



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

2/2004

It's planting time again! Seeds are being sorted, early potatoes are in their furrows, broad beans are showing their green tips. While thinking about what I should grow this year, I have, by chance, been reading a few books about Africa and have become fascinated with the fundamental importance of the seed in African life. Possession of a few seeds can be the difference between life and death. They can bring hope in the constant battle against poverty and starvation. With this realisation in mind, I was interested to read of a charity called Operation Sunshine – this charity needs seeds of onions, carrots, cabbages, beans, tomatoes, etc, either surplus from packets or from our own crops. They are then sorted and sent to those in need in Zimbabwe. If anyone is interested in supporting this scheme, I can supply further information.

Meanwhile in productive Sunnyside, the popularity of gardening grows. Sunnyside Old has no plots to let at present and the hard work on Clearance Days on Sunnyside New has prepared more for prospective tenants. But we have a responsibility towards the land that we rent and some concerns are voiced below about the untidiness and inactivity on some plots.

We look ahead to a spring and summer of rewarding gardening.

Strategy for Berkhamsted Allotments – update

Discussions with the Allotment Management Team have lead to the possibility of decisions about the management of the Berkhamsted allotments being delegated to a new Berkhamsted Allotment Association. The new association would comprise allotment tenants representing Butts Meadow, Dellfield and Sunnyside allotments. The Council would continue to grant the individual tenancies and to collect the rents, but having agreed the policies (strategy) to be followed and fixed the budget, the new association would be empowered to make the decisions necessary to ensure that the allotments flourish. The proposals for this new management structure are to be considered by the full Council in May.

Sunnyside Questionnaire

Attached to this newsletter is a questionnaire. It's purpose is to look for your talents and seek your help in our various activities. An early reply would be very much appreciated by Jenny, our secretary, who also points out that you could download the form from our website, if that would be easier.

Gardening by the movement of the Moon

This is evidently an ancient tradition of gardening, followed by many gardeners on the continent and is one of the important practices of biodynamic gardening. It is a belief that natural forces are effective and add an extra dimension to organic gardening. It seems to be that the movement of the moon is charted on its path in front of

the different constellations of earth, water, light and warmth and the best time to sow and plant is worked out from this calendar, for example root crops would be planted on an 'earth day' when the moon is in front of Taurus or a similar earth constellation, leaf plants would be sown when the moon is in front of a 'water' constellation like Pisces or Cancer, etc.

The moon has also an ascending and descending rhythm. When it is ascending, it is thought that the plant sap rises to the upper part of the plant and it is a good time for grafting or cutting. When it is descending, the sap is in the roots and it is a good time for transplanting.

Followers of this system claim bumper crops, free from disease and if you are interested you could obtain a calendar of Biodynamic Sowing, worked out by Maria Thun, available from the Biodynamic Agricultural Association (01453 759501).

Children at Sunnyside

We love to see children joining their parents on the allotments and enjoying the fresh air and open space which Sunnyside provides. But we must point out, for Health and Safety reasons, that children must be deterred from chasing about the paths and running across any allotments, other than their own. Some tenants have voiced their concern about the possibility of a serious accident, especially with the increased number of green-houses. We all have a responsibility to ensure that everyone can safely enjoy our open space at Sunnyside.



Gardeners' Clippings

Have you lost your black plastic compost bin? The recent high winds have deposited an empty bin on B43 – if it belongs to you, please contact Fiona on 874334.

Absent Tenants

A number of tenants have not been very active over the last year and their gardens show a lack of attention. It seems, therefore, to be appropriate to draw attention to the conditions of tenancy contained in the contract between tenants and the Town council as the landlord.

Paragraph 4 of the conditions of tenancy includes provision for the Council to terminate a tenancy with one month's notice if a tenant is not observing the rules affecting the allotment garden. Paragraph 5(a) of the Tenancy Agreement reads as follows:

'To keep the allotment garden clean and in good state of cultivation and fertility and in good condition.'

Tenants should also bear in mind the provisions of Paragraph 5(m) of the conditions of tenancy which reads as follows:

'On termination of the tenancy the allotment garden shall be handed back to the council in such condition as to comply with the requirements of these regulations.'

The Allotment Society does not wish to see tenants given notice for failure to comply with their conditions of tenancy, so it would be appreciated if the tenants concerned would tidy their plots.

It is not helpful to other tenants, who may have put in a lot of their time to keep their plots in reasonable shape, only to find the plot next door is neglected and causing a problem. Also, we do not wish visitors to Sunnyside Old to see unkempt gardens, when all plots are taken. So over to you, and we look forward to seeing all our tenants soon.

Sunnyside Church Car Park

The quotes received by the church were double the expected cost and the funds raised are insufficient to cover the full cost. The latest thinking is that the roadway could be done to provide additional car parking for ten cars. So far as the car park is concerned, the proposal is for wood chip to be used to provide a better surface, although this would need regular attention.

Railway Works Sunnyside New

When discussion last took place with a Balfour Beatty representative, it was established that an extension of the Licence period would be obtained to the end of March, and possibly to August. The Town Council has received the cheque for the March extension and further information is awaited. We took this opportunity to see if Balfour Beatty would assist us by widening the middle roadway using the material from the present work site and our request is receiving consideration.

They were reminded that the gateway needed renewing with a

9-foot wooden gate and a pedestrian wicket gate, and that they should restore the stretch of hedge grubbed out at the start of the works. They were also asked to renew the hinge post on the main gate on the Old side of Ivy House Lane. We shall see what happens in due course.

Assistance with Plot Clearance

Ian Hicks (mobile number 079467 96638) is prepared to make himself available to any tenant requiring his services. Any tenant needing Ian's help should contact him directly.

Rubbish Removal

Tenants are reminded that the past service for the removal of unwanted glass, metal and plastic is no longer available. It is therefore necessary for tenants to make their own arrangements for disposal of such items at the Council amenity tip in Northbridge Road.

Help!

Any volunteers for Butt's Meadow Clearance day on Saturday 15th May? For more information please ask at the Tea Hut (B15).

Dates for your diary

Sunnyside Open Day –
Saturday 26th June.

Butts Meadow Open Day –
Saturday 19th June.



Far left: A spot of lunch revives the team on the March clearance day.

Left: Getting to grips with the heap.

Our Compost Heap!

by Jenny Sippings & Clive Smith

Composting is very much in vogue these days, for ecological and environmental reasons, whereas a few decades ago it was the preserve of the traditional farmer and gardener who could not afford to dispose of masses of vegetation any other way, or could not afford to 'buy in' soil conditioners and fertilisers.

Apart from regularly composting horse manure the 'hot quick aerobic' way, we have also been building up a 'roving compost heap', also known as a 'cold' heap for the past 5 or more years. Recently, we needed to disassemble this heap, something Clive has been looking forward to for years!

Why? To find out how well it has worked, what has been produced and, specifically, what and how much has failed to break down. The result – about 2 cubic yards of what looks like quality dark friable loam, which just has to be a great soil conditioner and fertiliser too, such was the amazing variety of organic matter that has gone into it over the years.

Having scraped the heap's skin and most recent additions, we found the core of the heap, about 6 foot long and 3 foot high, to be incredibly weed free, despite having had just about everything we are told should not be composted added into it at some time or other – albeit having tried to kill it first under the heat of the sun!

The beauty of this method was that any weeds were very easy to remove, because of the lovely crumbly dry texture of the compost. A single dock, a few thistles and a couple of nettles were probably the worst. There was no bindweed at all, no twitch grass other than on the skimmed surface, but I would not dream of burning twitch or any other grasses anyway as they are just what you need to produce better loam than you could buy.

Another discovery! Instead of burning brassicas we piled them up and attacked them with a sharp spade or mattock to chop them into bits and bruise them before adding them to the pile. As no trace whatsoever of any over a couple of years old could be found it seems woody, fractious waste breaks down quite fast once you start the process off. Yes, it takes time, but then so does starting and managing fires which maybe outlawed soon anyway.

A roving heap is so called because as the height approaches 3 feet or so, you add new material one end creating a linear pile with an 'old' and 'new' end. New additions need keeping damp, particularly in the case of woody stems. To achieve this, the heap has had about 20 litres of kitchen slops chucked over the 'new' end weekly.

This 'cold heap' approach was adopted when we realised that burning damp sods, woody stems and pernicious weeds, was maybe a waste of organic matter, as well as a nuisance to others. Despite loving a

good flare up of old wood, brambles, etc a couple of times a year, we found that we were soon accruing several cubic feet of additional organic matter every year, so it was worth dedicating some space to it. Every spring, the previous year's additions have shrunk to half their original size. During seasonally wet weather and hot summers it has been covered with cardboard or carpets. Overall, I was surprised it was harder removing man-made detritus than any unrotted matter or weeds.

Some tips:

Good:

- coffee (nitrogen rich)
- all vegetable kitchen waste
- cooking water and tea
- annual and perennial weeds (if dried in the sun first)
- attacking the heap occasionally with a sharp spade, especially in midwinter when it is freezing

Bad:

- bleached tea bags (the paper does not break down)
- diseased vegetables

We also added the remains of two long rows of runner beans, smashed up with a sharp spade and piled up to rot over the winter – a small heap 18 inches high is the result.

Why burn this wonderful resource when it can be added to your cold heap in the spring?