February 2014

Issue 14

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EAA News

Happy New Year, albeit a soggy one.

For once, the fact that the soil on the allotments drains quickly has been a bonus. If you have suffered because of the floods, our thoughts are with you.

Far be it to wish for harsher weather, but periods of hard frost break up the soil and kills off larvae of slugs and other pests. Autumn planted garlic needs a period of low temperature for good bulb development.

It is all systems go from now on, each year most of us start with a plan but this usually changes by throughout the year. It might be the weather, seeds not germinating, slugs, pests, birds, the reasons are endless. Oh for the joy of allotmenteering. But that is just the point, mostly it is a joy, the sense of achievement, the exercise, the fresh air and not forgetting the harvest, freshly gathered vegetables are the reward.

You may have observed that another notice board has been erected at the far end of the plot, (courtesy of ETC). In addition to displaying EAA, HPHS and ETC notices, plot holders can advertise any free surplus or required equipment or materials. No commercial advertisements please.

New speed limit signs have been erected at the beginning of the track, please drive carefully.

Last years very successful Plant Sale will be held again this year. The racks will be in place from late April onwards or as soon as excess plants are available.

There will be another Scarecrow competition, judging will be Saturday, July 26th, any suggestions for a theme? New scarecrows please, my last years effort is looking a bit beyond it.

Don't forget the gate code changes on 1st February.

Coming soon to a TV near you

The BBC hopes the series called 'The Great Allotment Challenge', can do for cabbages and cucumbers what the 'Great British Bake Off' did for pies and pastries.

Building on the tradition of the annual horticultural show with its competitions for jams, chutneys, fruits, vegetables and flowers, the six-part series will celebrate Britain's love for gardening - and a good competition.

Filmed in the walled garden at Mapledurham, Oxfordshire, nine pairs of gardeners will test their green fingers and horticultural know how. Over four months, the gardeners will have meticulously planned, planted and nurtured their allotments as they attempt to harvest a crop of prized vegetables and fruits. They will then face a series of challenges.

Each hour long episode will reflect the growing season and what's ripe for picking at the time. The couples will face three challenges each week that test their horticultural knowledge, creativity and culinary skills, as they're tasked with turning their produce into preserves, as well as creating floral arrangements.

Three experts will preside over the proceedings, each an authority in their field:

Each episode, the team that fails to impress our experts will hang up their gardening gloves and leave the allotment for good.

The series is expected to air in the Spring 2014, maybe worth a look.

Seasonal Tips

After the prolonged rainfall, the soil has become waterlogged. And if walked on the soil becomes compacted, so use boards if you have to walk on the soil. One bonus, weeding is much easier with the soil being moist.

What to do to prevent the soil becoming waterlogged in future. Add organic matter to bulk up the soil and add nutrients, which would be washed away in heavy rains.

Feeding your soil with trace rock minerals and slow release granules, pellets or powdered organic fertilisers will help retain nutrients in your soil and replenish those lost to leaching during heavy rain.

Build raised beds and fill with well-drained topsoil.

There is plenty to do off the plot. Chitting early potatoes, egg boxes come in very handy for this job. If you have a heated greenhouse or propagator, tomato, cucumber and chilli seeds can be sown in these during this month.

Hardy peas can be sown in root trainers, they do not need heat. How about sowing them in lengths of guttering? Drill holes in the bottom for drainage, cover ends, sow seeds in double rows. Place in an unheated greenhouse or polytunnel. When they are ready to plant out, dig a shallow trench, remove one end of the guttering and slide the peas into the trench. Sowing peas this way has the advantage of deterring mice, there is nothing they like better than freshly sown pea seeds in the ground.

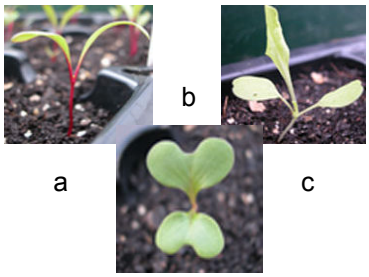
Broad beans can be sown outside now, but they might rot, better to sow them in pots indoors, 3 to a pot.

Leeks and celeriac have a long growing season, these can be started off indoors now.

When it stops raining and the plot is workable, start to dig in overwintered green manures such as grazing rye and winter tares. Remember not to follow rye with a direct sown, small seeded crop such as carrots or parsnips for at least six weeks as the decomposing rye foliage can temporarily inhibit germination. Leafy crops such as cabbages and spinach beet do well after tares, thriving on the nitrogen released as the foliage and root nodules decompose.

It's easier to dig in a well grown green manure if you cut down the top foliage and leave it to wilt for a few days first.

Name the seedlings, answers on back page



All things Celeriac

Though it looks like a misshapen swede, it tastes similar to celery, both belong to the parsley family and is often known as celery root.

A versatile vegetable it can be used in soups, stews, gratins and mash, with or without potatoes and made into chips.

Why not try this easy bread with your celeriac soup.

Ingredients:

175g self raising flour

175g Lancashire cheese, crumbled

175g celeriac, peeled

4 spring onions, finely chopped

Pinch cayenne pepper

1 teaspoon salt

1 large egg

2 tablespoons milk

Method:

Heat oven 375°F, 190°C, Gas Mk 5

Sift flour into a large mixing bowl, add onions, two thirds of the crumbled cheese, cayenne pepper and salt. Using a course grater, grate in the celeriac. Mix thoroughly.

Beat the egg and milk together and gradually add to the mixture producing a loose, rough dough.

Transfer the dough to a baking tray, shape into a round, keeping the rough texture.

Press the rest of the cheese over the surface, sprinkle with a little flour.

Place the tray on the middle shelf for 45-50 mins or until golden brown.

Cool on a wire rack.

This is lovely served warm and if there is any left over, it' really good toasted.

Plot Watering System

This article was submitted by Julia and Richard Tredgett (plot 46). They have recently taken over the front half of their plot and this is one of their ideas for the enlarged space.

We watched with interest when Linda and Dave (plot 18) set up a watering system for the tomatoes in their poly tunnel last year and following their success have decided to experiment with one of our own.

The proposition is to use two connected 200l water butts to water our bed of courgettes, cucumbers and butternut squash.

The plan is to bury a length of hosepipe to the bed and connect a soaker hose around the bed measuring about 120cm by 7.5m.

A timer will be attached to deliver water in the evening and then we will experiment to see how much water is delivered and how much water is actually needed.

By the end of July we should be able to judge how it is working and provide an update.

Do you have a project this year? How about writing about it for the newsletter?

HPHS News

There are seed potatoes available for sale in the Shed in 3kg lots, please bring a bag.

Earlies: Pentland Javelin, Arran Pilot and Foremost.

Main crop: King Edward, Majestic, Cara, Pentland Crown, Desiree and Maris Piper.

Salad: Charlotte

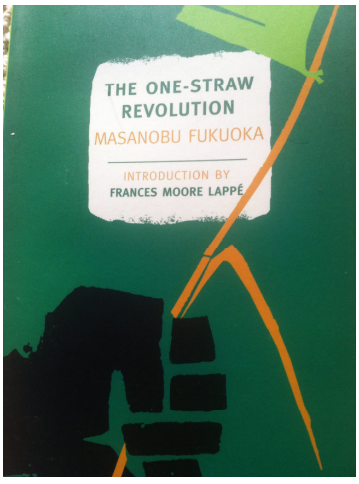
There are also onion sets and shallots, pea, and broad bean seeds available, all at reasonable prices.

Don't forget to renew your membership, still only £1.

The One-Straw Revolution

This interesting article has been submitted by Peter Burton (plot 68), perhaps this is the answer!

Here's a book I bought a couple of weeks ago.



Well, it's that time of year to curl up with a book, read a few pages, doze off and read a bit more with a cuppa, isn't it?

I wonder if it will interest you in the way it's grabbed me.

It's the true story of Masanobu Fukuoka who died in 2008 at the age of 95.

It was only a few years before then that he stopped farming.

Now that got my attention.

I got curious.

Was he forcing himself to work for so many years?

I didn't have to read much to find the answer to that was a resounding 'No!'.

What's my interest in him and his methods?

He has become famous for his so-called 'natural' farming methods.

Some have even called him 'The Do-Nothing Farmer'.

And, from what I've read so far, this is not far from the truth apart from working hard during harvest time!

And he needed to work hard then because his yields of rice and wheat were at least as much as neighboring farms that used insecticides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers. In some cases, the yield was far greater.

How come? Well, to start with, he virtually did nothing.

What he did do was get curious and observe.

What happens in the natural world, he asked, where for millions of years there were no humans?

His observations led to his conclusion that worms, micro-organisms and weeds seemed to do pretty well in creating that most important element of any garden, allotment or farm: a well nourished soil.

To this natural mix, he added a little green manure (white clover) and some chicken manure with minimal 'interference' to the soil structure i.e. no digging.

So I'm taking a leaf out of his book this year.

I won't do exactly the same, but I'll aim to get close.

If you add into this mix Chris's love of and expertise with flowers and herbs, well then, in our 4th season of 'working', (or in my case, hardly working!) plot 68 we're interested to see what transpires.

The Science of Crop Rotation

Crop Rotation has been used in farming almost since farming first started. Ancient farmers found growing the same crops in the same position caused a build up of pests and a reduction in fertility.

So the solution was to grow a winter crop, and then summer crop, and finally leave the ground for one growing season to recover. This three year system was commonly used in Europe until the 16th Century.

Crop rotation after the 16th Century was modified to a four year cycle by farmers in Belgium, where Wheat, Turnips, Barley and Clover produced a sustaining system to feed both animals and humans. Not only did the Clover provide animal feed, but it also fixes Nitrogen into the soil and enriches it in the process.

Forward to the modern vegetable garden and the need for replenishing the land and enriching it in the process is achieved by planting Roots, Alliums, Legumes and Brassicas.

A quick mnemonic to help remember the rotation plan, R.O.L.B.

The root crops are usually Potatoes, which by the action of sowing, growing and harvesting turn the soil over and prepare it for the next few years. Swedes, turnips and parsnips are included in this group.

The Onions have an anti-bacterial effect on the soil and they 'clean' the ground ready for the next year.

The Legumes have Nitrogen fixing bacteria in their roots, and lastly the Nitrogen hungry Brassicas benefit from all the love and attention lavished on the soil over the previous years and provide you with wonderful vegetables.

This is not a law and you aren't going to have crop failures and blight on your land if you plant the wrong things in the wrong bed. It's a guide of best practice and you should be prepared to break the rules.

Polytunnel Palaver

Last year we decided it was time to invest in a polytunnel, this is the saga of the assembly.

Easy, said my OH, it's only a frame tent, who needs instructions, but we followed them nevertheless.

We marked out the positions where the frame legs met the ground and drove in wooden takes. A trench was dug outside of the frame in which to bury the bottom edge of the cover

We then erected the frame attaching each corner upright to the stakes using cable ties. Shorter wooden stakes were driven in at the middle upright positions for extra wind support and secured with cable ties.

It would need a very strong gust of wind to unearth that!

Now for the cover, although the polytunnel wasn't all that expensive, the cover was quite a heavy green plastic material, very unforgiving.

Try as we might, there was no way the cover would meet the frame at the required points, let alone zip the door up. There was no alternative, the frame had to be moved. So all the cable ties were cut, out came the stakes and the frame legs and these were repositioned. Stakes driven in again, cable ties secured and the frame was ready for the cover again.

This time it worked, the corners of the cover met the corners of the frame and the door would zip up. All that was left was to tie the inside of the cover to the uprights and bury the cover into the ground.

All finished, only took us 5 hours!

The moral of the story, who needs instructions, just use your intelligence, after all, it's only a frame tent!

And finally!

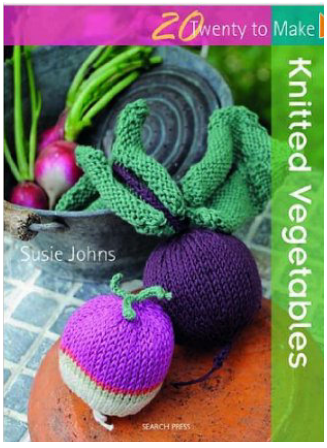
There was a young farmer of Leeds,

Who swallowed six packets of seeds,

It soon came to pass

He was covered in grass

And he couldn't sit down for the weeds



If you can't grow them, knit them

Answers to name the seedling

a: beetroot, b: radish, c: lettuce