



# Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club



BWGC

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## Newsletter Winter 2018

### **I am a D-I-Y Expert ((if that means Destroy-it-Yourself) Unsung heroes.**

If I bang a nail into a wall, the wall collapses, the nail bends, and I clobber my finger with the hammer! Thankfully, we are not all like that. The Gardening Club is very lucky to have Brian Hutchings who spends many hours from February to October -the opening times of our Shop at the Shed- and probably a few more during the 'closed' season- maintaining and repairing the quite large collection of mowers, strimmers, cultivator etc., that belong to the Club. He also assists in other matters such as the watering system together with Larry Mabey. If you, like me, admire how the grass around our allotments is kept so tidy, look no further than Brian and John Hayes. It might seem fun riding around on a mini-tractor, but it is not the most comfortable position and, to mow our large area, is very time-consuming. Not only is this aesthetically enjoyable for us, but it makes the area safer, too.

Whilst most members who use the equipment are careful, normal wear-and-tear takes place and owing to the limited opening hours, mowers, especially, are used on wet and/or long grass and often the wheels are not raised sufficiently resulting in strain on the parts. Enter Brian Hutchings, our practical and knowledgeable expert to repair/replace/mend, so that the equipment can be used again. Brian also ensures that users do not have to handle fuel, as he tops up the various fuel tanks and keeps an eye on oil levels. The Club and its Members owe him a great vote of thanks. In his 'spare' time he has an allotment together with his wife Sandy who always supports him -and makes delicious cakes for our BBQ events! Oh, and he always seems to win our -now annual- Potato competition, too!!!

**Our A\_G\_M is always a pleasant affair** and the Cheese and Wine theme does help, but it is YOUR chance to share in the running of the Club. Of course, the Trustees listen to you during the year, but this is the more 'official' time to air your views and wishes for the benefit of the Club and your fellow Members. With this issue you will find all the necessary documentation regarding the A\_G\_M and I would draw your attention to the fact that questions must be sent to the Secretary

at least 14 days prior to the meeting. This enables the Trustees to prepare answers which may well need background searches for relevant information. Although our membership 'year' runs from October 1<sup>st</sup>, we do continue to keep all last year's members informed up until the A\_G\_M provide adequate time to re-join. After this date, we send Newsletters etc., etc., only to those who are members for the current year. Of course, news is still available through the Parish News and various reports in local journals, plus posters in Red Lion Street and our own website [www.bwgc.org.uk](http://www.bwgc.org.uk). If you are paying by Bacs, please make sure you quote your postcode and also ensure that Linda receives your Membership form. Thanks.

### **Avoiding the difficulties of growing from seed, I choose several varieties of Plug Plants**

especially, the grafted Tomato plants as they really do get away faster with great cropping. These too are 'crosses' (but not technically) in a different way as they have a different and vigorous rootstock, allied with the stem chosen for quality and quantity of its crop.

### **One of the 'fun' sorts of vegetables**

I noticed in the Suttons Seed book was Cucamelon just like mini-watermelons – but, in fact, they are cucumbers but with a cucumber/lime flavour. There was even a herb tasting of Beef and Onion Crisps! Nice to see more seed catalogues featuring seeds in fun packets especially for children, too. More space is given, also, to organic varieties. Our natural 'helpers' are not overlooked, either. There are special -though not unusual- plants for pollinators and others for predators that help clear up those green/blackfly pests. With wildflowers becoming ever more popular, there is a section for those as well.

**There are a couple of items becoming more popular**, such as 'plant halos' ideal to place on growbags and give plants more space to grow and they really help with watering. Also, and especially for those who want some home-grown spuds but don't have much room, potato growing bags. Unlike growbags these don't come filled with compost, they leave that to you. They can be grown virtually anywhere as long as there is sun and you don't forget to follow the growing instructions.

Another more popular item concerns fruit trees. They are now especially grown for patios and will flourish in a large tub -again, if you follow instructions.

### **If time drags a bit in the gap between Christmas and New year**

- if you can get out of all those chores lined up for you at home! – have a look at websites/brochure/Garden Centres and see if you can find anything interesting for the garden next year. I find it quite exciting to order and dream of the perfect crops that will fill my allotment in 2019. Sad? Maybe but, at my age, what can you expect.....!!

### **If you would like a Suttons catalogue,**

come along to the AGM and collect one, it's more fun - and much easier- than looking through it online. Whichever method you choose, please ask for the special Suttons discount code to quote when ordering. This will give you 50% off seeds, and 15% of other items (excl. P+P and offers). This will then be deducted automatically if ordering online, or you have to do it manually if ordering by post.

### **Pine needles and conifer hedge trimmings**

take a long time to decompose, so put them in a separate compost bin. After 3 years they should have broken down to form a useful mulch for acid loving plants (e.g. Azaleas)

### **Flower arranging?**

Then ditch the green stuff! That's the block of floral foam that most use. Apparently, they are made of non-biodegradable plastic. Widely used since the 1950's, it's made from phenol formaldehyde but the search for a suitable replacement is proving difficult.

### **Garden clippings**

20% of roses don't have any scent. The remaining 80% have the strongest scent when the flower is only half open.

Have you 'spotted one of these? Ladybirds. Of course, we know the one with 7 black spots, but what about the other 46 varieties resident in this country? Not all are red, and some have up to 30 spots.

Radishes are the ideal introduction to gardening for children.

Rhubarb is a vegetable.

Fritinancy is the buzzing of insects.

A flock of snipe is known as a 'wisp'

The bee hummingbird is the world's smallest. It weighs as much as a tea-bag. Can you get decaffeinated hummingbirds??

Female aphids give birth to other live female aphids that are already pregnant with yet more female aphids.... And don't we know it!!!

Cranberries bounce when ripe. Another name for them is (what a surprise) "bounceberries". If it bounces seven

times it is perfect to eat. Whose counting for goodness sake!!

Every time a woodpecker's beak hits a tree, its head is subject to 1000 times the force of gravity.

Ants nod to each other when they pass.

The trap-jaw ant and has the fastest bite in the world.

It's jaws close 2300 times faster than a blink of an eye.

As well as nodding its head at the same time???????

..... put these three together and we have Nature's chain-saw!

Death-watch beetles attract mates by repeatedly banging their heads on the floor. Any excuse for being drunk, I suppose!

Botanists cannot tell the difference between broccoli and cauliflower. Try eating them you idiots!!

Incidentally, for those with a musical ear, bees buzz in the key of A, unless they are tired when they buzz in the key of E. So, if you hear a tired Bee, put it in a comfortable chair, with a honey and lemon tonic!!

### **Mycorrhizal fungi. What is it all about?**

Mycorrhizas are beneficial fungi growing in association with plant roots, and exist by taking sugars from plants 'in exchange' for moisture and nutrients gathered from the soil by the fungal strands. The mycorrhizas greatly increase the absorptive area of a plant, acting as extensions to the root system. **Phosphorus** is often in very short supply in natural soils. When phosphorus is present in insoluble forms it would require a vast root system for a plant to meet its phosphorus requirements unaided. It is therefore thought that mycorrhizas are crucial in gathering this element in uncultivated soils. Phosphorus-rich fertilisers are widely used in cultivated ground and not only reduce the need for this activity but are thought to actually suppress the mycorrhizas. For this reason it is best not to use phosphorous rich fertilisers in conjunction with mycorrhizal fungi.

Neither fungi nor plants could survive in many uncultivated situations without this mutually beneficial arrangement. Mycorrhizas also seem to confer protection against root diseases.

The above is from the RHS website and you can buy this product from them, Amazon, E-bay and Garden Centres to name a few.

### **Larry's Plot**

Larry has a great outlook about having an allotment. If it ain't necessary, don't do it! After all, this is a hobby, not an existence. However, he usually tries to see if 'not doing it' is the right way. For instance, do potatoes need all that work of digging a trench, earthing up and all that? You may have the odd 'greenie' poking through the soil, but the rest are fine, and you have avoided all that earthing up!

The usual "old wives' tale" is that potatoes clear the ground. Just think about it. Who digs the trench, who earths them up, who digs the crop when harvesting time comes? Yes, you get the idea.

Incidentally, we are having a competition to find the only person in our Town who hasn't heard that Larry won the men's cake competition at our Annual Show. The prize for that person is a hearing aid!

#### **Still on the subject of Potatoes....**

Don't buy too early, as our 'Shop at the Shed' will be open from Saturday February 2<sup>nd</sup>, with a good selection of Potatoes. You only buy the amount you want – this gives you an opportunity to try several varieties without paying for 'kgs' in a pre-packed amount! Also, you will save money. Then there is still plenty of time to 'chit' (allow a couple of stalks to start growing) so that they get a good start when the soil (not just the weather) is warmer. Keep them in a cool place, out of direct light. Don't plant too early, despite the fact that you are itching to get going with longer days ahead. Don't be tempted. The list of varieties will be published in the new year. Also, see Tim Gover's 'Shop Report' below. We are looking to you, our customers to give us plenty of feed-back regarding our shop. What do you want to see in stock? Do you want more organic items? If so, what? [www.bwgc.org.uk](http://www.bwgc.org.uk)

**We have 'bean' told... that leaving runner bean (and similar) roots in the soil** will improve nitrogen levels, we are now advised that this is regarded as another "old wives' tale". It seems that scientists have now decided that it doesn't. So, after all these years they have finally tested the idea (RHS and Kew, where were you???) Maybe they are correct, but surely those roots - especially the fibrous ones, can only improve the soil?

**Looking ahead to bumper crops;** from a Daily Telegraph article by Jean Vernon:

We really cannot overstate the importance of bees to our local and global crops. Before we really get growing this year, consider the following;

- 1. Bee safe** Reduce - or preferably stop - using [pesticides](#) altogether
- 2. Offer a home** Add an insect house to your garden for nesting sites for solitary [bees](#) and insects. Make your own but ensure it has a waterproof roof.
- 3. Act local** Lobby your MP and council to reduce or stop pesticide use in your area. Ask your council not to cut the road verges and to leave wildflowers for wildlife. Encourage local groups to plant native wildflowers.
- 4. Re-wild your lawn** Rethink your take on lawn weeds. Dandelions are excellent bee plants, providing vital pollen early in the season. White clover is a honeybee magnet, while the longer tongued [bumblebees](#) prefer red clover. Let the grass grow longer and allow the lawn to flower.

Or replace the lawn altogether with a wildflower meadow. MeadowMat, £12.60 per sqm, is a great way to support and attract wildlife. It's laid like turf and is packed full of pesticide free wildflowers. There's a special Birds & [Bees](#) version, with 42 species

of [perennial and biennial grasses](#) and pollen, nectar and seed-rich plants for wildlife ([meadowmat.com](#))

**5. Buy organic** Seek out and buy organic plants, seeds and [bulbs that are pesticide-free](#). The Soil Association lists organic nurseries and plant suppliers ([soilassociation.org](#)).

**6. Check your shed** It is illegal to buy, sell or use any pesticides containing the three neonics (imidacloprid, clothianidin and thiamethoxam), withdrawn by the EU for gardeners. If you find an old bottle in your shed, it must be disposed of responsibly. It cannot be thrown in the rubbish or tipped down the drain. Contact your local council for details of which household waste sites accept chemicals and take them for disposal. Visit the Crop Protection Association (CPA) Common Sense Gardening site at [gardenchemicaldisposal.co.uk](#).

**7. Plant trees for bees** For effective foraging, [bees](#) need masses of flowers in one place. Large shrubs or small trees are a vital food source. Five established trees would provide a similar amount of pollen and nectar as an acre of meadow. Choose winter and early spring flowering trees such as wild cherries, [willow](#) and [hazel](#). Organic fruit trees can be purchased- see online.

**8. Put out water** [Bees](#) need to drink and evaporate water to cool their hives. They collect water droplets, such as the morning dew on leaves, but they drown in water bowls, so fill the bowl with glass sea beans, pebbles or even marbles to provide a surface for them to drink from.

**9. Grow forage plants** The RHS has a comprehensive list of plants for pollinators ([rhs.org.uk](#)). Choose plants with single, open flowers for easy access to the pollen and nectar. Organic herbs, which include some great bee and pollinator plants such as sage, thyme, nepeta and lavender, can be purchased.

**10. Grow from seed** Choose organic seed or ask about neonics and chemical treatments. For example, Suttons and Dobies say that their seed ranges are free from neonics. The BeeMat, £9.99 is a ready seeded (free from neonicotinoids) biodegradable mat (200cm x 50cm) with mixed wildflower seeds chosen for bees ([beemat.com](#)). Simple Sowing has a range of neonic-free, wildflower seed mixes in 45.7cm x100cm seed carpets. The Perennial Wildflower Bee Carpet, £7.99 is a ready to lay seed carpet with bee-friendly wildflowers ([simplesowing.co.uk](#)).

**11. Choose organic flower bulbs** Especially those that flower in early spring when bee food is scarce, such as daffodils, crocus and early tulips. The Organic Gardening Catalogue sells a range of bulbs for autumn delivery ([organiccatalogue.com](#)).

**12. Learn more** Visit [buglife.org.uk](#) where you can download a Pollinator Identification Chart, or check out the seven common bumblebee types on the Friends of the Earth website ([foe.co.uk](#)).

What else do pesticides kill???????



Bee pollinating a lavender plant. Don't kill by negligence.

### SHOP AT THE SHED (Spring 2019)

The Shop at the Shed will reopen for business on Saturday February 2 at 10.00am. Seed potatoes have been ordered and have been promised to be delivered a few days before opening. To make sure you get your favourite variety you are advised to come along on the opening day when there may well be other things happening to tempt you. 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. If you are able to help the Club in this way you can be extra helpful by clearly labelling each plant which you provide.

Some of you may have missed the chance to buy a few barrows of manure when we opened the Shop in November. I shall be doing my best to get more in the pen by the beginning of February and keeping it topped up as we go along. The chicken manure pellets which we sell are incredibly good value and very easy to apply. Indeed, one of our most experienced vegetable growers, Den Marriner, tells me that he uses very little else to encourage his crops to perform well.

To those of you who have never visited the Shop please come in and say "hello" and see what we have to offer. There will always be a welcome cup of coffee and the opportunity to get to know other club members. If you have a problem with pests or diseases, there is normally someone around who can offer advice.

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

**How to use woody mulches around the garden.** From time to time, we receive a load of wood 'chippings' in our pen at Albany Road. Perhaps this general advice from the RHS may help

*Mulches from broadleaf trees and shrubs.*

Hedge/shrub prunings and stems from younger trees or tree suckers can be shredded and applied directly as a fresh mulch on unplanted or planted areas.

Wood, including bark from larger, mature trees can be chipped and applied as a fresh mulch on both unplanted areas and around plants on well-established beds. However, be aware that woody materials may contain compounds that harm plants (phytotoxic) which are produced by the plants to deter potential herbivores and/or help suppress the germination and growth of competitor plants (allelopathy). Whilst the concentration of such chemicals is unlikely to affect mature, well-established plants, it is better to avoid using fresh broadleaf chippings on newly planted beds. Alternatively, this issue can be resolved by maturing or ageing woody materials before use. Ageing is the process of stacking the material into a pile and leaving it to weather for three to four months. This will allow any phytotoxic compounds to be broken down, rendering the material safe even on newly planted beds.

**Fresh conifer materials** are more likely than broadleaf woody waste to contain phytotoxic compounds e.g. tannins, which can reduce germination and harm young plants. Again, this is unlikely to be an issue for mature plants, but chipped and shredded conifer mulches should be aged before use around establishing plants.

*Mulches from mixed woody materials*

If the material you wish to apply is an even mixture of a range of tree species, it can be applied fresh around established plants. When in doubt, it is better to age it or apply to non-planted areas of the garden.

Application of woody mulches:

- \*As with all **mulches**, take care not to cover herbaceous perennials or small bulbs
- \*Do not mulch directly up against the base of tree trunks or shrubs as this can create a moist, low oxygen environment which may encourage disease. Leave a 8-10cm (3-4in) gap
- \*It is best to apply mulch to beds in early spring, before annual weeds become established. Mulches are most effective at suppressing weeds if applied before they get a foot-hold
- \*Woody mulches can be applied any time of year, but try to avoid applying mulch to dry soils
- \*Get the right depth: wood chippings due to their larger particle are less likely to compact and can be applied at a greater depth, about 8-12cm (3-5in), compared to traditional composted organic mulches such as garden compost or well-rotted manure that are best applied at depth 5-7.5cm (2-3in)