



Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club



BWGC

Registered Charity No.
1169353

Newsletter Winter 2017/18

Well, it's AGM time again and we look forward to joining you to the start of a new gardening 'season'. As always, we would welcome any person who wishes to enhance our Trustees list. This year our 'Red Lion Street' extravaganza will need a new leader to bring new ideas and energy to one of our great fund-raising events.

Our Trustees will, of course, add their help and experience but, as they are all heavily involved in their own 'sections, cannot be expected to extend their remit even further.

We produce three newsletters, eleven Parish news reports and many posters. Different views and ideas are always welcome to keep information and reports fresh and interesting.

Our monthly meetings and social evening and events have to be researched and booked. Can you come up with ideas? More technically minded? Then lend a hand!

Maybe you can ease the load of the Trustees by offering to be a regular at our work parties? It is YOUR club, so please help it flourish.

So, what will this year bring in the way of weather? Nobody knows, of course, and that's probably why gardeners prefer to plant a range of produce. Every year the story is similar to "my carrots failed, but the beans did well". Too often, the seed supplier is blamed. Weather suits one plant to the detriment of another. Our own trials for a reliable 'forecast' have proved successful –see end of Newsletter. Despite the lack of 'forecasting' there is one tip to beat the weather. **Don't plant too soon'**. We all want to get going, and the temptation is often too strong to ignore. We don't flourish in the cold and-especially- the wet, and even very hardy plants don't grow –they just survive!

Leaving planting until the soil is warm and the weather more clement will pay dividends in faster, stronger growth and increased cropping. If you have to plant and are not sure about the weather, try staging your planting over a period. It will be interesting to see if the late early ones catch up –or even overtake- the earlies. Tomatoes, especially, will appreciate a later planting date as, once the cells

have hardened to keep out the chill, they won't recover.

Talking of tomatoes, they do love the moisture, but too much can spoil the taste and cause rotting – I find the larger ones are more susceptible- so keep moist but not too wet, and enjoy the taste!

Just a thought!

Artificial grass has now become so good, that many people are considering the idea. I wouldn't blame them but, watching the Blackbird searching for worms, the Starlings pecking away for grubs, and the Robin and Sparrow picking up seeds and small insect, I just wondered.....!

Councils are cutting funding for Public Parks.

Nearly all Park Managers are expecting further cuts. This may not be good news for these important leisure spaces but will there be a benefit for wildlife, I wonder. If grass and borders are not cut, will Nature colonise these 'neglected' areas and perhaps bring an increase in Bees, Butterflies and many more?

More good news.....Our Wildflower population is under threat, but a waste processing company is trying to help buck the trend. Viridor is working with wild-plant Charity Plantlife to use landfill sites to help restore the balance on chalk grasslands. It's a 3-year project and will include new butterfly meadows.

Top Tip.

You are always advised to keep your seed packets in a sealed tin or whatever. How about placing them in those transparent sealable freezer bags? They will stay fresh and you can see what's in there without having to open up!

Brexit or no Brexit.....

EU lawmakers demand five-year phase out of weed-killer glyphosate

The European Parliament called for weed-killer glyphosate to be phased out in the next five years, prompting the European Commission to drop its proposal for a 10 year licence extension.

Calendar 2018

Ann Magrath has been busy booking interesting speakers for 2018.

She writes;

24th January

A.G.M. – Cheese and Wine evening. No speaker

28th February

**'Canada, Alaska & the Butchart Gardens
with Jenny Carter**

28th March

**'Frank Kingdom Ward: Last of the Great Plant Hunters'
with Mary Holliday-Bishop**

Also: MEMBERS SPRING SHOW

Class 1 – 5 stems Daffodils/Narcissi;

Class 2 – Pot of bulbs (pot not to exceed 10" diam.)

**Class 3 – 5 stems any spring flower
(not daffodils or Narcissi);**

Class 4 – 3 stems flowering shrub

25th April

**'Shrubs, the backbone of your garden'
with Geoff Hawkins**

12th May

Red Lion Street Plant Sale

23rd May

**'Soft Fruit: All aspects of growing'
with Peter Barwick**

26th June

**'Highdown – Secrets of a Chalk Garden'
with Lesley Chamberlain**

Also: MEMBERS ROSE & SWEET PEA SHOW

ROSES

Class 1 - a specimen Rose - to be named

Class 2 - 3 stems, any varieties;

Class 3 - 3 sprays cluster Roses

Class 4 – the biggest Rose

SWEET PEAS

Class 1 – 6 stems, same variety;

Class 2 – 6 stems, mixed varieties

Class 3 – 6 stems, old-fashioned;

Class 4 – 1 stem, most highly scented

21st July

Open Annual Flower and Produce Show

26th September

**'Gardens of Japan'
with John Baker**

20th October

**Annual Social Evening (at the Jubilee Hall)
Speaker T.B.A.**

28th November

**'Australia – A Plantsman's Paradise'
with Steve Austin**

**A great selection of interest, subjects and speakers.
Thanks, Ann**

Anthea and Larry – who have put so much effort into keeping standard up on the allotments, and improving the access and safety have plans for the new year.....!!

David Williamson, who keeps us safe from risks, updates the Trustees on H&S law and guides us on all matters relating, has decided to step down as a Trustee after many years of valiant service, not just in H&S but in many other matters such as drainage and work parties. We all owe David a big 'Thank You' for his services to your Club.

Whilst many of you mow the areas adjacent to your plots, all who have plots owe a great debt of thanks to Brian and John, who regularly mow the wider areas, and Brian can always be seen attending to odd problems with our various equipment. If we had to pay for an 'outside' service, the cost would have been substantial.

It's a very quiet time in the greenhouse, but don't neglect it. Glass needs a thorough clean to let all available light in for your early seedlings and tubers. Snails may well have laid eggs in your greenhouse so this is where a thorough clean really does some good. Clean staging, shelving and all nooks and crannies that snail eggs can get in as, although you can see the adult ones that hide in pots and under large pot 'lips' they may have left their progeny to annoy you in the Spring.

The £1million Buddleia

Most of us are pleased when we see a Buddleia clothed in bees and butterflies, but this showy plant can cost the taxpayer quite a bit of money. Seeding easily, growing in poor soils and thus in walls and buildings, it can also swamp native plants being quite invasive in many areas. Also, of course, it has a fairly short season and those insects need sustenance throughout the rest of the season.

If you have a plant, shorten stems in autumn, cut almost to ground-level in February before growth starts, and this should keep it tidy and less bothersome until autumn comes again.

With gardeners battening down the hatches for a few weeks before the Spring, and the 'compost from above' has now meant that the trees are bare, don't forget the birds and wildlife that need your help. Putting food out 'now and then' does not suit them so try and do it regularly. I recall a notice in one of America's great parks where everybody feeds the wildlife in the summer. The notice says "...but who is going to feed us in the Winter?"

The Robin, Blackbird and other native birds –and

welcome visitors- will, thankfully, continue their sweet song all through the Winter and up to the end of the nesting season thanks to your care.

Are we wasting money, killing our plants and polluting the ground, and can we save money, too?

(adapted from smilinggardener.com)

Fertilizer Labels

In many countries, in order to be considered a fertilizer, a product must contain a minimum percentage of total nitrogen, available phosphate and soluble potash.

That's often written as NPK – such as 10 10 10 fertilizer or 5-10-5 fertilizer – “the big 3” mentioned in the question above. That required percentage can be quite high, well over 20%.

Notice that it's *available* phosphate and *soluble* potash, not *total*. This has an unfortunate consequence for organic fertilizers. Nutrients in organic fertilizers are wrapped up in various organic compounds that need to be broken down by microbes before they become available to plants. That's how nature does it, and it takes time. Most of these nutrients are not so quickly “available.” That's why things like compost and kelp aren't technically “fertilizers.”

What Is A Complete Fertilizer?

The law says a “complete fertilizer” only has to supply these three nutrients. We know, of course, that plants need many dozens of nutrients (perhaps over 70), so it makes no sense to apply only three. In fact, applying too much of these three indiscriminately often causes more problems than benefits.

As we'll see below, while we need a lot of different nutrients in our soil, we don't need all that much of any of them. That's one reason why quality compost and biostimulants like sea minerals are often the best garden fertilizer choices – they supply everything in tiny amounts, just to make sure all of the nutrients are covered.

How Much Of Each Nutrient Does A Plant Need?

The answer is shockingly little. Only tiny amounts of each nutrient are actually removed from the soil when we harvest the vegetable garden. If our soil is poor and losing nutrients through leaching and volatilization **, we need to add a little more than if we have a balanced, sustainable ecosystem, but not nearly as much as one might think.

(*Herbicide **volatilisation** refers to evaporation or sublimation of a volatile herbicide. The effect of gaseous chemical is lost at its intended place of application and may move downwind and affect other plants not intended to be affected causing crop damage.) Of course I knew what it meant!!!!

What's in YOUR bag ?

Multi-compost comes in all shapes, sizes and prices. So, what are you getting for your money? It may be stated

on the bag somewhere but they are mainly a mix of (or including) wood fibre, pine bark, green compost, coir and peat. Depending on the ratio your compost may be good (or not) at holding water which is the most important item as plants are usually not too fussy about what compost they are growing in. So, how can you tell? Some composts look wet at the top but may be dry underneath, and vice-versa. Some may drain well but hold water and, again, vice versa. Try lifting the pot after watering. Does it appear heavy or not? Heavy means it's holding the water, otherwise you might need to water more often. Most composts have fertiliser added but it may just last a few weeks, so inspect plants regularly – mainly potted ones- to see if the growth has slowed or if there are yellowing leaves. Also of course, limp growth may need the watering can. Generally, the more you pay, the better the compost, but always look out for offers. Peat free composts do seem to dry out faster which also means the fertiliser probably gets leached out faster, too.

SHOP AT THE SHED (Spring 2018)

Tim our 'Head of Shed' has been looking for stock, and he writes.....

The Shop at the Shed will reopen for business on Saturday February 3 at 10.00am. Seed potatoes have been ordered and have been promised to be delivered a few days before opening. Those of you who took part in the Great Potato Competition last year which was organised by Anthea and Larry will be pleased to note that the variety used on that occasion, Carolus, will be available for you to buy and grow in bigger quantities on your plot. It proved for most of us to be blight resistant which should be good news as this is a disease which seems to return to Albany Road every year now. Derek Cole was very upset that I didn't include Kestrel in last year's collection so these will be available in 2018. Good news for those who like to show potatoes as this variety is very popular amongst the experts. It looks pretty on the table! We shall also be selling red and white onion sets and shallots. If you planted onions last Autumn they should be ready to harvest from late May and should keep until early Autumn in 2018. The onions you plant in the Spring should last well into the winter months. Those of you with a greenhouse will be looking to get things started early so there will be a good supply of quality compost available and the usual range of fertilisers. In fact while you are planting why not pop in a few extra seeds to produce plants for us to sell in Red Lion Street in May. Runner beans, French beans, courgettes and peppers are easy to grow and very popular and last year we could not get enough tomatoes, particularly the very small ones which can be grown in pots on the patio. If you are able to help the Club in this way you can be extra helpful by clearly labelling each plant which you provide.

I am always happy to listen to your suggestions for adding products to our range. Last year I was asked to supply organic slug bait. I was a bit reluctant because we did try a few years ago and found them not to be popular. But it shows how attitudes have changed because the

uptake this time was very enthusiastic so these will definitely be available again next year. Finally I would like to thank those of you who help out in the Shop because without you we could not operate. *New volunteers are always welcome and will initially only be asked to work with an experienced person. Give me a ring (895218) if you are interested.*

Tim Gover

Responding to a request from Bishops Waltham in Bloom

The Club subsidised the purchase of wildflowers which will be grown on the Station Roundabout on which, some weeks ago, a chevron was cleared, facing south. With our donation BWIB purchased enough plug plants to fill one half, with the other awaiting seeding. It will be interesting to see which patch performs best.

Vine Weevil Larvae

These pests munch their way through the roots of your winter bedding; they basically eat through the very foundations that keep your colourful flowers like violas and pansies upright. So if your flowers suddenly collapse; vine weevil larvae are most likely the culprits at this time of year. (Unwins)

The debate goes on..... and on.

Neonicotinoids, debate rages over the harm they cause to bees. (Results of a Swedish Study)

Hives of honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) weren't greatly affected by the chemicals in their pollen and nectar, the study suggested. But the data on bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) told a different story. Bumblebee colonies that hadn't fed on the treated crops looked normal: they were packing on weight to survive the winter. But in the colonies exposed to neonicotinoids, the growth chart was a flat line. When the Swedish study was published in April 2015, it made headlines around the world. It was the first to show that neonicotinoid chemicals — known as neonics — could harm bees in a real-world farming situation. Bee populations are declining in many parts of the globe, a worrying sign for the crops and wild plants that rely on these pollinators for their survival. Parasites, disease and shrinking food resources are all prime suspects. But a link to neonics has become a major flashpoint.

Maybe Wales has the answer? Wales is the first nation to commit to becoming a “pollinator-friendly country”

Communities around Wales are being encouraged to introduce measures that help pollinating insects of all kinds. It may be the first scheme in the world. Four goals have been suggested; provide nectar-rich food sources; set aside places for insects to live; avoid using chemicals that harm them; spread the word about the need to safeguard pollinators (RHS Mag) for more info contact

www.biodiversitywales.org.uk

Unique Weather Forecasting Scheme now under trial at your Gardening Club

We will soon be sending all our readers a special weather forecasting kit, comprising of an organically grown coconut. It has been proved, in scientific tests, to be the most reliable weather predicting method of our time. Stocks are limited, as they are grown exclusively at our Albany Road allotment site and stored carefully at our ‘Shop at the Shed’. Yours is FREE with every purchase of just ten tonnes of manure.

Below you will find the special ‘cut-out and keep’ code chart produced by our meteorological section.

A Very Happy New Year to you all and Happy Gardening!



What would YOU like in your newsletter? Have you a story (funny or otherwise) to share? Is there a ‘crafty plan’ you have this year or can you let us in on a secret tip you have discovered? Contact robinbreach@btconnect.com or www.bwgc.org.uk if so.

Thanks!