bonfire. Another fairly effective method of destruction is to let the roots dry out on a warm surface - but remember where you have left them, else they might start to grow again.



Couch grass is less of a problem because its white roots (white with sharp points on the end) run much closer to the surface. However, if it gets really established it can grow into a thick mat. It's also a big problem if it gets wrapped round the roots of fruit trees and bushes – I once had to dig up an apple tree to get rid of it! Dispose of the roots in the same way as you would with mare's tail. Dandelions can be a nuisance if they get well established because they are deep-rooted. Be vigilant, and dig them up when they are mere seedlings. For the well-established ones, dig deep and try to get rid of the whole root.

Annual weeds are much less of a problem than the perennials. The smaller they are, the easier to pull up or hoe up. If you are pulling them up, pull them horizontally; if you pull them vertically they much more easily snap off and leave the roots in the ground. My advice, not everyone will agree, is do not weed peas as you will very easily loosen the roots of the peas and they will not appreciate it (the cure's worse than the disease). After the peas have been harvested, dig up the weeds with the peas.

Keith Wadd

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT



Don't forget if you have any surplus fruit or veg, please put it in them in the yellow boxes at the side of the Allotment Shop. The produce is collected by Sian Gamble and taken to Resurrected Bites where it's turned into lovely meals. There's lots of rhubarb around at the moment, so if you have any to spare put it in the boxes. Sian is a dab hand at rhubarb crumble!

BROWNIES

I recently had contact with a brownie pack leader who asked if she could bring a small group of girls to look round the Allotment site. They are making their first visit on 5th May in the afternoon. If it goes well, they will hopefully visit us a few times throughout the season. It's always good to involve children in gardening at an early age.

Angela Dicken

WORK WEEKEND

We will be having a site Work Weekend on **Saturday 2nd July and Sunday 3rd July 10.00 - 12.30**. Our main aim will be to clear the ditch at the bottom of the main site and cut the hedge that runs alongside it. No doubt there will be other hedging and clearing jobs to do too.

For those new to the site, we usually meet a couple of times a year to carry out site maintenance tasks. As a self-managed site, it's up to us to keep the site in good order. And many hands always make lighter work.

We'll organise drinks and cake too. If you can help on one or both of these days, please let me know

Angela Dicken

Dates for your diary

Sunday 29 th May	Open Day at Harlow Hill
Sat 2 nd & Sun 3 rd July	Work weekend
Thursday 5 th August	Deadline for Show Entries
Sunday 21 st August	HDAF Allotment Show



Early rhubarb

Please feel welcome to submit your comments on newsletter items. Articles on your crop-growing experiences and experiments also welcome.

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Formatting by Angela Dicken.