

RESERVOIR DIGS

Stuart Road Allotment Society Newsletter



NEWS FROM THE SECRETARY

Welcome to the Summer Newsletter

I hope you and your plots are surviving the heatwave. It certainly has been a challenging summer for all growers, although some plants such as fig and apricot trees have been thriving in the sun. There is more on what to grow in hotter weather on page 3.

The more water we can collect for free, the less we have to pay for. Although many of you already have a waterbutt collecting rainwater from a shed on your plot, the change in climate means that we will all have to save more.

There is an argument to have several waterbutts on each plot. The Committee may seek a grant from Southwark Council next year to help with the cost of buying more waterbutts. In the meantime, please remember that hosepipes are only permitted for taking water from one tank to another. It is in our regulations that hosepipes cannot be used directly to irrigate plots (this supersedes the current Thames Water ban on hosepipes).

The water bill is our single biggest cost on the Allotments. For May and June we paid roughly £1,000 each month. In July we paid £1,665. At this rate, the total for 2026 could be close to £10,000. But the weather is not predictable and so nor are the bills. To give us a buffer against this volatility, we agreed at the AGM in March to a price rise in rent. For full plots, the rent is now £65. For half plots, the rent is £32.50. September is the month for paying rent, so please bring the right amount plus your rent card. The named plot holder must pay in person, in the Big Hut, on any Sunday in September from 10am til midday. We accept card, cash or cheque. There is no facility to pay online. If you know that you will be absent in September, you must speak to a member of the Committee, leave a message in the Shop or send an email: stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com

The other big event happening next month is the Allotment barbeque, which is free to all plot holders. This takes place on Saturday, 19th September from 1pm. You are welcome to bring dishes – there are some excellent cooks among us! But the Society will provide plenty of meat, vegetarian and vegan dishes plus alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Tom Norrington-Davies, our resident chef, has kindly agreed to be in charge of the barbeque again. If you can help volunteer in any capacity, please let us know by email: stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com

Funding for this event comes mostly from sales of young plants grown on our own Nursery, notably those at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day back in May. Belated thanks to Serife Dervish, who runs the Plant Nursery; and all the volunteers that day.

Brendan Maton - Allotment Secretary

SEPTEMBER IS RENT MONTH - NEW PRICES

£65 for a full plot

£32.50 for a half plot

PLEASE PAY IN THE HUT

SUNDAYS in SEPTEMBER 10AM til MIDDAY

COMPETITION TIME!

We will be announcing the best plots of the year at the Allotment barbeque. The Committee makes a shortlist of plots, which are then judged by an external professional gardener. This year there will be two winning categories: best full plot and best half plot. Both winners will receive shop vouchers; there will also be prizes for runners-up in each categories.

PLANTS FOR SALE (AND SO MUCH MORE.....)

WHILE SUMMER produce is ripening, our own Plant Nursery and Shop have been planning for the seasons ahead. From the Plant Nursery, you can buy spring greens, including Durham Early, Bacalan de Rennes cabbage and Purple Ultracross collards. There are several types of chicory available, including old favourites such as Rossa di Treviso but also Luisa, Pink, Catalogna Pugliese and Pain de Sucre.

For years the Nursery has been supplying interesting Asian Greens. Hardy winter growers such as Mizpoona and Mizuna, which continue to give even when days are short, will be on sale alongside several kinds of Pak Choi, including the beautiful-looking and beautiful-sounding Vibrant Joy.

As the warm weather continues, salad days are not yet over. That means there are also lots and lots of lettuces available for the next two months.

Plot holders are welcome to buy 'direct' from the Polytunnel behind the main Hut where these plants are grown. You can walk in any day, any time: there is an honesty box so these purchases are cash only. If you want to pay by card, the produce is on sale in the Shop every Saturday and Sunday, 10am til midday.

Alongside tasty homegrown vegetables, the Shop is going to be stocking green manure seeds, which will be making a welcome return after flying off the shelves last year. We completely sold out last, so this year even more will be ordered, along with a few extra varieties for those who like to try something different.

Spring flowering bulbs will soon be on order, ready to arrive this autumn, so you can start planning a burst of colour long before winter sets in.

One date to put firmly in your diary is Onion Day, returning on the first weekend of October, ie Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th. It's become something of an annual tradition and we'll once again have a fantastic selection of onions, shallots, garlic, broad bean seed and carefully selected fruit bushes, all ideal for autumn planting.

But Onion Day is about more than just buying! We'll also have:

- A seed swap, so those half-used packets from this season can find a new home.
- The results of our Pumpkin Competition. Who grew the biggest beast this year?
- Coffee and cake, because gardening conversations are always better with refreshments.
- And a few extra surprises we'll reveal nearer the time.

Need compost or manure in larger quantities? Don't forget we also offer bulk bag deliveries. Pop into the Shop to place an order or join the Compost WhatsApp group to keep up with the latest deliveries.

Finally, some exciting news from behind the counter. We've treated ourselves to a shiny new card-reader and, unlike its predecessor, it seems determined to do exactly what it's supposed to! Paying for your purchases should now be quicker and smoother than ever. Whether you're stocking up for autumn, looking for advice, or simply fancy a gardening chat, we'd love to see you any weekend morning in the Shop. Happy gardening!

Serife Dervish, Plant Nursery, & Steve Sheppard, the Shop



GROWING IN WISDOM AT WISLEY



What a well-oiled machine the annual visit to Surrey's RHS Garden Wisley is. So well-oiled that places for the trip on 20th June went as quickly as Oasis reunion tour tickets.

Once the inevitable stragglers had made it to the coach outside the Ivy House pub, we were off. Quiz sheets were passed around, and those of us able to read on moving transport without suffering a migraine started collaborating on the answers.

Once on site, people broke off into smaller groups and headed for their favourite spot – the allotments, the glasshouse, the walled gardens – while a handful of swots hit the garden library.

Inspirational ideas were all around us: vast pots of mixed succulents (*see left*) or adjustable potting tables.

For those who had overdone the sight-seeing before lunchtime, relief came in the form of an al fresco three-piece band playing jazz standards. Visitors who had run out of horticulture steam slumbered on the lawn to the tune of Fly Me To The Moon.

The last half hour was spent in the traditional way: going up and down the aisles of the well-positioned garden centre on the hunt for a bargain. Some of our group came back to the coach laden with ornamentals. What would SRAS Plant Nursery have to say about that?

The only tragedy this year was that organiser extraordinaire, Alessia Capponi, was sadly absent. That's one tradition we want to break with next year.

Hazel Nutt

WHAT TO DO IN A DROUGHT

THE UK IS WARMING and so gardeners need to think hard about which crops will flourish during hot summers. For inspiration, walk around the allotments and notice what others are growing. Many of our plot holders were born abroad – in China, Cyprus, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Madeira, Mongolia, Turkey and Sudan. They bring a wealth of experience about what to grow in hotter climates.

One crop always found on Madeiran and Portuguese plots is tree cabbage, pictured below. It is well-travelled and so known by many other names, including Portuguese kale or *Couve Galega*. You can see many tree cabbages on Stuart Road Allotments. This is a short-lived perennial, similar to Taunton Deane, which has been grown for centuries here in the UK, providing plenty of greens in your diet. The taste of tree cabbage, especially its older leaves, is not the most wonderful, even among brassicas. But there are several great Portuguese recipes such as *Caldo Verde* that get the best out of the leaves. It is a low-maintenance plant, giving you more time to worry about (and water) other crops. Like any perennial, the roots go deeper than annual brassicas, which helps in hotter, harsher climates. Tree cabbage's height also provides shade for more delicate vegetables such as spinach and salad.

Another tall perennial to consider is saltbush, also known as tree purslane, which flourishes in arid regions around the world. Used to tough environments, saltbush needs little care in order to grow; and reaching two metres in height, can hedge plants which prefer shade. Saltbush is rich in minerals such as phosphorus, iron, zinc and of course, sodium, which gives this plant its common name. Like purslane, the taste is not as wonderful as

some other salad items or herbs. But saltbush is a reliable, easy grower in hot conditions.

Long-lived perennials such as gooseberry bushes or any fruit tree ought to be most resilient. Plants that have been in the ground for five years or more have well-established root systems for sourcing water. Within this group, plot holders might nevertheless consider those types of plant that thrive in hotter climates, e.g. peach rather than apple; blackcurrant rather than raspberry. The biggest concern with some of these fruit is that they are most vulnerable at blossom-time. If there is chilly weather in April, damage may be done to the nascent fruit that the heat of summer cannot full repair.

A final word on mulching: this can always help reduce dehydration. Mulching is not an instant remedy in hot weather. Rather, it is part of your winter preparation of vegetable beds to keep moisture in the ground and build healthy root systems.

PRUNING TIPS

If you are an experienced gardener with competence in growing fruit, we would like to hear from you. Several allotmenters have requested a class on how to prune fruit trees. We would prefer to use a plot holder but will seek an external expert if no one on site is forthcoming. Looking after your biggest plants is important: fruit trees can be no higher than three metres, according to our regulations. Pruning them badly or with dirty blades will introduce disease or cause the tree to panic and send up 'water shoots' – new growth at the top of the crown that bears no fruit spurs but takes energy from fruit production on lower branches. If you can help other plot holders avoid these problems, please contact a member of the Committee or email: stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com



WELCOME YOUR NEW SITE CO-ORDINATOR



Wayne Johnson is our new Site Management Co-ordinator, following Gary Levart's decision to step down in April. Wayne has already been very busy keeping the water tanks in good condition. Other major tasks on the horizon include path maintenance, which is a problem all over the site. Southwark Council have funded the purchase of sleepers and buttresses that should stabilise paths and prevent them becoming dangerously uneven underfoot.

The Council's grant, however, only covers materials. All the labour, ie digging out and levelling the soil, will be done by plot holders. Wayne stepped forward to co-ordinate site maintenance because he saw the risk if we relied on outsiders to do the work. "Calling in tradespeople to do jobs on site means spending big bucks," says Wayne. "There is a risk then that every plot holder's rent goes up if we start outsourcing. A community like the allotments relies on people putting their hands up," says Wayne. "I thought I could do some of those jobs, so I volunteered."

But as the title Site Maintenance Co-ordinator suggests, Wayne won't be doing all the jobs on site himself. He is hoping to grow the community spirit so that more plot holders make themselves available for major projects such as levelling paths. Expect to hear more from Wayne soon.

KNITTING TOGETHER



If you like knitting, sewing, crochet or embroidery, then drop in for Craft Club every second Sunday of the month at 11am in the Hut. Each session features a guest speaker and workshop. Most of the speakers are plot holders, drawn from our local pool of rich and diverse talents. But crafters are welcome to drop in use the space to pursue their own projects – attending the talks and workshops is optional. Tea and biscuits are freely available.

In September, Jane Booth will host a second workshop on cordage, the art of making cords from dried plants. Visitors to the Hut may have noticed various plants hung to dry on a wall in the main room – these will be used in this workshop. Popular choices for cordage include dandelions, daffodils, irises and day lillies.

Historically, using common garden plants for cordage saved households money on buying expensive twine or string. Twisted dry stems are surprisingly strong. Jane notes, however, that in the old days, cordage would then have been tarred to waterproof it. Without that protection, modern cordage only really survives when used indoors.

“Craft Club welcomes all ages and abilities,” says its founder, Serife Dervish. “The workshops are fantastic. But if people just want to get on with their own project in a lovely setting, there are plenty of quiet corners.”

Crafters can also keep up with the news and chat by joining the WhatsApp SRA Craft Club channel.

CRAFT CLUB UPCOMING EVENTS

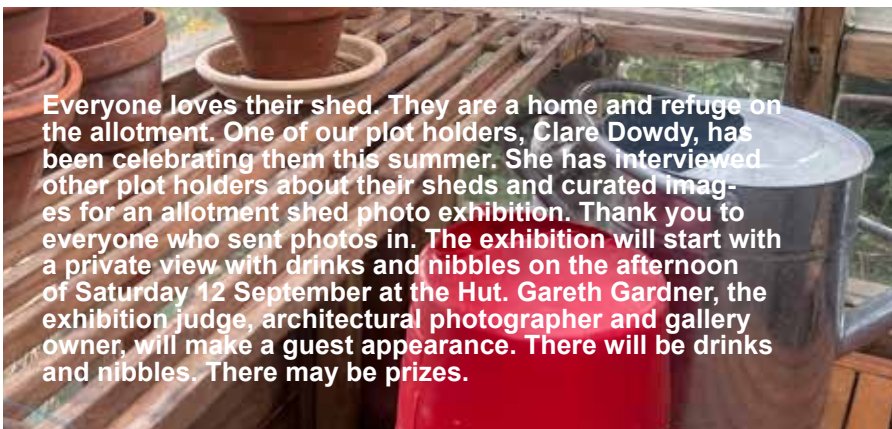
13th September – Cordage with Jane Booth

11th October – Granny Squares (crotchet) with Beatriz Custodio

8th November – Christmas Special Part One – knit your own Yuletide decorations with Ann Coley & friends.

6th December – Christmas Special Part Two – make your own festive wreath with Liz Honeybone & Serife Dervish

HOW STYLISH IS YOUR SHED?



Everyone loves their shed. They are a home and refuge on the allotment. One of our plot holders, Clare Dowdy, has been celebrating them this summer. She has interviewed other plot holders about their sheds and curated images for an allotment shed photo exhibition. Thank you to everyone who sent photos in. The exhibition will start with a private view with drinks and nibbles on the afternoon of Saturday 12 September at the Hut. Gareth Gardner, the exhibition judge, architectural photographer and gallery owner, will make a guest appearance. There will be drinks and nibbles. There may be prizes.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

NUNHEAD ART TRAIL

26th & 27th September

There are a host of talented artists, sculptors and crafters among us. Come and enjoy their work on display in the Hut. The Art Trail will also feature the launch of the book of the Impossible Poets, based on their residency last year at the allotments.

If you are a plot holder and want to exhibit, there is still time. Please contact Pete Lawrence on the Allotments WhatsApp; or email stuartroad-allotmentsociety@gmail.com

Visitors to the Art Trail will be guided from the gates to the Hut. They will not be free to walk around plots.

ONION DAY

3rd & 4th October

Your chance to buy sets of next year's alliums. Come along to the Hut for the best range and the best prices. There will be free tea and cake, the results of the Giant Pumpkin Competition and a seed swap.

TOMATO SEED SAVING

10th October

One way to select what to grow on your allotment is the difference in taste between plot-grown produce and super-market offerings. Tomatoes are a fruit where the difference in taste is vast. To make the best start to next year's growing, Serife Dervish will be holding a class on saving tomato seed. Feel free to bring your favourite varieties from this year to the class for preserving.

MORE TALKS IN THE HUT

Two talks to come - for which we don't yet have confirmed dates - will be on stargazing and hot composting. The composting workshop will be with Ben from the community-led gardeners, South London Urban Growers (S.L.U.G.). Ben has done a composting workshop with us before and liked Stuart Road Allotments so much, he has become a plot holder.