

SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

3/2001

This edition of the Newsletter is later than usual, so there has been nearly 4 months of hard productive work since April. Abundant growth and heavily laden fruit bushes have been due reward for the difficulties of last winter, as have been the pleasant moments of relaxation with a cup of coffee, and a friendly chat, in the summer sunshine.

In spite of the late spring, early potatoes and peas were on some plates by the middle of June, and the prolific rows of cabbages, onions and other seasonal vegetables are a pleasure to see. But the goodness taken from the soil has to be put back and in this edition we have a contribution from Clive Smith about the great value of the compost, with explanation of his horse manure trials. This is well worth studying if you want to be able to use your compost or manure heap in weeks instead of months – so look out for the Brandlings!



A fun time was had by the young and the slightly older at the barbeque!

OPEN DAY AND BARBECUE – 30TH JUNE

For the first time, the public were invited to view our allotments, with the object of encouraging new tenants, attractive posters and information signs gave excellent publicity and members gave their time to dispense drinks and cakes and answer questions, with the result that we now have several new allotment holders. The day ended with a family barbeque in the garden of Sunnyside Rural Trust and we are grateful to them for allowing us to use their facilities. The sun shone and it was a happy friendly occasion. Thank you to Patrick Stileman, Rod Cottrell and the Committee for organising it for us.

VOLUNTEER HELPERS

Your Committee have considered a suggestion that a panel of helpers be formed from tenants to help out those who, due to health problems are temporarily unable to tend their gardens. If you would be prepared to be part of such a group, please contact your Committee Members on site or at home with your views.



ALLOTMENTS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

At the last meeting of the Committee your representative put in a bid for a new water tank on Sunnyside Old on Plot Q35. This was accepted and we should see progress on this work during the current financial year.

The council have also been informed of the works undertaken by the Society on Sunnyside Old and New to resolve problems with plumbing, gates and notice boards during recent months. For your information the Council were reminded that of the 17 water tanks on Sunnyside Old and New, only 6 are fitted with taps.

ALLOTMENT RENTS AND WATER CHARGES

Following a meeting of the Town Councils Environment Committee held on 23rd July, discussion took place at the Council Finance and Policy Committee on 30th July with a view to establishing criteria for future determination of allotment rents and water charges. No decision was reached since it was felt that financial information should be provided for the next meeting of the Finance and Policy committee.

An attempt will be made to determine which areas of allotment land might be re-designated as public open space with a view to maintenance costs being separated from the allotments Budget. If this happens and expenditure on 'Allotment' land is reduced, then the apparent subsidy to the allotments would be reduced, which would please some Councillors who seek to make the Allotments cover their costs from the rental income.

Your Committee will continue to keep a watching brief on your behalf, but it is possible there could be discussion on the level of rents at the next meeting of the allotments Management Committee to take place on 21st August. Should it be decided to increase rents, this would not now happen until September 2002, because of the requirement to give all tenants 12 months notice.

GLASS FOR COLD FRAMES

Patrick Stileman (874457) has some surplus panes which would be suitable in a cold frame. Please contact him if

SOCIETY OUTINGS

The response to the questionnaire in the last newsletter was small and the Committee felt that no further action should be taken, since the numbers were finely balanced for and against outings.

TENANCY CHANGES

OUT

Joe Tatum AS

IN - Sunnyside Old

Susan Holmes A44

Diane Calderwood B34/C35

Tony Rainbow AS

Kevin & Isobel Marsh B10

Colin Hawke B32b

Andy Williams B33

Brendan & Louise Aspel B35

Sunnyside New

Guy Woodham 42

OBSTRUCTIONS ON ROADWAYS

To avoid problems with the grass cutting contract, tenants are requested not to obstruct the roadways on either site. It is of benefit to us all to have the roadways looking as tidy as this enhances the appearance of our allotments.

SUNNYSIDE CHURCH CAR PARK

The Church are reconsidering their position following the Town Council's decision against the use of Tarmac on the roadway, grass verge and present car park area. We can therefore expect further discussion on the matter at a future Town Council meeting.

RUBBISH CLEARANCE

We have had another successful clearances with the Borough Council taking away three and a half lorry loads. For the time being all the usual sites for the deposit of rubbish are closed, so keep unwanted metal, glass and plastic on your plots. Further collections will be arranged later in the year and you will be given details in a subsequent Newsletter.

ANTIPODIAN GARDENING

We would like to welcome Kylie and David Bartlett (B31) who last had an allotment in Australia. We look forward to hearing their opinions on gardening in the Northern Hemisphere.



ENVIRONMENT FAIR

Once again the Society had a stand at the Environment Fair in the Civic Centre to publicise the availability of Allotments at Sunnyside, Butts Meadow and Dellfield. The event took place on 6th & 7th July and the move to Friday/Saturday enabled more potential tenants to see what we achieve at Sunnyside. Angela Wheeldon put on the attractive exhibition which took up a significant amount of her very precious time and we are all grateful for her efforts.

A number of other tenants kindly helped to look after our display and to answer questions. The Town Mayor, Garrick Stevens visited the fair and congratulated the Society on its display.

BONFIRES

A letter has been sent to all Allotment tenants at Sunnyside (a copy is reproduced at the end of this newsletter).

The background is that the Environmental Health Department at the Borough Council have received a complaint from a resident of Grantham Mews. The Borough Council have been spoken to by a tenant who has explained that we always seek to be as considerate as possible to our neighbours on adjacent residential properties, but sometimes unexpected changes in wind direction do not help.

A leaflet was sent to the Town Council and a limited number of copies are available in the Tea Hut on Sunnyside Old, should you wish to have a copy.

Those of you who have read the notice about bonfires on most Allotment Notice Boards will not learn anything new from the leaflets.

NSALG SEED SCHEME

As you probably know the Sunnyside Allotment Society is affiliated with the National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners. One of the benefits to contributing members is the seed scheme with its very favourable prices. As well as an opportunity for individual members to save money, the Society will also benefit financially.

Jenny Sippings has volunteered to administer the scheme on behalf of the Society again this year. (If you are interested in ordering seeds through the scheme please contact her for a copy of the catalogue or collect one from the tea hut on B17. Please complete the form at the back of the catalogue (make sure you write your phone number on the form) and return it to Jenny Sippings with your remittance (plus 60p for individual packing) by 12th October 2001. Your cheque should be payable to Sunnyside Allotment Society. Carriage is free as long as the Society's total order is for more than £25.00. Jenny will notify you when the seeds arrive. We hope that you will support this scheme.

(If you have a variety of seed which you would especially recommend, the Editor would be pleased to hear of it for future information).

HORSE MANURE COMPOSTING TRIALS

Some of you may have noticed that of late I've spent an inordinate amount of time 'fiddling about' with my compost heap on 'A' road, frequently wielding a rather dangerous looking temperature probe. Whilst fairly oblivious to accusations of an 'obsessive' personality, I think its time to explain what has been going on for those not 'in the know'.

The aims:

- To determine the quality of horse manure deliveries – that is the Nitrogen content, C:N ratio etc by deduction, without resorting to expensive analysis.
- To determine the best way of fully composting this manure with regards to retaining its Nitrogen content, speeding the process and preventing annoying weed growth.
- To determine the effect of various ways of storing, handling and composting manure bearing in mind the weather i.e. good, indifferent and bad practice.

Principally, this has been done by temperature-time profile measurement, which gives an easy yet good indication of the microbial activity taking place. Obviously, simple observation has also played its part...

The Results

There seem to be very good Nitrogen content in the 'as delivered' state of the horse manure. The Carbon:Nitrogen ratio appears to be in the 25:1 to 35:1 region, probably at the lower end of this region which is good, offering the possibility of incorporating non-nitrogenous plant matter without ever slowing or inhibiting the natural aerobic composting process. Provided correct handling, hydration and aeration is carried out, weed and seed killing temperatures can be maintained for up to 6 weeks within the core, and a temperature – time profile ideal for rapid breakdown to a fertilising humus can be maintained. This is typically over a duration of 90 -120 days.

Certainly in summer, care has to be taken soon after delivery to prevent core temperatures going too high (over 70°C/158°F) and 'damaging' the constituents, burning off too much nitrogen as ammonia and inducing other deleterious effects.

This can be achieved principally by;

- keeping the heap shape wide and low (approx 2ft deep max) – the best control;
- increasing C:N by mixing in more cellulose matter;
- mixing in natural decelerators such as earth (up to 10%),

with the additional long term benefit of preventing nitrogen loss;

- controlling aeration early on (limiting it) and hydrating it upon delivery;
- in extremis, turning/mixing immediately every time temperatures start to exceed 70°C, putting the 'skin' into the centre and visa-versa – time consuming and hard work!
- when things cool down a bit (60-65°C), aeration can be deliberately induced to maintain thermophillic and aerobic bacterial activity for as long as possible - until the natural maturation phase begins at around 60 days.

In winter and wet, windy or cold weather, it would seem profitable to cover the heap and stop it being chilled or water-logged. A semi-porous material that can breathe (carpet) is to be preferred, plastic seems to encourage unwanted fungal growth. In this respect, sieved earth is again doubly useful and in summer too, can prevent the rapid drying out of the exposed surface. The case for containerisation is far from black and white, but in winter can definitely help during the intermediate phase when maintaining thermophile activity can be a problem due to freezing temperatures. Whilst the constituents should be kept damp, water logging is definitely not desirable.

Progress Report

The core of the latest heap is still above 60°C (140°F) after 5 weeks whereas without two remixes and considerable re-hydration (about 15 gallons per re-mix) it would barely be above ambient. The first heap now over 11 weeks old and having been turned five times is about 40°C (105°F) in the middle, now maturing nicely with Brandlings starting to populate the cooler areas. Another 2 or 3 weeks and I'll be looking to see if it has really composted down to a nice humus and whether the original constituents are unrecognisable. If so, it'll be tilled into any bare land during autumn and winter. Equally, it could be safely tilled in around winter crops, without damaging or checking their growth, since it should be a very good match to the soil. Delivered as over 3 cubic yards, it'll be about half this when finished, sufficient for about a quarter of a plot at 1" deep.

NB A four page FAQ on aerobic composting is available from the tea shed.

Clive Smith

LAVENDER BISCUITS

125g (5oz) butter
100g (4oz) sugar
1 beaten egg
1 tbsp dried lavender flowers
150g (6oz) self raising flour

Cream together the butter and sugar. Add the beaten egg and mix in lavender flowers. Fold in the flour. Place mixture in heaps on a greased baking tray.

Bake at 170°C /350 F /gas 4 for about 15-20 mins until golden. Delicious!

NB Rosemary leaves can be used instead of lavender flowers).
(If you have an interesting recipe using allotment produce or flowers, the editor would be pleased to receive it).

Date: 6th July 2001
Your Ref:
My Ref: ENV/AMC
Contact: Alison Keen
Directline: (01442) 228474
Fax: (01442) 228477

Allotment Holders
Sunnyside Allotments
Berkhamsted
Herts



**BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

The Borough of Baconam
is twinned with
Rees-Isenburg, Germany

Civic Centre
Hemel Hempstead
Herts HP1 1HH

Switchboard (01442) 228000
Minicom (01442) 228658
DX 8804 Hemel Hempstead

Dear Allotment User

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT 1990
BONFIRES, SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENTS, BERKHAMSTED.**

I have recently received a complaint regarding frequent bonfires being lit at Sunnyside Allotments.

The Environmental Protection Act does not prohibit bonfires but it does say that if smoke from a bonfire causes nuisance from neighbours, regardless of the time of day, it may be regarded as a statutory nuisance.

The most satisfactory way of getting rid of rubbish and organic waste is to take it to the civic amenity site, located at Northbridge Road. This is open between 8.30 am and 4.30 p.m.

It is also worth remembering that a properly run compost heap can provide a valuable return from garden refuse and may remove the need for bonfires altogether.

If you still feel that you must have an occasional bonfire, please make sure that you follow the guidelines listed below:-

- only burn dry material
- make sure it is sited where it is least likely to cause a nuisance
- Choose a day when the wind will not blow smoke and ash towards residential properties
- Please look to see if washing is being dried or people are enjoying their gardens – it may be sensible to postpone lighting a fire
- Don't let your fire smoulder for a long time
- Don't leave a fire unattended or light it with dangerous materials i.e. petrol or paraffin

I look forward to your co-operation in keeping your local environment smoke free.

Yours sincerely



**Alison Keen
Technical Officer
Environmental Health**

THOUGHTS TO PONDER, AS YOU GARDEN OR DIG OUT YOUR COMPOST!

"What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered." (RW Emerson American Essayist), "What a man (or woman) needs in gardening is a cast-iron back, with a hinge in it!" (Charles D Warner American Essayist).