



Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club



BWGC

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Newsletter Winter 2019

**Articles "From the Trustees" are presented
in the A.G.M. report.**

Sometimes you just can't win!

I was reading an article in Gardener's World by Nick Bailey who, you may recall, was our guest speaker at our 2018 Social Evening. The subject was 'Seeds'.

Well, after reading the whole page of close-typed comments, I began to wonder how we even manage to raise just one plant from a packet. Don't plant too deep or too shallow. Don't let light in, but some need light. Some like a frost, others won't look at growing under 50f. Use a deep seed tray, but others need sowing direct into the soil. Put the seed on its side if large, but you can't if it's small. It needs perfect drainage, but others need moist soil. Seeds don't like compost that is too rich, but don't plant in poor soil. Is it acid or alkaline soil? Whichever one, the seed doesn't like it! You left the seed box in the sunshine, so they have shrivelled, the others were in the dark and are now 'leggy'. Too cold, too hot!!! You put the box outside to harden off the plants. They are hardened off now, stiff with frost!! Plant out in a shaded position, but it may need full sunlight. Train up a pole, but don't stab the roots but maybe cut the tops off and trim the roots. NO! The roots are delicate and don't like transplanting. Water copiously but leave it until it dries out! That's what I love about gardening, all that home-grown produce, the exercise and the way it calms the nerves.....!! Never forget that a keen gardener is one who always believes that "what goes down, must come up!" And finally,..... I really am trying to grow my own food for 2020, but I can't find any bacon & egg seeds!!

Happy New Gardening Year everyone.

Robin.

At this time of year, on the verge of our 'Shop at the Shed opening on Saturday 1st February, our

thought turn to potatoes, onions, garlic and shallots amongst other things.

Our shop sells first early, second early, maincrop and 'blight-free' varieties as well as Garlic, Onions (incl. red) and shallots together with compost and much more, all ready to help you start your own 'gardening year'

As a general guide only.... Potato note; First Earlies can be planted in March for June/July harvesting - need eating straight away; Second Earlies can be planted in April for July/August harvesting -also need eating straight away; Maincrop varieties, Plant in April for September harvest, but they can be stored.

The first [potatoes](#) were cultivated in Peru about 7,000 years ago. You mean King Edward was alive then??

Protect those pot plants with bubble wrap around them.

They are far more exposed to the cold, ice and snow than plants in the ground. Also think about a covering of fleece in the worst of the weather. Keep a watch for slugs and snails over-wintering on your pots, especially if there is a 'rim' as they hide here, so slide your fingers around and you may well find some snails! Bubble wrap is available from our Shop at the Shed.

Indoor plants don't always need 'room temperature'

Some need about 40F to nudge them into flowering for the new season. Cyclamen also prefer cooler, but light, places as do Clivia but they will need a warmer place later on. It does seem that most indoor plants will suffer under 40F. If you have kept Geraniums from summer, they will stand cooler conditions as long as they are kept dry. Is this really, 'Rhubarb'? Cabbage root fly can devastate your crop. One supposed remedy is to place a piece of rhubarb below each plant. Worth a try, I suppose. Garlic is often planted in October, but our 'Shop at the Shed' will be very busy selling

Garlic as soon as we re-open. If the ground is frozen and/or too wet, they can be planted in a pot filled with multi-compost (also available at the Shop) and put into greenhouse/polytunnel/cold frame until the conditions improve.

It may seem too early to think of strawberries but, by covering the crowns now, you can get 'cropping' earlier. Incidentally, when they have finished, cut off the leaves to provide warmth and air onto the crown, and avoid virus' that can infect old leaves. The plant should recover well and start producing healthy new leaves that may also protect it later in the year.

It may seem a funny time of year, when nothing seems to be growing, but a high-potash feed, based on Seaweed for Onions and Garlic, or a boost for soft fruit and 'Leafy' Vegetables can give you better cropping. February seems to be a good time. Many books seem to advocate the use of 'Growmore' (available from 'The Shed') as a good all-round fertiliser to 'jump-start' healthy growth. Whilst Broad beans and Peas (amongst other Autumn-sown plants) are very hardy, they can still suffer in the Winter. Give them a bit of protection when very cold or inclement weather strikes. They may well reward you with a better, slightly earlier, crop. The experts are beginning to change their tune by suggesting a 'new year' sown crop is just as good, with fewer failures and 'the fly' hits it just the same as the Autumn sown varieties.

Leeks.

Strange to say that, whilst you will be harvesting your crop of Leeks, one of the finest Winter vegetables -and one of the hardiest, you need also think about sowing seed for next Winter's crop. You can start in seed trays or modular trays indoors. In fact, this may be the best way as you can keep a close eye on them, rather than leave the weather to ruin the small seeds outside. Sow thinly (prevents 'damping off') and cover with ½" of fine/sieved compost/grit/vermiculite/perlite. Even though the mature plants are so hardy, the seedlings are best at about 10c-15c. I use one of those 'heat mats' for other seedlings so I think this would be O.K. for leeks. It really isn't 'heat' as such, just a very gentle warmth -you can hardly feel it if you put your hand on the pad. A propagator with a thermostat would be ideal if you were given one for Christmas -well, there's always NEXT year! Oh, and don't grow them (or Onions or Garlic) in the same place next year. Next Winter warm yourself with 'home-grown' leek and potato soup! When transplanting them

into the dibbed holes (6" deep) you can be quite rough with them. Hold a bunch in your hand, trim the leaves down and also trim the roots up. This will startle them into producing quick growth. Pop them into the dibbed hole and don't back-fill. Water so the hole is full. After a couple of weeks, if the soil hasn't filled the hole, then do it. Also, watch for birds pulling them out of the ground. Legend has it that St David ordered his soldiers to attach a leek to their caps prior to battle. Still in Wales, folklore also has it that, if a girl slept with a leek under her pillow on St David's day, she would see her husband-to-be in her dreams. Is this where the saying "In your dreams, Mate" started?? Emperor Nero gorged on Leek Soup. He said it improved his singing voice. Probably kept him occupied waiting for the fire brigade!! *Have you heard?..... most gardeners know that Marigolds mask the smell of carrots and thus keep the carrot fly away. One idea mooted recently was that Nasturtiums keep down bindweed! This came from an anonymous source as I promised Larry I wouldn't mention his name.*

Research has shown

that, on average, U.K. gardeners spend the equivalent of three years of their working lives working on their gardens. Oh, well, only two years and 364 days to go, then!

For the first time last year,

we stocked Sulphate of Potash at our 'Shops at the Shed'. I was amazed how useful this was in improving yield, quality and disease resistance of most crops, especially strawberries and other soft fruit, plus apples and pears. You don't need much, and you can buy any quantity you want at 'the Shop'.

I have always warned of planting too early.

A few days of sun and we all want to get going. One way is to cover your area with polythene or plastic to warm the soil but, of course, you need to keep that warmth going after you have planted. Maybe by cutting holes and planting through them, the tops of plants will get warmth radiated from the plastic whilst the roots will be kept relatively 'warm' as well.

Go Potty in January.

Looking for something to do? Then clean all those plastic pots that you have saved over the years. No need to chuck them into the wheelie-bin, they will last for years. Brush off the worst of the soil before

plunging them into a bucket of warm water to which is added detergent or a garden disinfectant. Leave them to dry, and all your needs for sowing and potting on are ready for better weather, in the knowledge that any pathogens and fungi have been disposed of. Coloured pots CAN go for recycling.

Don't leave the leaves.

Leaf-mould can be useful for the garden, but can you venture out and collect them from under trees and on paths? Some people feel that they should be left to be re-absorbed by the tree. However, the tree has already taken its fill of nutrients before it shed the leaf. So, you are left with a useful -but not particularly nutrient rich- natural mulch/humous for your garden or allotment. In some parks they actually collect the leaves and, after using them for beds and mulches, ask the public to collect the excess. Whilst it is illegal to collect from Forestry Commission land, there is no ban on collecting from public streets, but you must ask permission before collecting from the owner of any Park.

The allotments, pictures taken from the same place.

When? Different Seasons?
No! Different Months?
No! Different Weeks?
No!



The two pictures were actually taken on the SAME DAY! The first, at 9.30am on 6th April 2018
The second, later that very day at 4.30pm.
Many thanks to whoever provided the photos

Barry Newman NDH, FNVS,

visited us in May 2019 and gave us an hour of advice tips and presented it all in a down-to-earth (pun intended) way with fun and a great pictorial display. He had come to us after judging at Chelsea! The enthusiasm was infectious and there were plenty of talking points, advice and guidance. One of our best ever presentations. Barry is a well-known grower, exhibitor, lecturer and judge. He is Vice Chairman of the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee and a former Chairman of the National Vegetable Society. As well as being a senior NVS judge, Barry serves on the judging and lecturing panel of the RHS. He is also a Britain in Bloom judge. Barry was formally trained in horticulture at Pershore, York and Bath. He is now retired.



Barry is a committed allotmenteer and lives at Littleworth near Partridge Green in West Sussex. His allotment is a mile away from home and has NO water supply!
Aren't we lucky at Albany Road with the 'Shop at the Shed', water, toilets etc., etc.!



One of the biggest points of interest concerned potatoes and the way to grow them. Individual 17ltr bags filled with compost, containing one potato, placed where the roots can be cool (e.g.in a trench) side -by-side, then grown on -another tip was to put string each side of the developing haulm

to stop it flopping over and becoming infected or ravaged by slugs/snails. When the potatoes are ready, you can cut off the haulm, pick up a bag, empty out the contents onto a compost or ready-made receptacle, and there they are -clean, no 'speared' ones and you didn't have to earth them up, either. To avoid a glut, you can cut off the haulm, move the bag to wherever it is not too hot, and leave it! The spuds should remain in good health for some time. Also see our website for more details about planting and fertilising. Just a thought, but couldn't we try carrots, parsnips or whatever in so-called 'Potato bags'?? Looking at the variety of bags available my choice would be for sturdy, long-lasting ones with proper handles, rather than the more 'disposable' type which may add to plastic waste in the short term, but that's just my personal view.

Early seedlings.

For starting seedlings early, try one of those polystyrene boxes. Maybe best to get one that has held vegetables (avoid one that has had fish in it, especially if placing in the airing cupboard!!) and don't forget the lid. Sow your seeds in a standard seed box, water, place in the poly-box, put the lid on and the constant temperature, darkness and moisture should see the seedlings get a good start. As with ALL seeds, make sure they are in good contact with the soil. Check after a week or so and the lid can come off if the seeds have shown through – it can be replaced at night to keep the cold out.

Par-SNIPS



When thinning out your root vegetable seedlings, it is handy to place, say, parsnips in a 'station'. As Waterloo is a bit too far away, your allotment may be best. Sow three in each 'station' about 6" apart. DON'T sow too early, they really do need warm soil. Mid to end of May should be O.K. or even later. When the seedlings show their first true leaves DON'T pull two of the three out. Cut them at ground level with scissors -preferably not the wife's best pair. Pulling them up can and will disturb the remaining root which may not grow into a show-bench specimen after all. All root vegetables can come under this advice but, strangely, you may be

able to re-plant the thinnings of Beetroot. Apparently, this is not classed as a root crop so, theoretically, you can transplant. Worth a try! Incidentally, Parsnips get sweeter with a touch of frost when the starch turns to sugar.

Got any Gutter!

No, we haven't turned into ventriloquists (yet) It's another tip from Barry. Use it upside down to cover your seedling row. It keeps off any heavy rain, the worst of the cold, and stops birds messing up the row and creates a micro-climate, as seeds like stable conditions – no, that doesn't mean they will grow alongside horses and donkeys!! Perhaps any spares you have could be stored in the pen by the shed, used, cleaned, then returned??

Tim's tip from 'The Shed'....

Damping-off is a nasty problem that affects seedlings. One minute they look fine, the next they have shrivelled and died. This is especially a problem when you are raising seeds earlier in the year. If they dry out they die, and if you give them too much heat they get 'leggy' and if you water them and the surroundings are cold, they can be hit by 'damping off'. Tim always puts a layer of xxxxxx over the surface once he has sown the seeds. This allows air and water to penetrate, but seems to keep the stem of the plant, where it meets the soil, just that bit drier and less susceptible.

An Allotmenteer also mentionedTry putting wood ash around your onions -perhaps it's the trace elements that help- and slugs and snails won't like it!.

What has Nature got in store for you this year?

Well, you can bet we will have a good spell of weather just after the daffodils flower. This will start our 'gardening bug' working and we will all be guilty of planting too early, and then rushing around covering our plants when the late April/early May frost comes along. Will it be another very dry late Winter? Either that, or too much of the wet stuff!

Either way, our 'Shop at the Shed will be open from Saturday 1st February. Every weekend from 10.00 to noon until the last weekend in October. Thanks to all those who have volunteered to assist the Trustees. There is usually at least one Trustee in attendance at each opening. Free Tea, Coffee, Biscuits will encourage you to stop and chat and to warm up when the weather is chilly.

Manure and Pro-Grow continue to be very popular, and our selection of fertilisers, lime, potatoes and mixed compost are always needed. Our policy of encouraging our members to join together, have fun and a chat has been very well received, and you can bet we will have a 'Grand Opening' for all, together with, later on, special 'Hot Cross Bun/Bacon Butty/BBQ days.

Don't forget the kids.

It's great to see Mums, Dads and Grandparents with their kids/grand-kids on the allotment, but we feel there is much more they can do themselves. The fun of watching the grown-ups tending their plot can wear off very quickly, so try getting them to some of these and watch their interest grow with their plants.....

Creating a love and knowledge of gardening is a wonderful thing to cultivate in children. Kids love growing, especially when they see results quickly and easily. These vegetables are our top choices to encourage gardening with children. They are easy to grow from seed, which means a quick and cheap project that's sure to satisfy. It becomes much more fun when you grow them yourself! [Try – Sugarsnap peas, radishes, pumpkins, cucumbers and beans.](#)

Leek'd Documents tell all.....

Barry Newman, our expert, suggested that Leeks need roots and tops trimming to force them into stronger growth once transplanted. I did as the expert said, and the photos' prove it. The result, after planting the usual way -dibbing a 6" hole, dropping them in, watering well but NOT filling with soil - was.....



Our monthly speakers programme for 2020 has been finalised and is enclosed/attached. Many thanks to Nicole Jones who has kindly taken on the demanding job from Ann Magrath who provided us with an eclectic mix of interesting and informative speakers for many years. Thank you, Ann, and best wishes to Nicole who has already proved to be a worthy successor.

When things get moving.... damage control

Take care spraying perennial weeds; spray drift from contact or growth-regulating weed killers can damage sensitive roses, tomatoes, potatoes, brassicas and vines, and there is always a danger to friendly insects.

Do you suffer from sticky willy?

Sticky willy (*Galium aparine*) goes by many different, descriptive common names including bedstraw, catchweed, beggar's lice, scratchweed and velcro plant. This annual plant is often an unwanted weed where it invades roadsides, home landscapes and vegetable or flower gardens, often favouring moist, shady sites. Sticky Willy competes with desirable vegetation for water, nutrients and light and affects the aesthetics of a landscape, forming dense, tangled mats. Downward-curving prickles on stems and leaves are responsible for this plant's annoying ability to attach to clothing and fur. The experts' advice is.....

Pull up or hoe sticky willy plants in early spring while they are still young, before they can flower and produce seeds.

The Glyphosate discussion continues

The European Food Safety Authority has decreed that it is "unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans". This goes against the World health

Organisation's view that it was "possibly carcinogenic". Also, it seems one side argues that it '...poisons the soil' and the other '...it breakdowns into harmless compounds and actually benefits the soil'.

We have two eminent agencies who have tested the article and they still can't agree, so what price 'the experts?' Does minimal use of a glyphosate weed-killer really cause harm to anyone or anything? For instance, is there any harm provided you use in strict adherence to the instructions on a product that has been thoroughly tested? Does it become inert when it touches the soil? Does it affect wildlife? Can you plant seeds within a short time of use? Is the hyperbole in various publications vindicated?

Do the alternatives pose any risk to self or wildlife?

Questions that remained unanswered in 2019

Is 'organic' just an expensive exercise, do seeds need to be 'organic' when you are growing them in an organic way?

When using a lawn weed-killer, does this harm the worms and other beneficial wildlife in the soil?

Can 'bug-killer sprays' really be used and not harm beneficial wildlife?

Does use of the organic (non-metalddehyde) slug pellets cause any danger to wildlife or are we ignoring some important facts?

Do we dig in Winter or not? Looking through the excellent magazine from the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, I noticed this;
"SOIL. A wide range of species overwinter in the soil, from slow worms to moth pupae and bumblebees. Try to resist digging the soil until mid-Spring when they'll be awake"..... definitely food for thought!

Calendula officinalis, the pot marigold, ruddles, common marigold or Scotch marigold

This bright annual has gone out of favour being an 'old fashioned' item in the border. However, both its help to beneficial insects and also to gardeners (also hand cream!) is coming to the fore again.



Being, mostly, a 'single' it is much easier for bees and others that need the nectar to gain entry, whereas 'doubles' and other fancy looking flowers are often near impossible to penetrate.

These bright flowers, from orange to apricot (if you want a less showy display) are easily grown where you want them, like sun and can often still be seen trying their best to flower even into the dark days of December.

Their demands are not great, preferring a soil that is well drained but not overly manured or fertilised (too much 'sappy' growth results) and will cope well with dry weather. Also, as an annual, they don't need mollycoddling by growing in trays, hardening off and all that jazz! No, just pop them in a weed-free spare plot and they will surprise you later with their bright faces suddenly appearing above the foliage. I used my 50% BW Gardening Club discount to buy my seeds from Suttons. What a bargain, and the Bees will enjoy them all summer long. The plant is classed as H5, see below.

Hardiness ratings. A check-list when you see those strange numbers and letters.

All ratings refer to the UK growing conditions unless otherwise stated. Minimum temperature ranges (in degrees C) are shown in brackets

H1a - Under glass all year (>15C)

H1b - Can be grown outside in the summer (10 - 15)

H1c - Can be grown outside in the summer (5 - 10)

H2 - Tolerant of low temperatures, but not surviving being frozen (1 to 5)

H3 - Hardy in coastal and relatively mild parts of the UK (-5 to 1)

H4 - Hardy through most of the UK (-10 to -5)

H5 - Hardy in most places throughout the UK even in severe winters (-15 to -10)

H6 - Hardy in all of UK and northern Europe (-20 to -15)

H7 - Hardy in the severest European continental climates (< -20)

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and you can always find out more information from our website: www.bwgc.org.uk

and always remember whatever the weather

ENJOY YOUR GARDENING!!