

SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

1/2003

A happy and peaceful 2003 to you all. The new years seeds have arrived, the manure and compost is being spread, plans are being made for planting. We have three contributions to this newsletter, to help you decide what to grow. Peter Block gives us his valuable advice on sweet Peas, Daniel and Kylie Bartlett write enthusiastically about Companion Planting and its benefits. We are also lucky enough to have Patrick Stileman's expert opinions on tree pruning.

I am sure we all miss the greater physical activity of summer months, but there is no better place to be in Berkhamsted on a cold, sunny winter's day, than Sunnyside. Several stalwarts helped out on the January Clearance day in crisp winter sunshine. Hot soup and sausage rolls were comforting sustenance after a morning of bramble clearance to help tenants on Sunnyside New – all good for the body and mind! So why don't you come and join us on Saturday 8th February or Saturday 8th March and feel the benefit.

We welcome our new Chairman, Bruce Jones, who was elected into office at the AGM. We all hope he will enjoy his new responsibilities, and we promise him as much support as possible.

Since our last issue, all Allotment holders have been saddened to hear of the death of Ken Harbord, who quietly contributed to the environment of Sunnyside. We shall miss him very much. Patrick writes about Ken on the back page.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 30TH NOVEMBER 2002

This took place in the Training Centre, with kind permission of Sunnyside Rural Trust. Ted Dyer took the Chair, in the absence of Peter Chapman who had resigned in the middle of the year. Ted expressed his thanks to Peter for the work he had done, on behalf of us all.

He stressed the achievements of the Society:

1. New plot holders had taken on those gardens which volunteers had cleared.
2. A second Hazel Coppice had been planted for Jubilee year and seemed to be growing well.
3. The Open Day had been very successful, resulting in extra tenancies and some additional funds.

The meeting decided:

- a) To hold another open day in late September to show produce.
- b) Subscriptions should remain at £2.00 per annum (please note: all subscribers have the advantage of being able to participate in the Seed Scheme and Hire Shop discount scheme).
- c) Ted Dyer and Angela Wheeldon will continue as our Representatives on the Council Allotment Committee.
- d) Bruce Jones was elected as Chairman, Ted Dyer as Vice Chairman.
- e) The Committee was elected en bloc, with Daniel Bartlett, an additional member.
- f) A tree will be planted in Ken Harbord's memory and a plaque will be inscribed. Patrick Stileman will be the new Warden of Birchnell's Copse.

TOILET FACILITIES

Toilets are available at SRT when then the building is open. An application has been made to build one for ourselves and proposed costings have been submitted to the Council.

NEIGHBOURHOOD ALLOTMENT WATCH

The meeting in October was quite well attended. The Society has formally organised an Allotment Watch and the Council has been approached to pay for signs. Coding sessions have been arranged to name tools and provide coding stickers for the outside of sheds.

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES

This year, invitations to join us at our Christmas Party were sent to holders on the other sites, and we were delighted to see them at Sunnyside Old on 22nd December. The sun shone and the mulled wine flowed and the Christmas spirit sparkled. Thank you very much to the organisers.

ALLOTMENT REGENERATION INITIATIVE

A recent upsurge in interest in Allotments has encouraged the Government to recognise their potential and now many Local Authorities are producing Allotment strategies. This initiative (ARI) aims to get more people growing, both as individual holders and through Community projects. Money will be provided for five pilot projects to regenerate sites which have fallen into partial disuse.

So by our efforts at Sunnyside to clear our unused sites, and positively seek new holders, we are already doing our bit towards this new initiative.

CLEARANCE DAYS

Saturday February 8th from 10.30am onwards
and Saturday March 8th from 10.30 am onwards

OPEN DAYS

Saturday 28th June (followed by the Barbecue)
and Saturday 27th September

TENANCY CHANGES

IN

Sunnyside Rural Trust will now be the biggest holder on Sunnyside Old. Thirty-six gardens from C12 onwards have been rented out, together with C9, 11, 17.

Peter Allder C3

New site

Lynne Bennett 30/31
SRT 79/80/81

OUT

New site

Edwina Wilkes 23

Old site

Susan Holmes A44
Rose Scarborough A41

THANK YOU

Ted Dyer would like to thank everyone who generously contributed towards a new lawn mower, to replace the one of his stolen late last year. The new mower will be stored off-site until it has been security coded.

COMPANION PLANTING

By Daniel & Kylie Bartlett

I've heard a lot about companion planting over the years, everybody knows about sticking onions and carrots together and placing marigolds near tomatoes and I believe roses should be planted at the end of rows of grapes, but perhaps that's just to make them look pretty. Anyway, this year Kylie and I (i.e. Kylie) decided to give it a bit of a go.

Companion cropping can be described as the establishment of two or more plant species in close proximity so that some benefit is derived, like pest control or higher yield. It is related to intercropping and bio-diversity which brings its own benefits. At the other extreme, single crops are notoriously susceptible to pests and disease (think potato famine).

We are starting with the onions as we know they work so they'll be a centrepiece of our companioning strategy. We were also going through the seed catalogues and found pyrethrum – it must be useful for something as it's used in organic pesticides so we bought a packet of that and I'm sure we've got marigold seeds somewhere too. I've had a bit of a scout around the net and there's plenty there but mostly it ends up with a table such as the one below.

The theory is that companion plants either:

- lure pests away
- fix nitrogen for the other plants
- emit chemicals to keep pests away
- physically confuse or protect from pests
- provide protection from sun and wind
- create a habitat for beneficial predators
- provide diversity as most pests target a limited number of plant species (i.e. they can't eat them all)

Basically I'll let you know how it's going or if we've given up as the year progresses. Feel free to drop by B31 to have a chat – any companionly suggestions will be gratefully taken on board.



| COMPANION PLANTING CHART FOR HOME & MARKET GARDENING | | |
|--|---|--|
| (compiled from traditional literature on companion planting) | | |
| CROP | COMPANIONS | INCOMPATIBLE |
| Beans | Most Vegetables & Herbs | |
| Beans, Pole | Corn, Summer Savory, Radish | Onion, Beets, Kohlrabi, |
| Sunflower | | |
| Cabbage Family | Aromatic Herbs, Celery, Beets, Onion Family, Tomato, Camomile, Spinach, Chard | Dill, Strawberries, Pole Beans, |
| Carrots | English Pea, Lettuce, Rosemary, Onion Family, Sage, Tomato | Dill |
| Corn | Potato, Beans, English Pea, Pumpkin, Cucumber, Squash | Potato |
| Cucumber | Beans, Corn, English Pea, Sunflowers, Radish | Potato, Aromatic Herbs |
| Lettuce | Carrot, Radish, Strawberry, Cucumber | |
| Onion Family | Beets, Carrot, Lettuce, Cabbage Family, Summer Savory | Beans, English Peas |
| Pea, English | Carrots, Radish, Turnip, Cucumber, Corn, Beans | Onion Family, Gladiolus, Potato |
| Potato | Beans, Corn, Cabbage Family, Marigolds, Horseradish | Pumpkin, Squash, Tomato, Cucumber, Sunflower |
| Pumpkins | Corn, Marigold | Potato |
| Radish | English Pea, Nasturtium, Lettuce, Cucumber | Hyssop |
| Spinach | Strawberry, Faba Bean | |
| Tomato | Onion Family, Nasturtium, Marigold, Asparagus, Carrot, Parsley, Cucumber | Potato, Fennel, Cabbage Family |
| Turnip | English Pea | Potato |

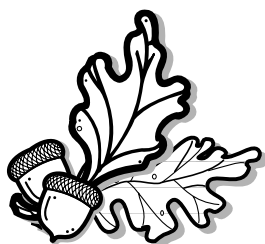
TREE PRUNING. WHEN & WHY IT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

By Patrick Stileman

I get tired of being told by people that the mature trees in their garden need lopping, topping, pollarding, trimming down etc, and being asked to provide them with a quotation for carrying out general assault to their beautiful trees. On questioning their motives, the usual responses include; the trees haven't been cut for a long time, they cast too much shade, or even that they drop all their leaves in the autumn!

Trees are not like roses, which require frequent and regular pruning. Heavy pruning will invariably cause damage to the tree, which may not recover from the work. Clearly pruning is valid and warranted in a number of situations, but far too many trees are excessively and needlessly cut. Our landscape is being systematically denuded by people allowing their trees, which can provide amenity for many people, to be heavily pruned for misguided, short term reasons.

Trees should not be unnecessarily pruned. Their beauty can be decreased, and damage can be caused. Pruning can provide sites for infections to enter the tree, such as decay fungi and bacterial infections, which may ultimately render the tree unstable. Another problem which is often associated with pruning, is the re-growth. Around cut branch ends, clusters of new shoots tend to develop which are unsightly, and grow far more vigorously than usual twig extension growth. This establishes the need for future pruning, on a regular basis, with all the associated problems described above, not to mention the financial implications.

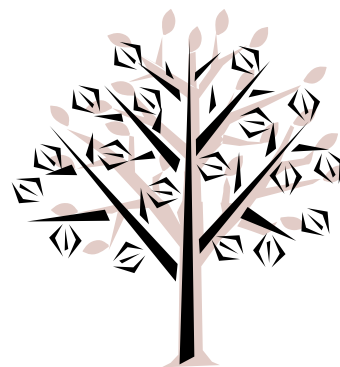


But there are occasions when pruning is necessary, and the benefits achieved will outweigh any negative effects on the tree. The consideration of tree safety is an important one, and tree owners have a legal duty of care to do what is reasonable to ensure that their trees are not dangerous.

Clearly there is ambiguity here, as no tree can be guaranteed safe however apparently secure its structure is. Strong winds can cause damage to the healthiest of trees. A qualified arboriculturalist however should be able to identify many weaknesses within the tree structure, by reading its 'body language'. Trees may have imbalanced crowns, heavy lateral branches, weak branch unions, internal fractures, decayed limbs, trunks, butts or roots, large quantities of dead wood or other insecure branches. Pruning may bring the trees to an acceptable level of safety. or removal may be the only valid option.

I have been asked by the editor to assess how much damage to trees could have been avoided during the storm of October 2002. Certainly some of the call out work that we attended to could have been predicted had an expert been called in prior to the event. These

included trees with decayed roots and butts being blown over, and limbs with very tight forks breaking out of the trees. It was interesting however that the majority (perhaps 60-70%) of the damage was caused to mature oak trees which would have appeared to be in good condition before the storm. Small to large limbs within the crown fractured, and either broke out of the tree altogether, or remained lodged within the tree. Why this should affect oak, which I would assess to be one of the stronger trees above other species is interesting. It may be that oaks, unlike others were very late in losing their leaves last autumn, and still had their leaves during the storm, which gave them an increased wind resistance.



Pruning can be useful in reducing nuisance when trees cast heavy shade. If they have crowded crowns, with numerous branches, these can be thinned out by up to 30%. This improves light levels, while maintaining a natural crown profile. Low branches, or branches close to or touching buildings can be removed in order to reduce nuisance.

Many of the nuisance problems that trees are perceived to cause, are created by fundamental errors of planning. Unsuitable tree species maybe planted too close to buildings, or unsuitable buildings are put too close to trees. This invariably leads to the tree owners having their trees topped, lopped or heavily reduced. The best solution may be to remove the tree, and re-plant with something more suitable instead. It is amazing how many young cedars, and Christmas trees, you see in tiny gardens very close to buildings. Trees need space.

Tree owners should consider having their trees assessed by an expert, if they are taking their responsibilities as a tree owner seriously. Clearly, this is more important where trees have the potential to do more damage should they fail. A tree with large dead branches may not be a problem, if at the end of a back garden, and very few people ever go close to it. Keeping its dead wood would be worth considering in order to benefit wildlife. The same tree however close to a road would clearly need more frequent inspections, and remedial work taken where necessary. Local Authorities should be able to recommend suitably qualified, local arboriculturalists, or the Arboricultural Association has a list of approved contractors and consultants.

I strongly believe that people should be less eager to prune, pollard, top, hack their trees. People need to love the beauty of natural looking trees, even if it does mean the loss of some light and leaves on the lawn. Love your trees, love your leaves. Get a compost heap.

SWEET PEAS

by Peter Block

My father grew sweet peas, and I remember the ritual of nicking the seed and then soaking them in water overnight before sowing them individually in 5 inch long tubes made from rolled up newspaper. Unwins nowadays advise not to nick and not to soak, so I don't, but I've noticed any great difference – there are still a few varieties that are very shy about germinating.

The books say that Autumn is the best time too sow Sweet peas and then over winter when in a cold frame before planting out in April. I've tried this for the past two years, sowing at the beginning of October, and found them to flower earlier, and to keep going for as long as spring grown seed.

I used to use sweet pea tubes, but now sow five seeds around the edge of a 5 inch pot. A year ago, mice had most of the seed, then small slugs devoured the few shoots that did appear. This year touch wood, the pests have gone elsewhere.

When it comes to planting out, each little plant is carefully unravelled; the roots can be a foot long. A deep slit is made in a well-manured trench and each plant dropped in, 3 to the foot, and the roots covered. This is best done when the soil is moist but not wet.

For those who have not sown theirs yet, all is not lost – most people sow in the Spring, anyway. Seed can be started indoors in February and March, gradually hardened off, and planted out in May. Spring grown Sweet Peas need to have their tips removed when they've made three pairs of leaves.

I grow mine up 2 metre high bean netting. It is vital to remove all spent blooms, because if they form pea pods, the plants think their job is over and die off rapidly. When they reach the top, they can be reduced in height by a quarter and after a week there's a new flowering; this cutting back can be repeated to prolong flowering into September.

My father used to remove side shoots and the tendrils, but it's very time consuming – only worth doing if you want to exhibit blooms. If you want lots of flowers on the plant and good length stems to pick, it's important to keep the roots moist at all times. Pollen beetles can be troublesome; they don't do any harm – just look unsightly.

There are many varieties, short to tall, and differing shapes of flower. The showiest often have no smell. There are several old fashioned varieties available, with shorter stems and smaller flowers and a magnificent perfume when you pass by.

Sweet Peas when cut last only a few days, but bring a lot of joy. They are something you can't buy in a shop.

FROM THE ALLOTMENT HOLDERS GUIDE

Advice when persuading others to take up a plot.

"It is good for your peace of mind as well as your body. It can relieve stress and help bring a sense of achievement" – all this and so cheap!



Dr Ken Harbord

In November 2002, Dr Ken Harbord sadly passed away, after fighting ill health for most of the summer. Ken was a keen allotment and Committee

member with a passion for nature. He will be remembered for his tremendous sense of humour and his insistence on helping others wherever he was able. Ken was the tenant of both allotments which had been planted with hazel coppice, and did more maintenance work to these sites than anyone else, with regular strimming to keep the weeds under control. Ken was also warden of Birchnells Copse, the small area of woodland above Sunnyside New. Here he did plenty of work, quietly, alone, without wanting any recognition for his efforts.

One of his policies in the woodland was to control sycamores, which are starting to take over. I was horrified to find out that he'd been felling trees which were leaning over the road and power lines by climbing the trees to install a rope then cutting them from the ground with a blunt old bow saw. When the tree was on the brink, he'd pull the rope and somehow manage to get the trees back into the woodland! Ken was a strong character, and his enthusiasm and positive outlook on life will be greatly missed.