



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

2/2005

This April newsletter always heralds the busiest time of the gardener's year. It is a time for optimism, ideas and visions of the new varieties and wonderful crops we plan to grow. Most of us have made a start, potatoes, onions and shallots are in and some seeds are emerging. We hope this is going to be a flourishing and productive season for every tenant. If you have not yet managed to tidy up and start growing we hope we will see you soon. Vacant plots are fast diminishing and it is good to see that gardening and growing vegetables is becoming such a popular activity.

You will read of the 'extra gardening activities' your committee plans for the summer. We hope that you will give them your support.

You will also read in this newsletter a very interesting article about globe artichokes by Spiros Taylor. He always has a most magnificent display of these wonderful sculptural plants, which are good to look at as well as delicious to eat. Hopefully, some of you will take advantage of his kind offer to share his seeds and give advice.

Subscriptions and Website

Our Secretary, Jenny Sippings, reports that many subscriptions have not yet been paid, and would be very grateful if you would pay up as soon as possible. You will need to do this in order to be able to take advantage of the Society's seed order with its very low prices.

We have a very attractive website with up-to-date information and gardening tips, so look at www.sunnysideallotments.org.uk and if you have an email address Jenny would be very pleased to receive it.

Her address is jenny@sunnysideallotments.org.uk

Security

Sadly, we had another break-in on the night of 8th April. The Tea Hut and a couple of other sheds had their locks forced and prised open but nothing appears to have been taken. The police were informed and came to the allotments.

We understand that Butts Meadow also had similar damage on the same night. We must obviously continue to take special care to keep our equipment as secure as possible.

Haul route on Plots 40 & 57 on Sunnyside New

This was originally proposed to provide a more accessible manure delivery point for those tenants in the middle of the site. It is under discussion again as the situation has changed since it was first suggested.

Firstly, there has been little enthusiasm or input from tenants on SS New. Secondly, many more plots are taken. SS Old is already full; we let 8 plots on SS New in 2004; so far in 2005 we have let another 8 plots on SS New. Your committee feels that taking 2 plots out of the remaining few vacant gardens for this purpose, can no longer be justified.

An alternative would be to consider using Plot 57 only for manure delivery, using the pathway

between the gardens for barrowing to individual plots. Please let Bruce Jones have your views before the next committee meeting at the beginning of May.

SUMMER DATES TO REMEMBER

Saturday 25 June – Sunnyside Allotment Society Barbecue

The annual barbecue for tenants, their families and friends will take place as usual at the Sunnyside Rural Trust training centre on Sunnyside Old.

As the event is not being combined with the Open Day this year (see below), we hope to start earlier for a more relaxed occasion for all. As usual tenants should bring their own food to cook on the barbecues provided. There will be more details nearer the event. Keep this date in your diary.

Saturday 13 August – Open Day.

This year we have decided to concentrate all our efforts into one Open Day. 13 August has been chosen to mark the end of National Allotments Week, now an established event in the gardening calendar. Hopefully there will be a wider variety of crops for visitors to see and we hope to combine it with other attractions.

We will be holding a Scarecrow competition (see back cover for details and entry form), so start planning now! There will be refreshments at the Tea Hut and on Plot 53 on Sunnyside New and we hope to hold other events in the Sunnyside Rural Trust Training Centre.

Apart from preparing your garden for the event, we will be calling on you for your help with preparations such as publicity, signage on site, grass cutting, providing food, produce and plants before the event, and help with refreshments on the day itself. We are looking forward to a very successful day.

Toilet

At last some real progress!

On 1 April (!) and without any prior warning, the Thames Water contractors appeared and made the connection between the main sewer running alongside the railway, and the toilet site on plot A15 Sunnyside Old.

The cost of the sewer connection has been met by Berkhamsted Town Council.

Despite all of this having happened much later than we had expected, and at the busiest time of the year, it is now down to us to build and fit out the toilet.

Fortunately we have the required skills among the gardeners at Sunnyside, and most of the materials to make it all happen over the next couple of months.

Renewal of Sunnyside Rural Trust Lease

Sunnyside Rural Trust's 5-year lease on the land they occupy on Sunnyside Old (the training building) and Sunnyside New came to an end on 31 March. The Trust and Berkhamsted Town Council have agreed that the lease should run on for a

further 3 months until the detail can be sorted out.

As it is statutory allotment land the Secretary of State has to decide whether the new leases should be granted, and whether for a further 5-year period, for which the Society has argued, or whether there should be a big jump to 14 years, as sought by the Town Council.

The National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardens have been closely involved, and we await the outcome.

The Globe Artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*)

By Spiros

Nomenclature and Historical Background

The globe artichoke is a member of the thistle family and has its origins in the Mediterranean countries. The name artichoke derives from the Northern Italian words *artiocco* and *articolos* the latter from *cocali* meaning a pine cone.

However, the word in Greek is *anginara* and according to Aegean legend, is derived from the name of a young girl called Cynara, who was seduced by Zeus, who was entranced and wanted to make her a goddess. She acquiesced at first, but later wanted to return to her mother. Zeus then became angry, threw her back to earth and transformed her into the plant we now know as the artichoke, which therefore has a divine essence.

Dr Bartolomeo Boldo (1576) said, "it has the virtue of provoking Venus for both men and women: for women making them more desirable, and helping the men who are in these matters rather tardy." So, an aphrodisiac!

Climate

Artichokes do best in frost-free coastal areas with cool, foggy summers, where the spring-like conditions during its growing period produce tender buds for an extended period. All the artichokes in the States are grown in California, where low temperatures, which can ruin the plant, are not a problem. Southern Italy also has large fields of artichokes.

Where frost may be expected, it is better to chop off the stalks in the autumn and lay mulch before the first frost appears.

It is not clear why there are not more artichokes grown in an island climate like Southern Britain.

(The allotments on Sunnyside provide we think 0.8% of the artichokes cultivated in the UK!)

The plants require a cool period (500–1300 hours of temperatures under 50°F (10°C) in order to flower. In the Mediterranean regions, e.g. Greece, the buds are ready in late March, early April. In Berkhamsted, the first crop usually appears in June, but the plants can keep on cropping throughout July.

Variety

I use the Italian and Greek seeds. An example of the seeds available in Italy, is *Carciofa Violetto di Romagna*. In Greece, there seems to be one main variety – *Artichoke, Anginara*. In the US hybrids have been developed which require less time at low temperature to flower (Imperial Star).

Soil

Plants can, apparently, be grown on a wide range of well-drained soils, and on gentle slopes as well as on flat areas. Hillsides I'm told may need more fertiliser. The plant is deep rooted and requires area for root development.

Irrigation and Fertilisation

Recommended rainfall during the production season is 15 inches. Usually the climate in Berkhamsted covers this, but watering is advisable in the summer to prevent the plant withering. Personally, I dig in manure before planting and once a year distribute ashes for potassium around the plant.

Cultivation

Once you have a plant, propagation is by division of side shoots, but if you don't have such a source, you need to start with seeds.

It is claimed that the plant can be grown as an annual from seed (seeding after frost in spring and harvesting in late summer/autumn). This is not always successful although it may be helped by soaking the seeds (4 weeks at a few degrees above freezing).

Even so, only a percentage of the plants will flower and crop. The safest way is to establish some plants and split them for expansion.

For transplanting, seeds are sown 2-3 feet apart and in rows 3-4 feet apart. For permanent beds, recommended spacing is 3-4 feet apart in rows and rows 6-10 feet apart. Thinking in metres, I keep them around 1 metre apart in each row and also the rows about 1 metre apart, but I take care to control expansion.

Expanding and generating new plants from crown divisions or side shoots is the normal method of propagation, and ensures the planting stock is maintained.

The easiest way is to detach a side shoot by digging down to the root and pulling away the bud (which is attached to the root) with the shoot from the mother plant. These buds, if left – as many will be – will, in the next season, expand the mother plant. No more than 4-5 should be left, and plants should be replaced every 3-4 years.

Harvesting, Handling and Storage

The buds should be harvested while compact. Where the climate is very mild, stems are also eaten, but at Sunnyside we confine ourselves to the buds, which can be stored under a wet towel for a day or two but, for long term preservation, it is better to strip the outer leaves (leaving the soft part at the base), remove the choke and freeze, after blanching for a couple of minutes. When cleaning the artichokes be sure to wear gloves and keep a bowl of water with lemon in to put the cleaned artichokes into. This part is time consuming

but provides a year-round supply of an exotic and (in the shops) expensive vegetable.

Recipes

The French (and the British) tend to boil the whole artichoke and dip each leaf into a dressing, but the flavour of the artichoke can be swamped, and an artichoke boiled in water is very bland. This approach probably stems from the fact that artichokes are expensive and you don't want to throw out all those outside leaves (and possibly don't want to spend the time preparing the artichoke heart). Where you have artichokes in abundance, it is the least appealing way of dealing with them.

In Greece, artichokes are stewed with carrots, shallots potatoes and dill. The addition of oil extracts the flavour, which appears to be oil rather than water soluble. Dill gives a lovely aromatic flavour. Another way is to cook them with peas.

In Italy, we have eaten wonderful pizzas with artichokes dominating the tops. The fields in the South make the crop abundant.

For other recipes, I have attached some websites with a range of combinations. We need to try some ourselves! We also need someone else to start a field to bring in the competitive element. I am available for seeds, for advice, and for demonstrations on how to split off the side shoots. Contact Ted to arrange a day.

References

1. www.whatscookingamerica.net/Artichoke.htm
see *All About Artichokes* by Linda Stradley, USA
Copyright TXS-900-517/2004
2. www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/specialty/globe.html
3. www.oregonstate.edu/Dept/NWREC/artichgl.html



SCARECROW COMPETITION/ Open Day 13 August, 2005

We have decided to run a scarecrow competition this year, because we thought it would be fun for tenants and their children to take part in; the scarecrows might keep the pigeons off your cabbages and will be an attraction for our visitors on Open Day.

There will be a prize for each class, which we hope the Mayor of Berkhamsted will present on Open Day itself.

Competition Guidelines

There will be 3 classes:

- a) Primary-aged children (up to Year 6)
- b) Secondary aged children (Year 7 upwards)
- c) Adults

There will be an entry fee of £1 per scarecrow. As well as the overall prize for each class, all children who enter will be presented with a certificate.

The scarecrows should be in place on your plot by the evening of **Thursday 11th August**, ready for judging on the following day. The judges' decision is final.

The scarecrows will be judged on the following criteria:

- they should be homemade (and your child's own work as far as possible);
- they should be fit for purpose;
- they should show imaginative use of materials, especially evidence of recycling;
- the scarecrow should be given a name which is displayed.



SCARECROW COMPETITION ENTRY FORM

Name: _____

Phone No: _____

Address _____

Plot No: _____

Class: a ☐ b ☐ c ☐

Age (if child): _____

I enclose my entry fee of £1 per scarecrow ☐

Closing date for entries: 17th July

Completed forms should be returned to the letterbox on B17, 82 George Street or 10 Chapel Street. Extra forms will be available on the website or from the Tea Hut.

* Please tick as appropriate.