

Allotment News



A regular newsletter for allotment holders in Welwyn Hatfield

Autumn 2013

Inside this issue

Page 2 National Allotment
Week and Hatfield
Farmers Market

Page 2 Compost bin offer

Page 3 Planning Your Plot

Page 3 Allotment Budget
Spend April 2012-April
2012

Page 4 Book Review

Page 5 Exotic Crops – Did you
Know?

Page 6 Change4Life

Page 7 Wood Wardens

Page 7 What's on at Mill
Green Museum

Page 8 Recipe Swiss Chard &
Onion Quiche

Preserve Your Produce!

Our evening allotment talk in April this year was presented by Rosemary Jameson, or Rosie, who inspired us to preserve anything from squashes to raspberries.

Rosie is the founder of the Guild of Jam and Preserve Makers and writes for several magazines about preserving.



For those who came we hope you enjoyed the evening and the takeaway goodie bag of Rosies' homemade mustard and oil. For those of you who missed it, here are some interesting points that we picked up: The three key preserving ingredients are vinegar, sugar or salt. Many preserving recipes do not require hours of boiling fruit and require only minutes of your time. The possibilities really are endless when it comes to preserving your harvest.

Rosie gives many talks and has a blog, to find out more visit www.rosiemakesjam.com.

www.welhat.gov.uk

**WELWYN
HATFIELD**
BOROUGH COUNCIL





Market Stall creates interest in Hatfield allotments

During National Allotment Week in August we had a stall at Hatfield Farmers Market promoting allotment gardening and our vacant plots in Hatfield.

National Allotment Week is the idea of the National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG); to encourage allotment providers to promote allotments.

Our stall had information on our Hatfield allotments and a lucky dip with prizes and displays of fresh allotment produce. We also gave away pots of compost with seeds to first timers and children to get them started growing right away.

Traditionally we have less demand for allotments in



Hatfield. Six residents signed up to be added to the waiting list in Hatfield on the day which was deemed a fair success.

A big thank you to those tenants who came along to speak to the public and

who brought fresh produce along to display. It was really great to have your help.

Next year National Allotment week is 4th-10th August, watch this space for our next event.

Buy one get one half price!



WasteAware have a great offer on compost bins – buy one get one half price!

Made from recycled plastic and supplied with black side hatch, the Compost Converters are available in two sizes, the Compact 220 litre



for £16.98 and the Giant 330 litre for £19.98. Call **0844 571 4444** or visit <http://www.herts.getcomposting.com>.



Planning your Plot

If you have just taken on renting a plot from the Council or are keen to adopt a more strategic approach to your growing, then you might want to consider crop rotation and the type of soil that you are working with.

Planning is important

The time of year determines which crops can be planted, if any, hence the need to plan. As each section is cleared and completed, manures and fertilizers can be added in readiness for a subsequent crop. There is a need to "rotate" crops just as there is a need to establish some "permanent" areas, where

for example, you could plant soft fruiting shrubs or dwarf fruit trees.

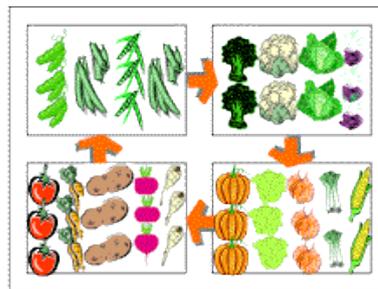
Crop Rotation

There are many different rotation systems that you can adopt, and you can be certain that adopting one will help prevent soil-borne diseases building up as you are not growing the same of

nutrients in the soil.

The four main groups are potatoes, legumes (beans crop on the same piece of ground each year. It also helps to make the best use and peas), brassicas (cabbage and broccoli) and roots (carrots and parsnip for example). Anything that doesn't fit into these groups can be fitted into any area.

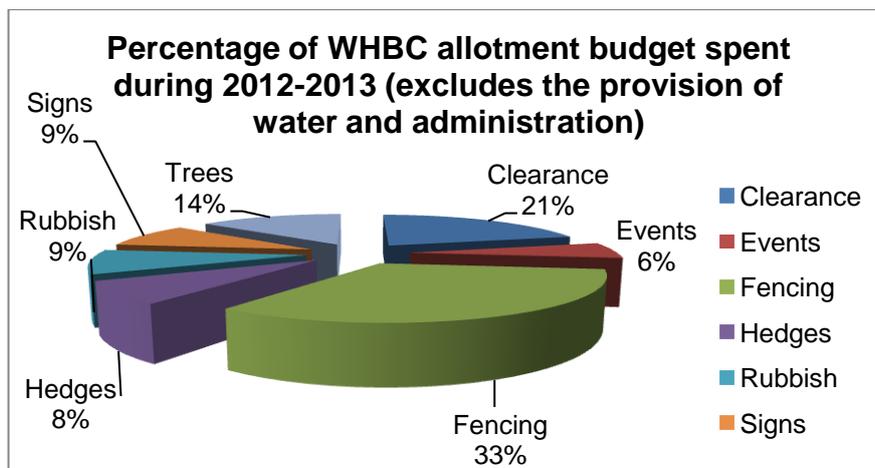
4 Year Rotation



Soil Type

Carry out a pH test to ascertain if your soil is alkaline or acid. If on the acidic side apply garden lime prior to planting out brassicas as they prefer it.

Allotment Budget Expenditure



With 46 sites to look after, the Council has a difficult job of stretching the small allotment budget to not only maintain our sites but also improve them as well.

In comparison to other years, the percentage of money spent on the different areas is very similar. Tenants can make a huge difference too by keeping their plots tidy.



Book Review by Oliver Waring

Would you like to grow tree chillis, cucamelons and electric daisies? If so this is the book for you.

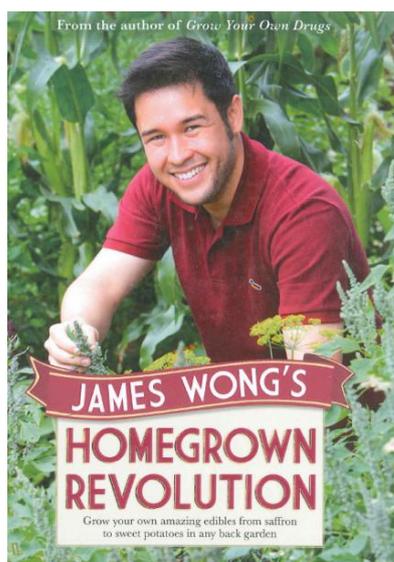
Homegrown Revolution is written by James Wong who is an ethnobotanist, television presenter and garden designer. He is best known for presenting the television series *Grow Your Own Drugs* and reporting on Countryfile.

James' book is a call to arms and he asks that you join the revolution and grow something different.

The book is enthusiastically written and encourages you to be adventurous with what you grow in your garden and on your allotment.

The first part of the book starts with the foundations of what you need to grow these exotic crops in the form of James' ten commandments.

Follow these commandments and you will have the soil and conditions you need for grow your exotic crops.



The main part of the book is encyclopedia of what to grow and how to grow them.

Admittedly some of the plants I already knew and are fairly common place such as globe artichokes

and various squashes.

Also, some of the plants shown you may not have thought were edible, such as hosta and day lilies.

For me the exciting bit is the exotic sounding fruit and veg that you can grown. Things like mooli, goji berries, skirret and shark's fin melon.

I would thoroughly recommend this book to those wanting to grow something more unusual on their plot. Who knows next year you maybe growing electric daisies along with your potatoes.

(This booked was borrowed free from WGC Library and is part of an extensive range of gardening books available from local libraries. For further details see below).

Libraries in the district

The following is a list of libraries in Welwyn and Hatfield.

Brookmans Park library: Bradmore Green, Brookmans Park, AL9 7QR. **Hatfield library:** Queensway, Hatfield,

AL10 0LT. **Welwyn library:** Civic Centre, Prospect Welwyn, AL6 9ER. **Woodhall library:** Cole Green Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3JA. **WGC City Central library:** The Campus, Welwyn Garden

City, AL8 6AJ. **Cuffley library:** Maynard Place, Station Road, Cuffley, Herts, EN6 4JA.

For further information and enquiries call 03001234049.



Exotic Crops – Did You Know?

Let's take a look at some of the exotic edible plants featured in James Wong book *Homegrown Revolution*.

Firstly you might be wondering what an **ethnobotanist** is. It is, like James Wong, "someone who studies or who is an expert in ethnobotany" which is the "the branch of botany concerned with the use of plants in folklore, religion, etc" (*Collins English Dictionary*).

Many of the plants featured in Mr Wongs book had medicinal uses in ancient cultures and are available to buy from seed.



Electric daisies (*Acmella oleracea*) is a perennial herb

with yellow flowers. Upon tasting, there is a burst of citrus quickly followed by a tingly or numbing sensation. This electric affect is produced by the plant's high levels of a pain-relieving agent called spilanthol, explaining its traditional use in treating toothache and sore throats

Skirret (*Sium sisarum*) is a perennial which has a cluster of white roots, similar in taste to sweet potatoes.



Chinese in origin, it grows well in this country, being resistant to cold and diseases. It can look attractive in borders, growing up to a meter tall with small white blossoms.

Sharks fin melon (*Cucurbita ficifolia*) got this particular name as when cooked the flesh of the fruit is similar to shark fin soup served in China!

The fruit, flower leaves and shoots are all edible.



Mooli, or more commonly known as daikon, Japanese radish or white radish, is a mild flavoured radish and resembles a parsnip when harvested in midsummer.

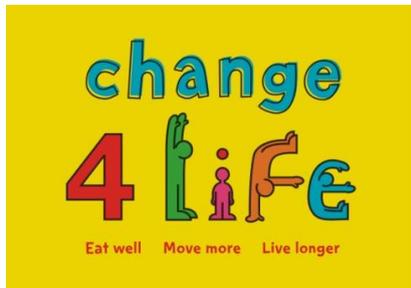


Goji berries (*Lycium barbarum*) is a deciduous fruiting shrub and apparently are easy to grow in this country and can even be grown in pots. Today, the berries are a well known "super food", being immune and mood boosting, antibacterial and full of essential nutrients.



Change4Life by Sandra Hone, Environmental Health

Growing your own is one of the important messages being promoted through Change4Life, the public health campaign across England that is encouraging everyone keep at a healthy weight.



The benefits of home grown food do not need selling to a healthy allotment holder as you are there already. However 1 in 4 adults and children in Britain are overweight or obese and reversing this trend will mean a much healthier and longer life, over a lifetime for our community, if we can share our food growing skills and knowledge to a wider audience.

The Council is partner with all the local children's centres running a Change4Life cooking

project to encourage parents to prepare and cook healthy meals for under five year olds.

It will not come as a surprise that some families do not make the best use of fresh vegetables that they could. They often do not know how to prepare and cook them well or fully understand the financial benefits, being low cost as opposed to buying a pre prepared meal from a supermarket.



This year as part of our project we gave away 100 packs of lettuce seeds donated by the RHS, a pot and compost so families could have a go at growing at home (on a windowsill if necessary). We recently heard of a scheme "planting up pizza" in a hanging

basket for children to take home. If you are mystified the hanging basket includes a tomato plant, basil, chives and a recipe!

Its bright ideas like the pizza basket, linking growing and cooking and making them easy for people to try, that could help people make a "change for life".

So here is the challenge for the dark days of winter: have you any bright ideas that we could take up locally that would encourage more people to both try growing their own but also cook using more fresh produce? Low cost and easy to do, just as a start. We'd love to hear from you and if we can, we will try to make the best one happen in 2014. Please contact us (see back cover for contact details).

You can also join Change4Life for free and will receive information on new activities, apps and offers and campaigns. Just visit <http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/change-for-life.aspx>.



Other council news.....

What's on at Mill Green Museum

As well as ongoing exhibitions at Mill Green Museum, here are the key upcoming events.

A Christmas Floristry Workshop

Learn how to make a traditional personalised door wreath. Materials supplied. Saturday 7th December, 10am-1pm. £42.00 per person, refreshments included. Booking essential.

Meet the Butcher

Local butcher reveals his knowledge on the theme of gammon and raised pies. Monday 9th December, 7pm-9am. £10 per person, Booking essential.

A Victorian Christmas Kitchen

Explore the origins of some traditional Christmas customs and foods. 19th November – 12th January 2014, Tuesday-Thursday 10am-5pm and Sundays and Bank Holidays 2-5pm.

Victorian Christmas Fair

There will be Victorian street sellers, commercial stalls, children's fun activities, storytelling, games and a Grotto. Hot Victorian street food will be available as well as Mulled Wine. Carols around the Christmas Tree at 4pm. Sunday 1st December 2pm-5pm. £2.50 Adults, £2 per child over 2 years. Grotto

entry £3 per child.

New Year Wassial Event

This traditional Twelfth Night ceremony is re-enacted in the beautiful grounds of Mill Green Mill and Museum and promises to dispel the winter blues after a festive Christmas. Sunday 5th January 2pm - 5pm. £3 per Adult, £2 per Child over 3 years.

For further information and enquiries about current events and exhibitions contact: **Mill Green Museum & Mill, Mill Green, Hatfield, Herts. AL9 5PD. Tel: 01707 357850. Email: museum@welhat.gov.uk**

Conservation Volunteering?

Have you got time to spare and are happy to work outdoors? Are you reasonably fit and healthy and interested in wildlife? Then why not become a green volunteer?

Each of our seven Local Nature Reserves has a Friends Group working with

the Councils' Landscape & Ecology team helping to manage the Council's most important wildlife areas.

Their work includes tree planting, hedge laying, litter clearance, wildlife surveys, path maintenance, building stiles, scrub management, leading walks and coppicing.

Working as a 'green' volunteer helps you stay fit, find a new interest and meet new like-minded friends. Tools are provided and training is given to those who wish to lead tasks or be a first-aider.

Contact the Landscape & Ecology Officer for more info. on 01707 357418.



TopTip



Now is the time to dig over your allotment so the soil can break down over winter. Give your compost a stir and clear out any unused materials from your shed and plot. You could also start thinking about what you would like to grow next year. When ready order your seeds and don't forget to order some exotic herb, fruit and vegetable seeds and join James Wongs' Homegrown Revolution!

Contact

Helen Sharpe
Landscape & Ecology
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Herts AL8 6AE

Tel: 01707 357329
Fax: 01707 357 375
Email: h.sharpe@welhat.gov.uk
Web: www.welhat.gov.uk/allotments



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

Recipe – Swiss Chard & Onion Quiche

Ingredients

- Pastry: 500g all-butter shortcrust pastry (make your own or buy Jus-Rol or Saxby's)
- Butter
- 3 medium onions, finely sliced
- 250g Swiss chard
- 4 eggs
- 142ml double cream
- 75g Gruyère, grated
- 2 tbsp parmesan, grated



Method

1. Heat the oven to 190C/fan 170C/gas 5. Roll out the pastry to a £1-coin thickness and line a 23cm, loose-based tart tin. Line with a circle of baking paper and fill with baking beans. Cook for 10 minutes then take out the beans and paper and cook for another 10 minutes. Turn the oven down to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4.
2. Heat a knob of butter in a pan and cook the onions until completely softened. Add the Swiss chard stalks first and cook for 3 minutes then add the leaves and keep cooking until tender. Season and cool.
3. Mix together the eggs, cream and cheeses and season well. Spread the chard and onion over the base of the tart and pour the egg mix over.
4. Cook for 20-30 minutes until the filling is just set.
Serves 4-6. **(Source: BBC Good Food)**

Putting people first.

**WELWYN
HATFIELD**
BOROUGH COUNCIL

