

Allotment News



A regular newsletter for allotment holders in Welwyn Hatfield

Autumn 2015

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Gardening on the Menu

Last month on the evening of 24th September, Martin Fish, and his wife Jill came all the way down from North Yorkshire to speak to 75 of us about making the most of the produce from our plots.

Martin, a horticultural journalist and an accredited RHS judge, covered a range of fruit and veg, pests and diseases, and storage methods in his presentation. He advised drying off potatoes in the sun for a few hours to set the skin, before placing them in paper or hessian sacks in a cool dry place.



Jill has a cookery column in Garden News and had hours



of fun cooking with her children when they were young.

We were given lots of ideas such as grated beetroot and carrot salad (quite simply grated beetroot, grated carrot with orange zest) and chill powder (dry your chillies out, put them in the liquidizer to form a dry powder, then add garlic powder, oregano or cumin before putting it in a jar.

It was a lovely evening and there was even an opportunity to taste Jill's chilli jam and beetroot and chocolate cake (see recipe on back page) as well as to purchase some of her homemade produce.

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Water Harvesting by Roger Edgson

Be inspired by Roger, a tenant from Digswell Nursery, who has created his own rainwater harvesting system.

"I had decided that I wanted to see how practical it would be to generate a reasonable amount of water for use on my plot. After a bit of research finished up going for a structure which was made simply from 2" x 2" timber, a 2m x 2m corrugated plastic sheet for catching the water, some guttering and some water butts.

Although my limited research suggested that it should be possible to collect a decent amount of water, I was still a bit skeptical over the quantity being quoted. However I have to say that I have been pleasantly surprised.

This month was the first time since I put in the system that I have had to start using water from a site tank, so that is about two and a half growing seasons where I have only used rainwater.



Pretty impressive I think.

Having got out of the habit of carrying cans I really found it a chore when I did eventually run out of rainwater and had to start lugging watering cans from the tank again. I guess for some plot holders who are maybe a bit less physically able it must be a real challenge having to cart water from a tank all the time.

Probably the key thing that I have learnt in this is that you need to ensure that you have enough storage containers to collect all the rainwater that falls in the wetter, out of growing season months so that when you start

needing it in the spring you have plenty. I finished up with two large and four medium sized butts all of which were full at one time.

Anyway, the main reason for this update is to give encouragement to plot holders who are thinking about doing something similar.

With a bit of time and a modest amount of money you can make watering, one of our key tasks, much less of a chore. At the same time you can make a contribution to using less treated water, something we are all going to have to do in the future."

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Improvements at Harwood Hill

A new housing development in Sherrards by the Welwyn Garden City Housing Association (WGCHA) means that our allotment garden at Harwood Hill will benefit.



The WGCHA purchased part of the garage site, adjacent to Harwood Hill Allotment, with plans to erect three new dwellings.

As part of their plans, the WGCHA will be installing a mains pipe to the allotment as well as an agricultural dipping trough. So the allotment will have mains water provision from the spring. The existing rainwater harvesting system will be

moved to another site, so even more tenants can benefit.

The WGCHA will be installing a new closed wooden panel fence along the boundary to the allotment garden, making the site secure for the first time. Prior to erecting the fence, the WCGHA has also kindly agreed to clear

a mound of earth along the boundary of the allotment site, which has undoubtedly been there for decades.

The clearing of the earth will create more space which can either be used to create a new plot or extend existing plots on the site. When the work is done it will be decided.

Speedy New Allotment Tenants

We have had the pleasure of witnessing many speedy new tenants this year – taking on very overgrown and uncultivated plots, to completely turning them around in the space of just a few months.

Reports from Deerswood and Moneyhole show the rest of us mortals what can be done! (Pictured - Mr Cox at Moneyhole at the start of the season 2015.)



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National Allotment Week



We ran social media campaign during National Allotment week in August to engage the public and promote our allotment sites and allotment gardening.

We reached 7,324 people during the campaign and 224 people engaged by clicking, liking or sharing posts. Those of you have liked the Council webpage and follow us



on twitter might have seen the posts. To keep up to date with Council news, like our facebook page: www.facebook.com/welwynhatfield@WelhatCouncil and/or follow us on [Twitter@WelhatCouncil](https://twitter.com/WelhatCouncil).

Allotment Pictures 2015



Perfectly prepared for the growing season at The Pastures on 14th May 2015.



Giant poppies planted by tenants in the entrance to Briars Wood Organic Site.



Borage, hardy geranium, lavender and penstemon attracting the bees and butterflies at Moneyhole.



Jobs to be getting on with

As if there weren't enough jobs to do in our own homes, having an allotment generates jobs of its own! Much of the work carried out now will save twice as much time when spring arrives.

October

- Check that your plot boundary pathways (at least 50cm wide) are well maintained and free from obstructions. This will ensure that other tenants can use the pathways, and neighbouring properties can maintain their boundaries.
- Harvest or protect crops that may be susceptible to frost.
- Clear away debris from summer crops, place on compost heap to prevent the harbouring of diseases.
- Harvest pumpkins for Halloween, place unripe tomatoes in a drawer to complete their ripening.
- Lift remaining main crop potatoes and harvest the last of the peas runner beans, celeriac and lettuce.
- Sow winter lettuce and winter hardy peas and

broad beans and they will spring into life as the weather warms up in the spring.

- Plant spring cabbage, garlic and autumn onion sets.
- Prune out old growth in fruit bushes
- Plant out any new fruit trees, bushes or canes.



November

- Transplant autumn sown lettuces to grow under cloches.
- Start winter digging on clay soils before it becomes too wet and heavy to work. Let the winter frosts break the soil down for you.
- Cover the compost heap,

ensuring it remains moist but not saturated during the winter months.

- Plan crop rotation for next year, to lower the risk of a buildup of disease.
- Propagate rhubarb crowns by lifting and dividing them in to smaller pieces.
- Start to harvest winter cabbage, Brussels sprouts, leeks and parsnips. Wait until after a frost for the parsnips because the chilling effect turns the starches into sugars and this gives them their natural sweetness.

December

- Stake Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli plants and drag soil up around the base of the plants to give them extra support.
- Check over tools and clean and wipe down all wooden handles with linseed oil.
- Take time to reflect on your successes this year and to consider what went wrong with some crops.

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TopTip



Don't wait until the New Year to dig your plot. Make the most of the long days until the end of British Summer Time at the end of this month and also November to get your winter digging done before the New Year. Keep removing weeds as they continue to grow during Autumn.

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Please contact us if you would like to contribute to the next edition of Allotment News.

Recipe – Chocolate & Beetroot Cake

Jill Fish gave us the recipe for this lovely moist cake. It takes about one and half hours and makes a 2lb loaf cake.



Ingredients

- 30g (1oz) cocoa powder
- 180g (6oz) plain flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 225g (8oz) caster sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 225g (8oz) beetroot, boiled till tender
- 200ml (7floc) corn oil
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 3 eggs beaten
- 100g (4oz) plain chocolate, chopped small.

Method

1. Grease and line a 2lb (900g) loaf tin.
2. Sieve the flour, baking powder, salt and cocoa powder together into a large bowl and sieve in sugar and chocolate.
3. Peel the cold boiled beetroot and puree in food processor or grate finely, put into a bowl and add the oil, eggs and vanilla essence, beating well.
4. Make a well in center of dry ingredient and pour in beetroot mixture. Fold in slowly making sure everything is incorporated.
5. Pour batter into loaf tin and pop in over at 180c/fan160/350f/gas4 for about hour to 1 1/4 hours. Or put into muffin cases and cook for about 25 minutes.
6. Turn out onto wire rack to cool and sprinkle with icing sugar and serve with dollop of crème fraiche.

Putting people first.

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