



From Jill, the Site Manager SPRING 2014

Those of you who were able to attend the AGM in January will have been reminded of the concerns we have in relation to our ever increasing water costs. Even Thames Water noticed how high they were last year so it must be bad! There has been some debate as to whether or not sprinklers should be banned on site, additional costs levied for hosepipe use, restrictions made on watering times and various other ideas for reducing our usage. For the moment we would like to ask you to do what you can to help. Typically a hosepipe delivers 1,000 litres/1 cubic metre of water an hour, (I'm not sure that's true with our water pressure but it's no wonder our water meter is spinning if it is!) Here are some tips to keep your plots happy and hopefully save us some money:

Watering Techniques

Watering little and often is bad for your plants, it encourages them to develop roots near the soil surface where they quickly dry out. One good soak every 7 to 10 days is better than a daily sprinkle. Only water in the cool periods of the morning or evening when evaporation from the heat of the day will be reduced. Use a watering can if possible. Prevent run off by gently breaking up the soil surface before watering or make small holes around plants using a cane or something similar. Target individual plants rather than watering the whole bed.

A useful technique, particularly on thirsty plants such as tomatoes and courgettes, is to plant in a dip so that water pools around the base of plants. Alternatively, partially bury a short length of plastic pipe or a bottle (no cap, neck down, base removed) in the earth next to each plant. You will then be able to fill these with water and allow this to percolate down to the roots.

Mulch

Mulches are simply layers of material placed on the surface of the soil to inhibit weeds, prevent water evaporation and improve soil condition. They can be natural materials such as wood chips, leaf mould, compost, manure, grass cuttings or straw. Mulched beds will need considerably less water than those with bare soil. The thicker the mulch the more effective it will be; a mulch of at least 5-10cm will make a big difference to water conservation, productivity and soil structure. Weed suppressant fabric or thick cardboard will also help.

Water Butts

If you have a shed and/or greenhouse then consider attaching guttering and a water butt so that you can harvest rainwater. You'll be surprised how quickly the butt fills up and if you can get more than one on your plot it will be a great help. Some plants, such as blueberries, cannot cope with tap water.

Drought Tolerant Plants

If you want to have flowers on your plot there are a huge range that will survive without regular watering. The list is quite extensive but some to try are Echinacea, Lavender, Echinops, Iris, Alliums, Verbena, Wallflowers, Foxgloves and Geraniums; they all have the added benefit of being much loved by bees and other pollinators.

Grass areas

Reduce the number of outings with the lawn mower and, when you do cut, raise the level of the blades; a longer cut will help grass to survive dry weather. Use the cuttings to mulch around the bases of trees, fruit bushes and numerous vegetable beds; potatoes, carrots, sweetcorn, and beans will be particularly appreciative. Grass cuttings are an excellent heat source for compost bins and also provide protection from late ground frosts.

Hoping (never the less) for lots of sunny days, Jill

Notices & Reminders

Spring Work Day - Saturday 12th April 10.00am (until we're done !)

Please come along and help with the usual maintenance tasks. Refreshments will be provided

Site **speed limit** is 5mph, please adhere to it as site activity increases.

Bonfires are prohibited from 1st May until 30th September.

Dogs must be kept on a lead

Please turn **compost heaps** regularly to deter rats

The **water taps** will be connected during the first two weeks of April.

EMGS Inter-allotment Competition

A renewed collaboration with the Esher Molesey Garden Society offers each site/association in the area the opportunity to submit a collective entry to two special classes at the annual Summer 'Flower Show'.

Category 1. A collection of at least seven vegetables in a box or basket. Exhibit not to exceed 600mm in length.

Category 2. A vase of mixed garden flowers and/ or foliage to contain at least seven varieties. Exhibit not to exceed 500mm in height.

HCWAA will need at least four members to contribute some exceptional produce and put together winning submissions.

Madeleine Hern, Plot 44b
madeleine_hern@hotmail.co.uk and
Jean Billett, Plot 25
jean.billett@ntlworld.com have kindly offered to co-ordinate our entries for this years competition on 16th August.

In addition, all plot holders are encouraged to submit as many individual winning entries as possible to contribute to the total score for each association, revealing exactly where the collective horticultural talent in the EMGS area lies!

Plotter Profile - No 15a/b Jarda Chlapik

The 2013 Gold Medal winner kindly provided some text describing his experience.

"It all started in February 2011, I had no prior knowledge of growing vegetables, or working an allotment plot. Plot 15b was virtually a green field site with a lot of brambles, couch grass, weeds, sloping surface, and buried material. To assist me with my new adventure, I acquired some books for newcomers starting an allotment, which I have found essential in guiding me through this phase and leading to my success in growing vegetables.

I commenced by clearing the site of brambles, wooded plants and long grass, which culminated in three bonfires. I then planned and pegged out my plot into seven beds and leaving space for small shed and compost area. I then acquired several wooden pallets from a local garden centre to build compost bins. Fortunately being retired from work I could throw myself into the mammoth task of digging each bed progressively and planting my produce. I started clearing surface grass, placing it in my new wooden compost bins along with equal amounts of leaf mould.

Digging the beds is, I consider, the most important process for growing vegetables (building the loam and development of micro organism into the soil). As the soil had not been dug or used for many years there were lots of well established weed root structures in the soil, so I was very meticulous, only using a pick axe and fork for digging, to ease complete root structures out. I felt using a spade would chop up the weeds roots which would multiply problems. Using the trench method of digging I took the opportunity to put barrow loads of leaf mould into each trench to help with the soil structure. I found bind weed the most common weed to dig out.

The delay in the lengthy digging program put me behind the start of the growing season so I opted to buy a lot of plants from the garden centres. After three months of digging, planting, fertilising and watering with a wide variety of fruit and veg, to my surprise I had to start digging again but this time removing the weeds throughout of all the summer months, more work than I realised but still enjoying it, seeing things grow, talking to fellow allotment growers for advice, putting up netting where necessary etc. Then low and behold at the summer Bar-B-Q I was applauded with a Medal for the most promising newcomer of the year - Unbelievable! The rest of the year was taken up with weeding and harvesting my produce, but not all was plain sailing as you would expect from a newcomer to the allotment. I had a few failures, bug problems, disease problems etc. all part of the learning process, but with guidance of fellow gardeners I expect to avoid some of the problems in the following years.

At the start of 2012 I was fortunate to obtain the adjoining plot 15a which allowed my wife and I to concentrate on growing a lot more fruit, again another four months of digging and planting seven new beds. With this extra space it allowed me to properly plan a four year crop rotation cycle. More hard work but still enjoying it and getting to meet more allotment holders. Birds seem to be a bigger problem this year so invested in more netting etc. This year I was particularly pleased that I was able to make use of a lot of good composted material from both of my compost bins (3 cubic meters). Another good growing year for me and I was particularly pleased to achieve a Silver Medal for the Allotment of the year.

Following the winter digging, adding manure and leaf mould, the Year 2013 got off to a slow start due to the prolonged wet weather, however it turned out to be a another bumper crop for me. My only project this year was to erect a greenhouse and grow some tomatoes and cucumbers from seed, all turned out good. With most constructional projects on the allotment completed, I have managed to put more time into feeding and protecting the crops, weeding and generally tidying up the plot, cutting grass, wood chip pathways etc. This may have helped in the culmination of achieving a Gold Medal Award this year (Whoopee!). What an amazing three years it has been, full of encouragement, advice from the association and members.

I think my main growing success is based on the continuation of year on year to build the loam in the top soil (using manure, leaf mould and some wood chip), growing a large variety crops and raising the beds around from the pathways to improve drainage. Also I am fortunate enough to have the time to spend at the allotment. What I enjoy most about the Hampton Court Way allotment is the exceptional location where we all get good sun presence most of the day which maximise the growing of crops. Also easy access to water, leaf mould, wood chip and manure when available. I embrace the community spirit with other Allotment holders to chat and help newcomers to get established, as well as getting involved with the community to maintain and develop the overall site into a nicely kept allotment.

My long term thoughts of improving my plot is to nurture the newly planted beech hedging along Hampton Court Way (it would be nice if other plot holders do the same). Also I am thinking of planting a small 12 in high hedge along the length of the east-west pathways which should reduce surface wind to improve crop propagation, this is pending costs investigations etc.

I hope my experiences may help and inspire newcomers to the allotment. All the best from plot 15. Jarda & Gina Chlapik"



Editors Note - Thursday 27th March 2014. We'll hold onto our fond memories of allotment days with Jane McMillan (Plot 22) all the more dearly now that she won't be joining us again for the coming season. Jane has finally succumbed in her protracted battle with cancer during a timely visit to catch the antipodean Summer in her home country of New Zealand. She will be sadly and greatly missed.



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