



Hampton Court Way Allotment Association 2012 Annual General Meeting

Monday 23rd January 2012 at Thames Ditton Tennis Club – 7.30pm

Come and have your say & hear the latest news from the HCWAA Committee

Following the AGM, professional gardeners Gerald Smith and Nick Mills will be on hand to answer your gardening questions and we will have a horticultural quiz compèred by Tom Appleton.

The bar at the Lawn Tennis Club will be open both before and after the meeting and there will be free refreshments available after the Q&A
The Club is just opposite the entrance to Thames Ditton railway station. There is plenty of off-road parking, so there's no need to park on the street

View from the Shed

The winter solstice has passed and as the northern hemisphere begins it's gradual tilt to face the sun it's time to look forward to all the excitement and activity that a new season brings to all us gardeners.

Gloomy days vanish as projects are completed, beds prepared and plots tidied. Dark evenings are brightened with a glass of wine and the first seed catalogues of the season.

So, as we move into 2012, let's wish for a frost-free spring, a warm wet summer and as our first seedlings emerge on a golden morning, a full violin accompaniment!

The carpet question

In the July newsletter I reported on the subjects that were discussed during our chairman Julie's attendance of the June meeting of Elmbridge Council Allotments

Consultative Committee. One of the issues raised at the meeting was the environmental impact of using carpet as a weed suppressant on allotments, and the council's potential plan to ban it's use.

The October newsletter contained a 'Letter to the Editor', which quoted various garden writers who extolled the virtues of carpet as a good form of weed control prior to cultivation. Perhaps they are not as well informed as we like to believe.

I regret that I did not give an opportunity for the committee to give a balanced reply, but would now like to clarify the council's and the committee's ruling regarding use of carpets onsite.

Below is the reply that Ian Billett received after diligently chasing this issue with EBC.

"As soon as your carpet-mulch starts to rot, whatever chemicals it contains will mostly

head soilwards. Cheaper carpets, stuck with foam backing and copious glue are a particular hazard, but even expensive carpets aren't much better, since they are loaded with anti-moth insecticides.

Carpets contain dyes and may contain heavy metal compounds. These can be taken up directly by plant roots alongside essential metal particles such as phosphorus and potassium that plants need to grow healthily.

Therefore, carpets should not be used as a mulch on allotments."

Ian Gayton
Parks and Recreation Manager
Leisure & Cultural Services
Elmbridge Borough Council

I think this is pretty clear-cut.
All members of the HCWAA committee are completely behind the decision to ban



carpets as a mulch, and based on the councils' comments, the use of carpets will be phased out.

All plot holders are asked to dispose of any carpets by April 7th – this is the date of the spring working party so there will be a skip available for disposal.

We will of course help anyone that may need assistance.

Catch the Pigeon

There are still some crops flourishing at this time of year – most notably winter cabbage, Brussels and sprouting broccoli. All of these brassicas are highly prized by our pigeon friends, who as you know can strip them to the stalk in a thrice, so if you have not already done so it's a good time to cover with netting.

Over the years I've tried all sorts of scaring methods including CD's, ribbons tied to canes and those winged plastic bottles that twirl on a piece of wire. My itinerant brother even offered – for a small fee – to spend some time on the plot shouting bang.

I found that the feathered varmints soon got used to all these scarers and munched on regardless.

Netting though is not always 100 per cent effective as I found out early last summer.

I watched in amazement as two fat pigeons lifted the netting at the base of my neighbour's fruit cage and walked straight in. I'm sure they would have walked straight out as well if I hadn't decided to rescue the fast disappearing currents. A fair few comedy moments ensued while being pummelled by panicked pigeons until they were eventually ejected.

The next big thing

After flicking through some catalogues it seems that the next big thing in fruit and veg is the Pineberry and the Purple Majesty potato.

The Pineberry is basically a white strawberry but with a pineapple flavour, it's said to be disease resistant but low yielding.

The Purple Majesty potato sounds very interesting. It's dark red right the way through and retains this colour throughout the cooking process – whether boiled, roasted or mashed. However the most interesting claim is that it contains ten times the level of an antioxidant called anthocyanin than a normal potato – this is said to be linked to health benefits in treating inflammation, diabetes and age related ailments.

From the site manager

As I write this I am amazed that 2011 is almost at an end, it has been such a busy year and the days have just flown by. The October work party was a great success; a big thank you to all who gave their time to help with the site maintenance tasks, your efforts are very much appreciated.

In recent weeks we have been lucky enough to secure several deliveries of wooden pallets and, thanks to Paddy (27a) and Ian (68a), the storage areas are now looking much tidier. There is still more to do at the Ember Court Road end of the site and, weather permitting, it is hoped that this will be finished before the Spring.

The new beech whips have been planted along a substantial part of the Hampton Court Way boundary and the job will be completed once the last few plots have been cleared. Again thanks go to Paddy and Ian but also to Jarda (15b) and Jean (25) who spent a day carrying out the somewhat arduous task. It was a bit of a shock that Surrey County Council decided to clear their side of the fence so thoroughly,

the result being that the site is looking a little exposed. However, if our little saplings are kept weed free they should survive the Winter and flourish in the Spring; don't forget to keep the leaf mulch topped up please.

Sadly the site has again been visited by inquisitive vandals, I am unaware of any thefts but numerous sheds were opened and one was substantially damaged. The Police are very unlikely to ever catch any of the culprits so I would suggest that nothing is stored on site that you would be particularly unhappy to lose or have damaged.

The AGM has been arranged for Monday 23rd January and it would be great to see as many of you as possible. The entertainment this year will be a quiz presented by Tom Appleton, our treasurer and quiz master extraordinaire. No doubt there will be fierce competition for the top prize so best get swotting!

I wish you all a happy, prosperous and fruitful New Year, let's hope it's a good one.

Jill, Site Manager

The price is right

Now that it's time to renew the HCWAA leases I thought it would be interesting to refer to a study carried out by Leicester University into the fluctuations in allotment rental charges across the country. It highlights what good value our plots are.

Runnymede is the most expensive place to rent. They have increased their charges from 34p a square metre in 2008 to 55p in 2011.

However this is beaten percentage-wise by Cannock Chase in Staffs who more than doubled it's rent for a full plot in 2011 to £108.92.

Waiting lists are also covered in the report with the longest being in Wyre Borough Council, Lancs with 12 people waiting for each of the 26 plots in the area.

It also seems that a number of councils have closed their waiting lists meaning that the number of people waiting for a plot could potentially be much higher.

Farewell

Sadly this is my last newsletter as editor.

Hurrah I hear you say – no more random witterings – bring on some useful information!

After nearly ten years I have decided to pass-on good old Plot 13. I've had the best of times, learned a lot and made some great friends. I would like to thank everyone who has helped me throughout the years. – I'll take many fond memories away with me and will miss you all.

Have a healthy happy and bountiful new year – best wishes Paul

Who to contact

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