

RESERVOIR DIGS

Stuart Road Allotment Society Newsletter



NEWS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the Summer newsletter.

We have two major events happening next month. The annual barbeque will take place on Saturday 13th September, starting at 1pm. This is a chance for all plot holders to come together to enjoy food, drink and entertainment.

The Society provides free food - meat, vegetarian, vegan - and drink – alcoholic and non-alcoholic - all afternoon. But you are welcome to bring dishes, especially those celebrating food from other countries. The event is funded by our plant sales at the Nunhead Cemetery Open Day in May.

Tom Norrington-Davies, our resident chef, will be in charge of cooking again. He will try to use as much allotment-grown produce as possible – look out for a request for contributions a couple of days before the event.

We will also be holding the never-ending raffle. Plot holders who wish to donate prizes can leave them in the Shop on Saturday or Sunday mornings before the 13th September. If you are not sure about the quality of the donation, please send a photo by email in advance to stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com

The second major event in September will be rent collection. This takes place every Sunday between 10am and midday in the main Hut. Rent this year is £30 for a half plot and £60 for a full plot. We accept cards, cash or cheques. Plot holders must turn up and pay in person: this is obligatory. Please bring your rent card.

Plot holders who fail to pay on one of the four Sundays in September will have to pay double in October. That means £60 for a half plot; £120 for a full plot. The Committee does not wish for anyone to have to pay the extra amount. If you foresee difficulties paying your rent in September, do not hesitate to speak to a Committee member in person or contact us by email: stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com.

Midge Cameron - Chair

PLEASE BEWARE OF THIEVES ON THE ALLOTMENTS

There have been numerous thefts on the allotments over the past year. Plot holders have lost tools and valuable produce. This is a great shame and very dispiriting given the amount of time it takes to grow our fruit and veg. The Committee encourages plot holders to report thefts and any suspicious activity. We have liaised with the Police. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to stop the thieves (there is almost certainly more than one). At the last Committee meeting, it was decided not to put up security cameras. These have been tried in the past: there is a lot of footage to trawl through and the images rarely give a clear identification unless light sensors are added. The allotments have long borders: we would have to decide where on the site to situate the cameras. Simple advice for now is to leave nothing of value on site. Do not allow people without keys to enter by the gates. Report any suspicious activity to stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com.

ONION DAY IS COMING SOON

Sunday 5th October is a date for your allotment diary this year. There will be a chance to swap seeds ahead of winter; find out who won the Atlantic Giant pumpkin competition; and celebrate Onion Day.

Autumn is a great time to plant out for the following spring, so join us in the main Hut for a celebration of all things allium. On sale will be six varieties of onion; three types of shallot; and seven amazing kinds of garlic (see box right).

Back by popular demand there will be overwintering broad bean seeds too. Get ahead of the game and beat the aphids!

The annual pumpkin competition will also reach its finale with the weigh-in. Last year's winner, by several kilogrammes, was grown by Mary Rees on plot 121. The prize for the heaviest pumpkin is a Shop voucher.



Entries for last year's pumpkin competition

The autumn seed-swap is a free exchange. If you have no seeds to give, then it's 50p a packet. Have a thorough search through your box of seeds and bring any spare along on the 5th October.

Certain plants, such as wallflowers, need to go in the ground no later than this time of year. But it is also great preparation to pick up spring-sown seeds in advance because you are saving money for the year ahead.

We will also be having a raffle with great prizes. If you have anything to donate, please contact the Shop.

Finally, there will be homemade cakes from various plot holders and free tea and coffee. So come for the onions; stay for a slice. It's a great day to share tips and food with fellow growers. SS



All alliums are autumn varieties, designed to go in before winter

ONIONS

Senshyu
Yellow Winter
Autumn Champion
Red Winter
Blood Red
Snowball

SHALLOTS

Golden Gourmet
Red Sun
Longor

GARLIC

White
Pink
Cledor
Germidour
Precosum (hard neck)
Printanor
Thermidrome

MANURE UPDATE

The supply of rotted horse manure from Fortune Bank Farm in Keston has been very popular with plot holders in recent years. To make things even easier, plot holders can now order manure in advance. Deliveries will be coming every second Saturday throughout autumn and winter. Our first delivery will be 18th October; the next will be 1st November; the next will be 15th November and so on.

Plot holders can reserve up to eight barrowloads for any delivery date through til 21st March 2026. Make a booking either in person at the Shop (open Saturday and Sunday mornings) or online via stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com.

The manure will arrive as usual at Borland Road gate at 8am. The cost is £5 per barrowload and plot holders have to barrow the manure to their plots.

- The alternative way to enrich your soil in volume is to buy bulk bags via the Shop. There are a range of materials available, from enriched compost to top soil to manure. Prices vary from £50-60. Unlike the rotted manure, there is no fixed date for delivery. Once there are requests for 20 bags, then we put the order in. As with the manure from Keston, plot holders have to come on the day of delivery and barrow the material to their plot. You are welcome to go halves on a bag with another plot holder. As a rough guide, three bulk bags would suffice to enrich the surface of an entire full plot.

A NATIONAL GARDEN TO DYE FOR

The National Theatre on London's South Bank now has its own dyeing garden, filled with plants that began life on Stuart Road Allotments. The dyes will be used to colour costumes for forthcoming plays at the National Theatre, including *Bacchae*.

The garden's vivid orange, crimson and gold flowers can be seen from Waterloo Bridge. You can get even closer by taking the lift to the terrace on the second floor of the building and sitting among the flowers – it's all free.

The garden is brainchild of allotment plot holder, Liz Honeybone, whose day job is textile artist in the costume department of the National Theatre, where she has worked on and off for over thirty years. Liz now spends an extra hour each day outside on the terrace watering and tending the new garden, which features dahlias, tickseed, Japanese indigo, madder, tansy and alkanet (*Alkanna tinctoria*, not to be confused with the more invasive *Pentaglottis sempervirens*).

Dyes in the past could be pretty noxious – the blue cyan we all know from printing ink was derived originally from cyanide. There was a condition called dyer's nose caused by damage to the nasal membrane by such poisonous substances. Thanks to improved safety and technology, the risks from colourants are much diminished. Nevertheless, Liz wants to get back to simpler dyeing processes that will give the actors something natural to feel against their skin.

And so, she persuaded the board of the National Theatre to give over a terrace to dyeing plants. Although this is only its first year, the yield is so abundant that costumes for autumn productions will feature the homegrown dyes. Liz is particularly taken with the hollyhocks (see pic) which were meant to be pink but turned out black.



They yield a blue colour. “You never know exactly what you are going to get,” she says, “but that is part of the fun.”

Liz is one of several keen dyers at Stuart Road Allotments. If you want to find out more, put a request to stuartroadallotmentsociety@gmail.com or on the WhatsApp group.

A QUICK GUIDE TO DYING FLOWERS

MADDER	Will grow in partial shade; free-draining soil	RED
JAPANESE INDIGO	Will grow in any soil but does need warm weather. Frost-sensitive	INDIGO
BLACK DAHLIAS	Full sun, rich soil	BLUE
TICKSEED (<i>COREOPSIS</i>)	Full sun; can tolerate dry conditions	YELLOW/ ORANGE/ BROWN
TANSY	Hardy; grows in most soils; needs sunshine	YELLOW/ GREEN
ALKANET	Prefers warm, sandy soil	RED



More than fifty plot holders visited Hyde Hall in Essex in June on the annual coach trip from Stuart Road. Highlights included the dry garden, the greenhouses and the quiz on the coach.

BUMPER POLYTUNNEL SALES

The number and variety of plants being grown on site in the polytunnels behind the main Hut has increased significantly. Expect winter greens for the months ahead; choy sum, purple pak choi, mizpoona, red mizuna and tatsoi. Prices are cheaper than any garden centre. You can buy these plants in the Shop on weekend mornings or directly in the polytunnel – there is a price-list and honesty box inside Polytunnel 3.

This great service is only possible thanks to the volunteers who manage the polytunnels and the perennial beds, growing plants from seed, cuttings and division. The perennial group makes a big contribution to the plants sold at Nunhead Cemetery Open Day - those sales fund our barbeque, annual coach trip (see above) and other social activities..

These volunteer groups can always do with extra help. If you can spare an hour or two a week, please have a word in the Shop or contact: stuartroad-allotmentsociety@gmail.com. The Committee is extremely grateful to all our volunteers on site. Polytunnel sales to plot holders for the first seven months of 2025 were £3,000.

WATER WITH CARE

We spent almost £3,400 on water for the first seven months of this year. It is far and away the biggest single expenditure on the allotments.

Plot holders with a shed can help reduce future expenditure by fitting a water-butt to capture rainwater. If you already have one water-butt, please consider getting a second for the drier months.

Using hoses from the water tanks is only permitted to fill water-butts; not for direct irrigation.

The biggest roof on the entire site is the Hut. The Committee is looking at capturing rainwater from here more

effectively. We recent bought a large unit to house water from the Workshop roof.

For the record, our water bill for the whole year of 2024 was £4,170.



DATES FOR THE DIARY

ALLOTMENT BARBEQUE

13th September

Free food off the bbqs and drink for all plot holders. Come along and enjoy the afternoon hospitality. The barbeque is paid for out of plant sales by the Society. Your chance to meet other plot holders and share tips.

Plot of the year for 2025 will also be announced. The winner gets a Shop voucher.

BAT MAN RETURNS

20th September

After a successful visit in July, Dr Iain Boulton, our local bat expert, is coming back on the evening of 20th September to do another bat walk starting on the allotments. This is a free event.

NUNHEAD ART TRAIL

27th-28th September

A dozen artists and craftspeople will be exhibiting their work in the Hut as part of the Nunhead Art Trail.

There will also be music from Tanpura Knights and a performance by the Impossible Poets.

INTO THE WOODS

11th October

Ever wondered what you can forage from the woods? Eleri Kyffin will be giving an afternoon talk on forest edible perennials on 11th October in the Hut.

HEALTHY SOIL WORKSHOP

Date TBC

Melissa Thompson from Goldsmiths will be holding a workshop on microbial diversity and soil health on-site later this year. Date to be confirmed.