



West Wickham Allotments Ltd

www.wwallotments.org.uk

Newsletter – September 2022

From our Chairperson

Well what a summer, the hottest and driest on record.

I have seen plots that are full of crops and also had reports of crops of potatoes the size of marbles. Which camp are you in, the 'highly productive' or the 'what have I done wrong' group? We had an inch of rain last Thursday but no more is promised for another ten days.

Don't give up hope if you didn't do too well this year there is always another one coming along. I hear on the grapevine that onions, garlic, broad beans and peas will be available in our shop soon. It will also soon be time when we start taking orders for seeds and potatoes so look out for e-mails from the shop.

Tony



Notes from the Trading Shed

What a strange summer it's been so far, both in the Shed and on the plots.

Firstly, we'd like to thank everyone who helped out at the Open Day last weekend. We had fantastic support with erecting marquees, supplying fruit, veg, jams, chutneys, plants and cakes and a wonderful bunch of people who stood in all that heat for several hours selling everything and serving tea and cake. We had great feed-back from visitors who really enjoyed themselves and who loved our prices! They all spent their money generously and we have nearly £100 to pass to St Christopher's Hospice from the gate money.



Takings in the shop have been down by about 7% on last year, but have been much boosted by Paul and Ian's wonderful supply of fruit and vegetable plants, so many thanks to them.

We've placed orders for Autumn planting onions, Senshyu and Blood Red, garlic Thermidrome, Broad Bean, Aqualdulce and Pea Seed, Meteor. We've ordered extra garlic this year because it sold so well in 2021. These should be in the shop in late September/early October.

We've also ordered Spring planting onions, Sturon, Turbo and Red Baron and Shallot, Golden Gourmet, Red Sun and Keith has snuck in an extra kilo of spring planting garlic to the order! These will be available in the New Year along with the potatoes.

We've decided to go with 10 varieties of potato again this year and have taken on feed-back from some plot-holders who've asked for particular varieties.

First Earlies - Maris Bard and Arran Pilot

2nd Earlies - Kestrel and Vivaldi

Salads - Charlotte and a new choice, Jazzy, which is described as a 'small waxy potato, nutty flavour, high yielding'.

Mains - Cara, Picasso, Desiree and another new choice, Sagitta, described as 'one of the best tasting potatoes, good chipper, excellent mash and boils well'. What more could we want!

We've had to put the price up a little this year to cover the price increase from our supplier, but they're still excellent value at £1.30 per kilo - far cheaper than anywhere else. We'll need to be paid in advance, as usual and will start taking orders in October.

We won't, sadly, be getting any Spring planting bulbs this year as our supplier tells us that the Dutch failed to apply expensive fertilizer to the bulb fields and are now unable to dig the bulbs because of the dry weather. We hope we'll be able to offer the catalogue again next year.

Finishing on some wonderful news - the soft-sided truck that Horticultural Supplies have used for years to deliver our orders, has been repaired! Our delivery will be brought right up to the shop again and we're all very relieved. Thank you so much to those who helped with the two deliveries that had to be hauled up from the roadside.

Regards

Keith and Liz



Topical Tips from Paul

Copper supplement. The excellent weather seems to have kept late blight on tomatoes at bay, but it will eventually strike our plants. In days gone by, gardeners used to spray Bordeaux mixture on to tomato and potato plants to stop blight. The use of Bordeaux mixture was banned in the EU maybe six years ago now. However, Vitax Copper Mixture seems to work just as well by providing plants with trace amounts of copper, zinc and manganese. You can only make three applications of the mixture to any crop but even one applied now should protect tomato plants throughout September. I have also found that Copper Mixture has kept my courgettes healthier than in the past by killing mildew and preventing further attacks. Vitax Copper Mixture is available in the Trading Shed or online.

Time to gather our crops. After one of the hottest summers on record, we might have expected a glut of crops but in fact the absence of rain seems to have reduced yields of some crops, with beans suffering quite badly. That said, I notice some very healthy climbing beans and would be pleased to know which varieties have cropped well.

Strawberries yields seemed high as do those of apples, pears, plums and blackberries. It will be a surprise if potato maincrops hold up and again we should share info on varieties which have best handled the hot weather.

Sweetcorn has grown well but there is still the issue of attacks by badgers. I have seen some very robust defences around sweetcorn beds and my own have just survived due to chicken wire protection. In addition, I placed plastic bottles over the cobs and this worked well. If you choose to grow sweetcorn, then it is possible to grow the plants in the same 'high security' bed year after year but overwintering with a brassica crop, e.g., spring cabbage, would be beneficial.

It's worth paying attention to harvesting time - for example, potatoes won't bulk up once top growth has died off and leaving them too long in the ground can lead to slug and wireworm damage. That said, I left a row of Charlotte in the ground over winter last year without any problems. Carrots will usually stand well but may split if over-watered, and swedes and turnips should survive.

Here is some information on growing veg in drought conditions:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/drought-care>

Raspberries. Now is the time to remove all the growth on which this year's early/mid raspberries fruited. This will encourage new cane growth for next year's crop and this should be tied in to supports.

Salads. It's far from too late to sow lettuce, salad leaves and rocket. These will grow well into the winter months if you provide some cloche cover. Cut and come again leaves work particularly well. I grew chard for the first time and the small leaves and stems were delicious in a salad - it is remarkably easy to grow. I am also about to sow Winter Density seeds which should overwinter and provide spring lettuces.

Composting. Plants are starting to die back and the growth can be composted but you might want to avoid potato/tomato stems, rust covered onion/leek leaves, mildewed courgette leaves, brassicas infected with club root and pernicious weeds such as marestail and bindweed. Keep your compost bin contents damp to deter ants from nesting. The compost accelerator sold by the Trading Shed works particularly well and costs a fraction of the price of similar product in a garden centre. Here is some information on composting:

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/compost>

Onions and garlic. If you plant onion sets over winter, consider covering them with enviromesh which is available from the Trading Hut. This allows 95% air and light transmittance. Not only will it keep out the allium leaf miner (around September/November and March/April), but it also provides a microenvironment in which plants seems to grow faster.

Here's some information on the allium leaf miner:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity/allium-leaf-miner>

Green Manure. This can be sown now, overwintered and dug in in the spring to improve the soil texture and replace micronutrients. I have found the phacelia tanacetifolia sold in the Trading Shed to be excellent in that it germinates and grows well and then is easy to dig into the soil. Sowing green manure on fallow land is an excellent alternative to weed suppressant material. Other green manure options include mustard, certain grasses and crimson clover. Remember that mustard is a brassica and may impact on your crop rotation plans. Here is some info on mulches and green manures: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/soil-composts-mulches/green-manures>

Happy plotting!

Paul

From the Secretary's desk



Thank you to everyone who helped or donated produce for the Open Day. The very hot weather meant that attendance was down on previous years but everyone who came had a good time. I am pleased to let you know that we raised £94 from gate & honey donations for St Christopher's.

The badgers are back on the allotments and we also have a rabbit roaming around eating carrots

There is a vacancy on the Committee. Do you have a few hours a month that you can spare to help keep the allotments running smoothly?

Viv