

RESERVOIR DIGS

Stuart Road Allotment Society Newsletter



NEWS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the spring newsletter.

Thank you to everyone who attended our Annual General Meeting on 23rd March. It was lovely to see so many people there and I hope you enjoyed the seed swap, raffle and cake afterwards. The minutes from the meeting are on display in the window of the main hut.

We had a small change in Committee members with Tom Norrington-Davies stepping down and Alex Greenwood and Serife Dervish being voted in. A big thank you to Tom for his contribution to Committee affairs over the last couple of years and a big hello to Alex and Serife. For those of you know who know Tom for his excellent cooking skills, fear not; he will continue to be involved with running the summer BBQ in September.

At the AGM we agreed a change to the plot inspection system. Plot inspections will now happen every two months, instead of every month. A key difference is that you risk eviction if you fail two inspections. The new system begins this month, April. More detailed information has been sent to all plot holders via email or letter. As guidance, here are the main criteria for failing a plot inspection:-

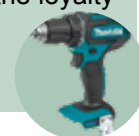
1.	More than 25% of the plot is covered in weeds.
2.	Less than 50% of the plot is cultivated.
3.	There is excessive rubbish on the plot.
4.	Paths around the plot are overgrown and/or uneven for passers-by carrying wheelbarrows.
5.	Edible fruit trees are taller than 3m; or culinary trees, e.g. bay, are taller than 1.5m.

Our social secretary and other committee members have been busy planning for our summer events, and I'm sure you will all join me in a big thank you to them all for being so proactive. As always, information is circulated both by email or via our Whatsapp group. We really appreciate everyone who has given us their email details, as this helps us to keep postage costs down. If you would like your email to be added to the circulation list, or would like to be on the WhatsApp group, please email the usual address - stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com - with your name and plot number. Please read on for allotments news and more information on activities over the next few months.

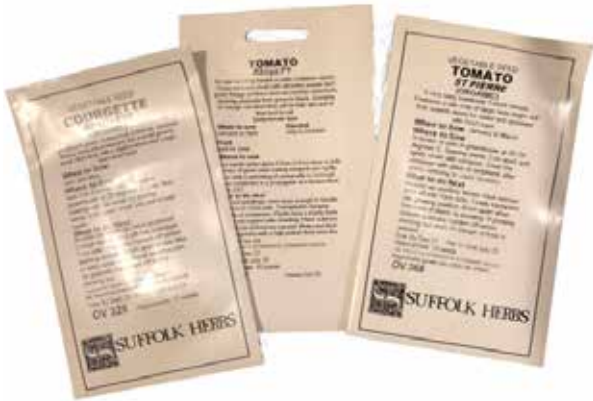
Happy Gardening everyone!

Midge Cameron - Chair

TOOL HIRE UPDATE:
 Starting from the first weekend in April, there will be a cost of £2 per hour to hire any cordless Makita tools from the Workshop. This includes strimmers, lawnmowers, drill, reciprocating saw and impact driver. Many of the Makita tools were acquired using grant money from Southwark Council. When they eventually stop working, the Allotment Society will have to buy replacements. This is the reason for introducing a fee. For regular users, there is a loyalty card available that gives you six loans for £10. Plot holders can buy the loyalty card in the Workshop with cash; or in the Shop with card or cash. There is no charge for any other communal tools, e.g. tree loppers, or the donated electric strimmers.



FROM THE SHOP FLOOR



Happy new growing season from your Shop. We are open Saturday and Sunday 10am to midday and eagerly await your visit!

We have lots of seeds for sale at the moment, including most of below which you can sow right away:

Spring Onion, Lettuce, Spinach, Cabbage, Calabrese, Cauliflower, Coriander, Parsley, Broad beans, Onion sets, Garlic, Radish, Kohlrabi, Turnip, Florence Fennel

We also have a big range of pumpkin and squash this year. I am having a bit of a rethink on the fertilisers we supply. We have been drawing down some of the non-organics, which will free up some space for other things in the next few weeks. We will be keeping Growmoor as it is so popular.

We are trialling a new chicken manure pellet which has added seaweed: good for nitrogen (leaves and stem growth) and minerals. We even have a pelleted balanced feed which is vegan! Liquid seaweed is back, this time at a reduced price of £7.50 per litre thanks to a new supplier.

In case you weren't aware, every last Sunday of the month we have a coffee morning in the main room of the Hut. Please come and enjoy free coffee and cake, bring something edible if you are a baker; or just sit and chat or debate. If the debate needs definitive answers about horticultural matters, there are some of the best books on gardening in our reference library.

Happy growing! Steve the Shopkeeper.

IDENTIFY YOURSELF!



Every plot must have a sign to help identify it for inspections. This is one of our site's regulations. To make the obligation more enjoyable, we held a competition this spring to see who could create the best plot sign. Here are photos of just some of the entries. A big thank you to Gary Levart, site manager, for organising; and all the plotheolders who demonstrated their imaginative flair. The winner was plot 132 below - congratulations to Liz and Ken (aka Adam & Eve).

If your plot does not have a sign, please make one. You can use whichever colours and materials you like so long as the number is clearly legible.



BUYING IN BULK FOR YOUR PLOT

You may have seen big green and blue bags outside the shop at the start of March. The shop is trialling these bulk bags of soil and compost as a new service to cut down on waste packaging and offer better value to plot holders. Those of you who buy the loose manure at Borland Road gate will be familiar with the idea of bulk buying.

The cost of the bulk bags is approximately £50, depending on numbers bought. Each bag is 800 litres, which is more or less 15 wheelbarrow loads. There is a bit more about each material below. In short, topsoil or veg soil will give you the perfect growing medium, particularly if you use raised beds. Compost and manure are good for mulching. Compost can be sown or planted into while manure is richer so needs mixing with your soil or compost before sowing/planting.

How much do you need? For mulching, you ideally want a 5cm layer, assuming you add every year. For a full plot, that is around three bulk bags annually. To fill an empty raised bed made with gravel boards - 4m x 1m x 15cm - you will need about 3/4 of a bulk bag of topsoil. See below for the different options available. SS



Organic Compost

Fully composted organic material produced in the UK from 100% renewable sources. Can be used as a soil improver, incorporated into top soils, top dressings & compost. Improves soil structure. Dig it in or just use as a mulch and plant straight into it.

Top Soil

High quality top soil screened to 18mm, particularly good for all-round use in the garden. Contains 30% blended organic compost. This is good for those areas that haven't had any soil improvement and are heavy clay soil to the surface. After levelling it out, I would suggest covering it in compost or cardboard or plastic to prevent it blowing away in the wind.

Vegetable Soil

Designed especially for use in raised beds but good for improving clay soils. The composition is 20% organic compost, 20% farmyard manure, 60% screened topsoil. So, similar to Top Soil (above) but most people choose this as it has more fertility.

Enriched Soil

An organically enriched top soil with standard mix of 50% 18mm screened top soil and 50% organic garden compost. Great for planting straight in to. Good drainage and water retention as well as fertility.

Horse Manure

100% pure horse manure. For use as a mulch or digging in. Organic soil improver; NOT suitable for ericaceous planting. Good for brassicas and improving clay soils. Similar to the bagged farmyard manure sold in the shop. Very nutritious. Will be slightly more composted, ie older, than the loose manure available at Borland Road Gate.

Composted Bark

0-10mm. A fine grade composted bark. Could be used for growing as a soil improver or mulching around trees/bushes. Increases organic content & moisture retention. Neutral pH. Composted to temperatures exceeding 55C to eliminate harmful bacteria & fungi. More expensive than the other materials, approximately £70 per tonne bag.

If bulk is not your thing, the cheapest regular bag we sell in the Allotment Shop is 40-litre horse manure for £6.25. Or you can reserve a barrowload of rotted manure from the deliveries at Borland Road at £5 a barrow. We email plot holders a couple of weeks ahead of each delivery.

Whatever you choose, you're always welcome to pop into the Shop and ask any of your lovely volunteers for advice.

POETS IN RESIDENCE

This spring we will be celebrating words on the allotments. Not one, not two but ten poets will be holding workshops in the Hut from April til the end of June. Known collectively as the Impossible Poets, they will be talking with ploholders to encourage their own tales and memories of gardening as well as creating poetry of their own to share on site.

Expect to see poems not only hung on the walls of the Hut and Shop but also on individual plots as artwork made using natural materials and found objects. Writing poems on seed packets is one idea in gestation.

Pia Goddard, one of the poets said: "We will embrace the opportunity to contemplate, share and write, to create new work inspired by natural elements – soil, weather, plant life - as well as the people, history and context of this protected portion of London land. We will be documenting and celebrating the seen and unseen life of the place."

The Impossible Poets collective includes curators and visual artists. There may be film and soundscapes too as fruit of this residency.

The first workshop is on Friday 11th April. All welcome to collaborate on poetry-making from 2.30pm. In the meantime, here is their first selection:

Allotments by Richard Church.

Lifting through the broken clouds there shot
A searching beam of golden sunset-shine
It swept the town allotments, plot by plot,
And all the digging clerks became divine –
Stood up like heroes with their spades of brass,
Turning the ore that made the realms of Spain!
So shone they for a moment. Then, alas!
The cloud-rift closed; and they were clerks again.



DATES FOR THE DIARY

MUSHROOM WORKSHOP

Saturday 12th April

Learn how to grow your own mushrooms at this practical session in the Hut. Starts 1pm. Cost is £14. Contact: beacust@gmail.com for more info.

NUNHEAD CEMETERY OPEN DAY

Saturday 18th May

The Polytunnel Group is already growing plants for sale on our stall at the Cemetery Open Day. We raise a lot of money at this event in order to fund social activities such as the annual coach trip and barbecue (see below). Volunteers to help on the day are always welcome – please put your name down in the Shop.

TRIP TO HYDE HALL

Saturday 14th June

This year we have decided on a new destination for the coach trip. We will be going to RHS Hyde Hall in Essex. Wonders there include a garden dedicated to plants from Australia and New Zealand.

SUMMER BARBECUE

Saturday 13th September

This is our biggest party of the year. Free food and drink will be provided, including strange spirits from Richard's distillery. We hope to use as much produce from the allotments as possible. Plot holders are welcome to bring dishes of their own.