

RESERVOIR DIGS

Stuart Road Allotment Society Newsletter



NEWS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the Spring Newsletter

We will hold our **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** this year on Sunday 22nd March at 10am. The AGM is an opportunity to get together and meet other plot holders. During the meeting we review the previous year, elect or re-elect officer positions and Committee members. The AGM is also your chance to debate and vote on changes to the rules and site management practices. Stuart Road Allotments is a democratic site: motions to introduce a new rule or amend existing rules can be proposed by any named plot holder. Everyone who attends on the 22nd March has a vote in approving or rejecting those proposals.

This year we are looking for a new site manager and additional committee members. If you would like any information on what these posts involve, please do email our site address (below). The people holding the Officer posts – Chair (me), Treasurer (Theresa Veith) and Secretary (Brendan Maton) are also standing again, but if you would be interested in knowing more about these posts, we would love to hear from you.

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
- You can put a copy in the letterbox of The Hut, which is also the entrance to the Shop (please don't put it in the letter boxes at the gates as we don't check these very often and things get very damp in there!)

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]".

If you want help or are uncertain about what you are proposing, please do ask one of the Committee members in person or email us.

Note that we are unable to accept motions during the meeting itself on the 22nd March.

The last date we can receive motions is Friday 27th February.

The Committee will be putting forward a motion this year to increase plot rents to £65 (full plot) and £32.50 (half plot). This is a £5 increase for full plots and £2.50 for half plots. Our accounts this year have shown that rents have not covered our ongoing costs, eg water bills and site maintenance. The proposed raise is a modest one and means that we still compare favourably with other sites.

Finally, this year we will focussing work on trying to increase our volunteer numbers, for everything from helping out with site work such as managing hedges and maintaining paths; growing plants in the Polytunnels and serving in the Shop. No posts are paid, and this is one of the reasons we manage to keep our rent costs low (imagine if we had to cover the costs of a professional plumber or builder every time something needed mending!).

Volunteering is a great way of giving back to the community as well as meeting other plot holders. Please do consider this and come forward if you have something to offer – this could be a specific skill or just a spare pair of hands. People to help unload sacks of compost; weed communal areas or water seedlings are very much welcomed!

Happy growing and see you at the AGM on 22nd March.

Midge Cameron - Chair

SPRING INTO THE SHOP

SPRING is on the way, even if the soil hasn't quite got the memo yet. If, like me, the winter weeding is still only half-done, now is a perfect moment to catch up before everything suddenly wakes up and starts growing at full volume. A little effort now pays big dividends once the light and warmth really kick in.

It's also prime time for planting fruit bushes. We've got a great range in the Shop at the moment, including raspberries, thornless blackberries and lots of other fruit bushes from Pennards of Somerset, all extremely good value from just £7.50 per plant. They're tough, reliable and ready to get their roots down while the soil still holds plenty of moisture.

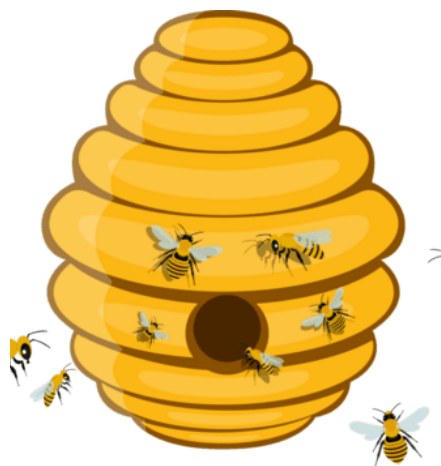
Pennards also supply us with our main spring planting lines, and we still have decent stocks of those too. That includes plenty of first early potato varieties for anyone keen to get a head start on the season. We also have onions that can be potted up now and grown on somewhere bright and sheltered, ready to plant out once the ground dries a bit. There's a little more garlic available too. If it goes in this weekend, it should still get enough cold to help trigger a decent crop later on.

My personal favourite thing in the Shop so far this year is the seed selection. It's bigger than ever, with over 170 different varieties of packet seeds, and especially lots of beans. We've bought some in bulk and packed them ourselves this time, which means they're really good value and give you the chance to grow a lot for very little. French beans - dwarf and tall - broad beans and runners are all in stock, just waiting for longer days.

We're also well stocked on compost, and once the end of the month is past, and provided things dry out a bit, we'll be restarting the bulk bag service. I'll put a message out before the end of February with details.

If you're not composting yet, or even if you are, a little feeding goes a long way. Plants mainly need three things: nitrogen (N) for leafy growth, phosphorus (P) for roots, and potassium (K) for flowers and fruit. We have a good range of balanced feeds in the shop, from fast-acting Growmore to slow-release BFB, plus vegan plant food pellets. I personally use chicken manure pellets, which are a great natural source of nitrogen along with some phosphorus and potassium too.

Spring is coming. Now's the time to get ready for it. See you in the Shop.



REPORTING BEE INCIDENTS

There have been hives up at the top of the allotments, adjacent to the reservoir, for a number of years. The site was chosen because it is almost impossible to cultivate fruit or vegetables there. The honey produced is sold in the Shop and all but one of the beekeepers are also plot holders.

To ensure harmony between adjacent plot holders and the bees, there will be a new form created to report stings from the honey bees protecting their hives. Some plot holders have suffered unfortunate attacks and it is the Committee's responsibility to care for plot holders and minimise future incidents. The purpose of the form is to capture accurately how many stings in the area are from these honey bees rather than other kinds of bees or wasps.

A meeting between adjacent plot holders and the beekeepers to discuss the issue will happen this spring.



Coming soon in the Shop:

- Dahlias
- Asparagus crowns
- Bulk bags in March (weather permitting)

Already in stock:

- Potatoes (including seven varieties of first earlies)
- Onions and shallots
- Garlic
- 170 different packet seed varieties
- Lots of beans!

HELP OUT IN THE ALLOTMENT PLANT NURSERY

THE SRA PLANT NURSERY is a vital part of our allotment community and helping out in the nursery is a great way to get to know your fellow plot holders. Proceeds from plants sales in the Allotment Shop and at the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery Open Day (FONC) in May fund all our social events and generate a small surplus to support the Society in lots of other ways as well.

The SRA Plant Nursery comprises two groups: the Polytunnel Team, who raise plants from seed; and the Perennial Group who manage the beds behind the Hut and propagate ornamental plants by division, mainly for sale at FONC.

Thanks to the epic efforts of our volunteers, the SRA Plant Nursery raised just over £6,000 last year to support the Society. That money means the summer barbeque and the annual trip to RHS Wisley are free to members. Growing plants together is not only more fun than buying from a garden centre; it is more sustainable. The more we grow on the site, the less we have to spend on transport and packaging.

The Nursery is now looking to recruit new volunteers to help make 2026 a success. There are lots of different ways you can help out. If you are worried about taking on too much commitment, you can always just add yourself to the rota for opening and closing the polytunnels and greenhouse. If you want to do more, you can help out with sowing, dividing plants and potting on. All are welcome. Veteran growers may bring their special techniques for nurturing particular plant types. For those with no prior experience of propagation, there are plenty of people on hand to show you the ropes.

If you think you can make a regular commitment of an hour or so once a week (we always need extra hands to open and close the polytunnels in the warmer months) please contact Serife on 07939 640 272 or serifedervish@hotmail.com



Plants for sale outside the Shop



Plants out for sale at Nunhead Cemetery Open Day May 2025

SAVE WATER SAVE £££s

Given the miserable, soggy start to 2026, it may be difficult to imagine how much water we use over the course of a year. Irrigation is, however, a major element of costs on the allotment.

At the start of this decade, in 2020, our annual water bill was less than £2,000. The next year it more than doubled to almost £5,000. By 2022 it gone up again to nearly £7,000. Since then it has yo-yoed, partly as a result of mixed seasons and cooler summers. Last year, however, the total was £6,681 - heading back towards that record set in 2022. To put these figures in perspective, more than half the money members pay in rent for their plots now goes on water. For comparison, back in 2020, water consumed only one-fifth of the income from plot rents.

Given that last summer was not a heatwave, the Committee is concerned that 2026 could see even greater water costs. This is one reason behind the proposal to raise rents at the AGM next month.

Regardless of that motion, plot holders should be conscious that water is becoming more expensive. Please try to minimise usage by planting less thirsty crops (so blackcurrants rather than raspberries); capturing rainwater from sheds in water butts; and irrigating via pipes and plastic bottles buried into the soil rather than across the surface.

FENCE UPDATE

There has been a temporary fence guarding the eastern side of the allotments by the flats on Borland Road. The Society had to buy and erect this fence because the property managers for the flats were dragging their heels repairing or replacing the previous fence. The Committee spent a lot of time trying to speed up the replacement, including writing to local politicians. Without some kind of guard, there are areas of danger where the ground falls away between our paths, especially alongside plots 18-30, and recreational area at the back of the flats. We also wanted to deter thieves from entering the allotments.

After more than two years, new managing agents for the flats has finally put up a permanent fence. The plan is to plant some wildlife hedging growing through the fence. The communal flower bed growing down the main path to the Borland Road gate can also be renewed.

SPUDS WE LIKE



Our first big gathering of the year was Potato Day at the end of January. This marked the official re-opening of the Shop after winter and a great chance to buy an essential crop for the year ahead. Trendy varieties such as Anya have sold out but several remain on sale in the Shop this month (see page 2).

Many thanks to Steve the Shopkeeper, Gwen, Ann Coley, Anne Thyer, Emma Parsons, Emma Greenwood, Louise Shepherd, Luke, Marcel, Ryszard and Jane Hart for great presentation and service indoors. Equal thanks to the cooks on the baked potato stall outside: Jane Booth, Clare and Beccy. Alan Downes was ever-dependable serving teas and coffee. Louisa Loakes and Florence Waterhouse created a woodland wall painting of snowbells and bluebells using potato prints. We are grateful to all plot holders who made the effort to bake cakes for the event.



SMASHING PUMPKINS



Our annual pumpkin competition is now in train. The goal is to grow on-site the largest, heaviest example of the Atlantic Giant variety that you can.

The number of entrants is limited to thirty. If you want to join in, just ask for a seed in The Shop - there are still some available. Entry is free!

An allotment record was set last year by Florence Waterhouse and her parents on plot 4b. Flo is pictured left with her scales-bending, prize-winning pumpkin!

If you think you can beat that, the winner will be weighed and announced at Onion Day in the Hut this October.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

ALLOTMENT AGM

22nd March

Our Annual General Meeting takes place in the Hut on-site this year. We begin at 10am and hope to conclude by midday. There will be tea and cakes afterwards plus a free seed swap – your chance to mingle with other plot holders and refresh your collection of seeds for the growing season ahead. Please do make sure that any seeds you offer are in-date and clearly labelled.

CEMETERY OPEN DAY

16th May

The Friends of Nunhead Cemetery Open Day (FONC) will take place on Saturday 16th May this year. The Allotment Society always has a stall and it is a big fundraiser for us. Plants for sale are already being nurtured in the Polytunnels behind the main Hut (see main story, page 3). Plot holders are also welcome to contribute other young plants they have nurtured. Expect a further call for donations and stall volunteers in early May.

CRAFT CLUB

Second Sunday of every month 11am-1pm

This is an opportunity for beginners and intermediate crafters to extend their skills from several talented plot holders. On 8th March, Jane Booth will be giving a demonstration of cordage: how to make twine from natural fibres such as dandelion leaves. The following month, Liz Honeybone will be mending and darning.

TALKS IN THE HUT

We had a great variety of speakers in the Hut last year on topics from soil health to mushrooms; pondlife to bee-keeping. There were two bat walks with local expert, Dr Iain Boulton. This year the first talk in the Hut this year will be on butterflies. The first walk will be looking up to learn more about the stars – dates for these and other talks will be confirmed soon.