

RESERVOIR DIGS

Stuart Road Allotment Society Newsletter



NEWS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the spring newsletter. I hope everyone is looking forward to another year of growing. The most important news first is that we have our Annual General Meeting (AGM) next month on Sunday, March 26th at 10am. The venue will be on site this year in The Hut at Stuart Road Allotments.

The AGM is an opportunity to get together and meet other plotholders. During the meeting we elect or re-elect officer positions; debate and vote on rule or site management changes. Everyone is welcome to attend. It would be lovely to see as many people as possible. It's a great chance to have your say in how the place is run, become involved and help to make the allotments truly representative of all its members. We hope that having the AGM on site will help to boost attendance.

If you would like to submit a motion to the AGM, there are three options. You can send it to the site email address: stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com. You can post it to our registered address: Stuart Road Allotments, 347A Ivydale Road, London SE15 3ED. Or you can save on postage and put a copy in the letterbox of The Hut on site. Please word your motion in the following format:-

"I move that the Society agrees to adopt the following... [and then your suggestion in straightforward language in no more than one short paragraph]"

We are unable to accept motions during the meeting itself on the 26th. So please submit your motion by Monday, March 6th.

The Committee will be putting in a motion to increase plot rents this year. Based on income and expenditure from last year, we would raise rents to £60 for a whole plot and £30 for a half plot. Last year's water rates were significantly higher than 2021 (see story on page 2). It is never nice to have to pay more but our rents still compare favourably with other local allotment sites.

I hope that everyone has seen the development plan which was circulated recently. If you feel you would like to contribute to any of the projects that are planned, please do get in touch. One activity we would like to revisit is the working parties we had a few years ago. These were monthly get-togethers during the summer to tackle specific areas of the site which needed some extra work (e.g. planting or weeding communal areas, cleaning; clearing abandoned plots in preparation for re-letting.) These were quite successful and again a good opportunity to meet other plotholders. Watch this space for details.

Midge Cameron, Chair



THE COST OF WATER KEEPS ON RISING



The water we need to irrigate our fruit and vegetables may be essential for their success but if it is coming from your nearest tank on-site, then each litre you use costs money. In fact water is becoming uncomfortably expensive, like so many other items we need to live.

And so we are asking all plot-holders to take action now to save on bills for 2023. If you have a shed of any description, please do fit a gutter and downpipe to a water butt. If you already have a butt or barrel, then get a second and third. There are no limits on numbers; they can easily be connected using a piece of garden hose. *

This method will be used to capture more rainwater from the roofs of the communal buildings ahead of summer.

Plot-holders should also think about planting crops now which will be able to tolerate heatwave conditions. Hopefully, you will see this as a pleasant challenge rather than a restriction. Kale and most vegetables with deep root systems are hardier than leafy salads.

The depressing news is that if we have another long, hot summer, it is possible that water bills will absorb all the money plot-holders pay in annual rent. That leaves a lot less money to spend on maintaining the site, keeping it safe and complying with regulations.

To put these costs in perspective, last year the water bill was about 72% of rental income. But while rental income has hardly changed, water just keeps getting

more expensive. We paid three and a half times more for water in 2022 than we did in 2020 – from just over £1,900 to almost £7,000 (Thames Water also happens to be our landlord but we don't get a discount).

The best ways to tackle this problem in the future is to save more rainwater in barrels or butts; and plant drought-tolerant crops.

* Sections of hosepipe are good for connecting water supply in butts and barrels. Hosepipes for irrigation, however, are banned by regulation on Stuart Road Allotments.

NEWS FROM THE POLYTUNNEL

The growing season will soon be here, and we will be starting to sow seeds to grow on to produce a good range of vegetable plants to sell to plot holders. We will put notices on the boards to let you know when plants go on sale to members in polytunnel 2. Surplus vegetable plants, and a selection of annual and perennial flower plants will also be on sale at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day on May 20th. Stuart Road Allotments had the most popular stall last year and we would like to repeat that feat this year. So please come along and buy something, or if you can spare an hour or two to help on the stall, please let us know.

All profits from sales on-site and from our stall at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day go to the social fund, and help pay for our annual trip to RHS Wisley and the barbecue in late summer.

Looking after all these plants is very labour-intensive. Watering is a major job in the summer, and we would welcome help. If you can help with watering on a regular basis, maybe once a week in the summer, please come and see us in the polytunnel to talk about it, or email stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com.

If you have any spare plants, we welcome donations of plants which we can sell on at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day. You can start now but we will let you know nearer the time when they are needed. We ask only that they are clearly labelled with the plant name and variety.

And one final request; we always need 9cm diameter pots. If you have any spares, please wash them out and leave them outside the polytunnel. Thank you

Marie Porcas and Paul Baker

Things to do in February

(See allotment-garden.org for detail from John Harrison)

- Chit potatoes
- Sow broad beans & early peas if soil is good.
- Sow parsnips now or March if soil is cold.
- Plant Jerusalem artichokes & shallots (cover the latter).
- Sow indoors: Onion seed, aubergine, peppers. Some say tomatoes now; others say wait another month.
- Start forcing Rhubarb (only every three yrs).
- Protect early flowering trees from late frost.
- Finish digging over, adding compost.
- Last chance to prune apples, pears, gooseberries, currants.
- For the diggers; turn over this year's potato bed, add manure/compost.
- Harvest leeks, parsnips, swedes, brassicas, scorzonera, chicory, endive, celeriac, celery, Jerusalem artichokes.
- Get ready for March, big month for sowing. Need seeds? See the selection in the shop.

SHOP TIL YOU DROP

The Allotment shop has now re-opened after winter hibernation. You can find us in The Hut (the big black shed) at the bottom of the site. **Shop hours are now 10am to 12pm every Sunday.** We hope to add another day but can only do that with more volunteers.

Potatoes, onion sets, shallots and garlic have arrived and are ready for sale. There is a choice of first early, second and maincrop potatoes. Prices are really low - a fraction of what you pay at garden centres. They are sold by the kilo bag which should have around 12/13 seed potatoes. We have ordered in more onions this year as there was a bit of a run on them last year.

There is plenty of fertiliser including chicken pellets (good for adding nitrogen), Growmore, blood fish and bone; and dry seaweed.

There is some ericaceous compost, helpful for mulching blueberry bushes. We have Strulch, which any visitors to RHS Wisley will know is used as a mulch on the veg beds there.

We are a bit low on peat-free compost and manure but more is coming in a few weeks. We have loads of seeds for spring sowing; you need to get in early for the best pick.

We also have John Innes compost, a mix of compost, soil and fertiliser for seed sowing or potting on. The bags are sold as JI Seed, 1, 2, 3 or 4 (the numbers refer to the increasing amount of fertiliser contained within, i.e. seed has none, JI4 the most).

Thanks to Marie and Paul for such a brilliant job managing the shop last year. Now it is my turn. Luckily I have a great bunch of fellow volunteers. So if you held back on the recent survey, please feel free to come down and let me have any suggestions or compliments: we like both in equal measure!

Steve Sheppard



Steve is ready to welcome you in the shop

PRICE LIST

Potatoes all £1.50 per kg

First Earlies

Duke of York (Red)

Duke of York

Low growing heritage potato, good for a windy site. Good as a new potato but can be left to develop as a general purpose potato.

Second Earlies

Acoustic

Very strong resistance to blight, perfect for salads and boiling. Becomes floury if left in the ground.

Charlotte

Salad potato, eaten hot or cold, good yield.

Caledonian Pearl

New variety, high yield.

Main Crop

King Edward

Early main, good disease resistance.

Onions all £4 per kg or £1 per 250g

Stuttgarter

Mild flavour, can be planted earlier than others.

Sturon

Stores well

Turbo

Strong flavour. Late maturing. Good yield.

Medium sized.

Red Baron

Mid-late maturing. Excellent cropper.

Shallots all £4 per kg or £1 per 250g

Yellow Moon

Good resistance to disease and bolting.

Stores well

Biztro

Good resistance to disease and bolting.

Stores well

Garlic 75p per bulb

Vigor

Produces lots of cloves. Stores well.



1l or 2l pasticc milk containers needed! Wash & leave in green bin in front of shop



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!
If you can spare a few hours to help in the shop we may be able to open a 2nd day. Call in on Sunday morning for a chat or email/ phone the secretary.

THE GOODNESS OF A PRUNE

I learnt to prune fruit trees on an orchard in Somerset and I enjoy sharing some of my knowledge.

When choosing where to plant your tree, it is good to stand on the spot you have chosen with your arms out wide and spin around. Your body is the tree trunk and your arms are the branches. Now you can see how far your tree will reach. Often it can be too close to the edge of your plot or too near to another tree you already have. Give it plenty of room.

Trees are living things, just like dogs and cats. You wouldn't tie a dog to a stake and leave it without water or food. So think of your new tree like a pet. Water it and feed it until it is well established.

The stakes are high

Check your tree's stake and ties from time to time so that it does not get strangled as it grows. Ensure the stake is well into the ground to support it. I see lots of trees that are holding up the stake instead of the other way round! On our site the wind blasts through from the west in bad weather. Try to put the stake on the windward side of the tree so that the tree blows away from the stake and doesn't rub on it.

We prune fruit trees because they have been bred to produce fruit and as cows need milking,



fruit trees need pruning. Pruning makes them give us more fruit. It lets light and air into the tree. This helps prevent fungal diseases. And the sun can reach the fruit to ripen it.

We have small plots and we need to control the size of our trees. I tell people: "don't be afraid to take control of its growth! Think Japanese bonsai: it's all done with pruning."

It is best to prune your tree each year then you will only have to snip through small twigs, not great big branches, and there are fewer off-cuts to get rid of. A blackbird should be able to fly through your tree without hitting its wings.

Sue Dawson

Please text Sue with your pruning queries on 07701 093348.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

OUR ALLOTMENT AGM Sunday 26th March

Stuart Road Allotment Society has its Annual General Meeting this year in the main hut on-site. Each and every plot holder is welcome. If you have a spare chair, please do bring as seating is going to be limited. The start time is 10am. Note that the clocks go forward earlier that day so set your alarm to allow for the 'lost' hour.

NB The shop will be open after the AGM at midday.

NUNHEAD CEMETERY OPEN DAY

Saturday 20th May

This is always a fun day out for friends and family and a great way to find cheap plants. Perhaps the best place will be Stuart Road Allotments' own stall.

WORKSHOPS

Date tbc

We hope to be able to host workshops on how to use natural dyes in fabrics later this year. The workshops will be run by SRA ploholders, who will also talk about which plants can be grown on-site for dyes. When dates are confirmed for the workshops, we will email plot holders to gauge your interest.

A happy growing season to all!

