



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

3/2006

Looking back to the newsletter of August last year, the comment was that May was cold and wet and that June was too hot. Nothing much has changed! Except that this year, the heat continued in July, becoming even more excessive. Gardens have been places for sitting in, and relaxing with a cool drink. Anything more strenuous has required great effort, preferably in the early morning or late evening but even so our allotments have managed to be productive. This year it has been the turn of the soft fruit to flourish and there was a report of cherries in abundance. Blackberries and plums look good, tomatoes are beginning to ripen, French beans and courgettes are surviving but runner beans are struggling with the lack of summer showers. Few plots seem to have much of a surplus but we hope there will be sufficient produce to make our Open Day on 20th August its usual success.

The lack of rain has made us all very conscious of how important it is to water wisely. The hose pipe ban makes it physically more difficult but water is a finite resource and perhaps the greater physical effort is a good thing if it makes us be more careful and sparing. Tenants are reminded again to read and follow the excellent water saving tips in the Sunnyside calendar.

Social activities have continued to add extra pleasure and interest for tenants. The annual barbeque was a very happy event as you will read in Patrick Stileman's report. Michael Barwise shared his homemade raspberry wine there and has written out the recipe below, using this or any other fruit. We have been visited by a party of children from the Baptist Church pre-school play group. Artists from Berkhamsted Art Society and others independently, have chosen our plots as interesting subjects for their canvas and will exhibit at the Open Day. Some tenants have been busy erecting a summerhouse in order to extend the socialising area.

So, if you are interested, renting a plot on Sunnyside Old or New can extend well beyond gardening!

Annual Barbeque

On the evening of Saturday 24th June we had our annual SAS barbeque at the Sunnyside Rural Trust building on Sunnyside old. The event was a huge success; helped by the glorious, perfect barbeque weather (much overdue following the somewhat inclement weather of more recent years). A good number of people, (perhaps 40-50) of all ages ventured out which created an extremely friendly atmosphere. People sat out on the lawn 'till late into the evening, eating food freshly cooked on the barbeque, drinking fine wines (including home made raspberry wine – thank you Michael) with great musical accompaniment from Peter Wheeler on the keyboard and vocals. A large number of children ran around all evening with extraordinary levels of energy and imagination. The event provides a great opportunity to meet other allotment tenants and their friends and families, and its success demonstrates that there is a lot more to allotment gardening than just growing vegetables. Huge thanks go to the Sunnyside Rural Trust for their generosity in allowing us to use their facilities. Thanks also to David Lathman for his wine contributions, and to Peter for his music.

Patrick Stileman

Rent and Water Charges

Rent and water charges are due to increase in the autumn. The rent for ten poles will be £13.40 and water will be £8.60. This is a small increase in line with inflation and follows the decision made by the Council last year. *(If you're not sure what a pole measures, then read John Driver's interesting article on the back page!)*

Intruders

Firstly, the animal variety. The explosion in the rabbit population has been a real problem to some tenants these past few months. The largest number seems to be coming from the railway. The Council are taking notice of the problem and there has been a meeting with a representative from the railways with a proposal to construct a rabbit proof fence.

Secondly, unwanted visitors. Unfortunately, again, there has been the usual spate of break-ins, particularly on Sunnyside New. It is up to all tenants to be very vigilant and report any suspicious behaviour and keep an eye on any strangers wandering about. We participate in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme and the current information accompanies this newsletter.

Please Note: To offset rising printing costs, an electronic version of future editions of the newsletter will be sent to all those people that supply an email address to Jenny Sippings – (jenny.sippings@ntlworld.com).

Stop Press. Allotment Open Day – Sunday 20th August

In spite of our fears, the weather was kind and sunshine after the rain made the whole area of Sunnyside Old and New look its attractive best. Apart from the gardens there was plenty to catch the eye, and provide interest for an hour or so.

Children could paint flower pots, parents could find a wide choice of books at the second hand book stall, the Art Exhibition showed the allotments as an attractive subject for artists, and the energetic visitors were offered a guided walk through Birchnell's Copse and round the



Overall winner: Scary Crow,
Dominic & Gabriella Garnham



3rd Prize: The Constant Gardener,
Barbara Driver



The fantastic cake selection was a big hit

whole site. Finding the scarecrows, entered in the competition provided extra fun and the Mayor must have had a difficult task in selecting the winner, Would it be the postman on the bicycle, or flower pot man? But the imaginative and truly scary crow, made by Gabriella and Dominic won the prize for best scarecrow on Sunnyside.

The many visitors were refreshed with homemade cakes under the attractive canopies and could take home with them fresh produce, and jars of homemade jam and chutney.

It was a very worthwhile day but would not have been achieved with-



2nd Prize: Looby Loo,
Jemma & Holly Driver



Bulb planting will never be thought of in the same way again!



The Judges decision was final!

out the tremendous hard work of Angela and her team. We are very grateful to everyone that helped make the day such a success.

Seed Catalogue

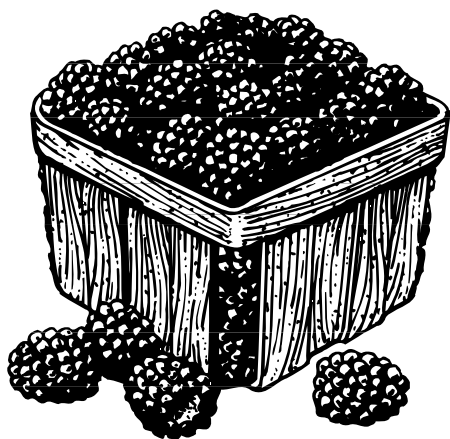
You will also find the current seed catalogue delivered with this newsletter, but tenants are reminded that only fully paid up members of Sunnyside Allotment Society may participate in this scheme.

Making Country Wines by Michael Barwise

As the berry and soft fruit season approaches, our thoughts turn to wine-making. It's a lovely way of preserving the tastes of Summer and Autumn through the following year. However many published recipes result in over-sweet, thin-flavoured wines that fizzing for ever, and occasionally first attempts taste horrid and are thrown away. So many beginners abandon country wine making before they really get to grips with it. Both quality and reliability can be much better, provided some basic principles are adhered to. The three main are: cleanliness and sterility, sugar content and expected alcohol, and proper preparation of the juice or must.

Sterility is absolutely fundamental, as contamination by unwanted yeasts and bacteria will ruin the wine. Proprietary wine-makers' cleaning powders are available, or dilute bleach can be used. Vessels should be rinsed three times after using cleaning powder, or at least four times after using bleach. Absence of any smell of bleach is the indicator of adequate rinsing. Swill about half to one litre of cold water round the container for each rinse, emptying it completely each time. This is much more economical than filling the container to the brim. After sterilisation, tubes, pipes, and stoppers should be rinsed under running water for about half a minute. Cold tap water from the mains is used for all rinsing. Equipment can also be scalded with boiling water. The fruit needs sterilising as well, but this happens as part of the extraction process.

Home-made country wines are best made as dry as possible, as it is



very difficult to stop the yeast working if there is a significant amount of residual sugar in the wine. For the beginner, wines should ideally finish up between 10% and 12% alcohol, using a basic wine yeast that has an upper limit of 14%. This means fairly accurate measurement and calculation of the required amount of sugar, allowing as far as possible for the amount of natural sugar in the fruit. The total amount of sugar required is about 16 grammes per litre of juice for each 1% of expected alcohol. Thus a 10% strength wine requires 160 grammes of sugar per litre of juice, or if you use honey, 230 grammes per litre of juice for a 10% wine, due to the water content of the honey.

The natural sugar in the fruit is allowed for using a wine-makers hydrometer. However, some fruit (notably sloes) contains a lot of non-fermentable material that makes the measurement unreliable. In general, wild fruit contains about 90 grammes of sugar per litre (equivalent to about 6% alcohol). If an higher reading is obtained, pectolase enzyme should be added to the juice and left overnight before testing again. The reading will probably be lower and more reliable. The measured sugar content is first converted to equivalent alcohol on the hydrometer scale, and the difference between this and the required alcohol is converted back to arrive at the added sugar quantity depending on whether plain sugar or honey is being used.

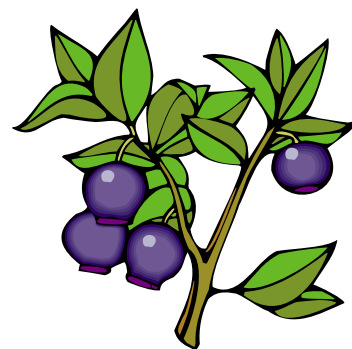
The best way to extract berry juice is in a double boiler, as the temperature should not exceed about 80 degrees C to avoid spoiling the

flavour. I use a stainless steel bucket inside an electric tea urn which has proved well worth the investment. Most berries will benefit from being deep frozen first, as this helps to break down the pulp. They can be left overnight to thaw in the double boiler and then brought up to temperature with a lid on and held there for about half an hour. The heat should then be turned off and the closed double boiler insulated with towels, pillows &c. to keep the heat in overnight. The following morning, pectolase enzyme is added, stirred in, and left for 24 hours. Next day, the juice is extracted by pouring through a jelly bag into another pot, squeezing as necessary. If you have a fruit press, this will recover the juice more easily, but heavy pressing must be avoided as it can crush the seeds and introduce bitterness. No water is generally added to the juice. The only exceptions I have found are raspberry which is too strongly flavoured, and rowan that will not ferment, unless an equal volume of water is added to the juice.

The extracted juice is then measured into the cleaned double boiler and brought back to 80 degrees while the extra sugar is added and dissolved. After no more than half an hour, the hot must (juice plus sugar) is poured into a sterilised fermenter and closed with a wine-makers' trap or bubble tube. I use cheap whisky in my traps as it has a sterilant action and is also more visible than water. The fermenter should be about half full at this stage to leave room for the must to work, so for 5 litres of wine (about 6 bottles) you will need a 10 litre fermenter. The 5 litre demijohns sold at the chemists are only large enough to ferment about 3 litres (just over two bottles) of wine effectively. You will need to start two of these to make a total of five litres of wine.

The following day, when the must is at room temperature, the yeast is prepared strictly according to the supplier's instructions and "pitched" or poured into the must. The trap is replaced and you are free to relax. After about half a day fermentation should be very visible. Twenty-four hours after pitching, you may add some proprietary yeast nutrient

dissolved in cooled boiled water to help the yeast work. I use about 1 gramme per litre of "Minavit". From then on you do nothing until the bubbling practically stops and the must becomes fairly clear. Once this has happened, carefully siphon off the clear must from the sediment into a sterilised vessel and close it with a trap. At this stage, the wine should completely fill the vessel, so you will need the content of two 5 litre fermenters to fill one vessel. Excess air can now spoil the wine so this is important. This process is repeated (probably three times) at intervals of between one and two months until no visible sediment remains (probably around eight months after you started the wine). Now for a secret technique. Transfer the wine to a polythene jerrican, squeeze out as much air as possible,



and put it in the deep freeze. Yes - freeze it solid. This has no effect on the taste of the wine, but it does help to kill off the remaining yeast. Freeze and thaw the wine three or four times without opening the jerrican, before thawing it for bottling. Bottles, corks and bottling equipment must be sterile, and I have come round to polythene corks despite tradition, as they are easier to sterilise. Ideally the wine should be filtered before bottling, but the cheap gravity-fed filters do not work well, and a proper filter is quite expensive. The bottled wine should be stored below 5 degrees and should be consumed within twelve months if filtered or six months if not.

This is only a very brief overview, but I hope it gives some idea of the important factors in country wine making at home. I'm happy to give further advice.

The Plot Thickens!...

by John Driver

Younger allotment holders (the under 40's) who started school after the introduction of 'Decimal Currency' in 1967 and , the introduction of the 'Metric System' of measurements in 1971 (brought in after our entry to the EEC), will no doubt be well versed in centimetres, kilograms, litres etc.

Much of the blame for the Metric System and Decimalisation of our currency can be put fairly and squarely at the feet of 'The King of France' who decreed that a standard measurement of fine cloth would be a 'Metre' which he defined as the distance from the tip of his nose to the end of his out-stretched hand. He also decided that instead of counting in dozens, like ignorant peasants, his Royal System of counting would be based on 'Units of Ten'. As they say, the rest is history, the 'Metric System' is now universal.

However, I wonder how many of us 'old codgers', sitting out there in our allotment huts, still feel sentimental about the loss of the good old English 'Imperial System' of measurement?

I guess the vast majority of allotment holders will have been brought up on the 'Imperial System' of measurement at school eg. pounds-shillings-pence, pounds and ounces, pints-quarts-gallons, inches-feet-yards and miles, combined with the intricacies of furlongs-chains-acres. Many of us have never really fully embraced the Metric System because the 'Imperial System' of measurement was firmly ingrained into our sub-conscious by old fashioned teaching whereby we had to recite verbatim, our 'Imperial' measurement tables and conversion factors. You'll no doubt remember reciting;

- 22 yards = 1 Chain,
- 10 Chains = 1 Furlong,
- 8 Furlongs = 1 Mile

Mediaeval Maths – hope you're up for this!

Before the days of compulsory schooling, our mediaeval forefathers and yeomen, who could not read or write,

needed to measure, in order to work out distances and to determine areas in their fields and farms.

These were highly practical folk who used parts of their bodies as 'Units of Measurement; eg.

- One 'Inch' (from Old English 'Ynca' meaning 'One Twelfth') = length of the top joint of a thumb;
- Four Inches = the width of a hand (is still in use today to measure horses despite metrication!)
- Twelve Inches = the length of ones' Foot, (hence the standard distance 'one foot' was adopted)
- Three Feet = One Yard ('yard' derived from the Old English term 'gierd' meaning Walking Stick).
- The English 'Rod' = five and a half yards.

This land measurement is as old as farming itself. and was the distance required to turn a team of Oxen pulling a plough. The ploughman's assistant called a 'bovarius' carried a Pole, exactly one Rod in length. When he reached the end of the furrow being ploughed it was his duty to walk in front of the oxen and to use his Pole to find the exact spot where the next furrow should be ploughed.

As an aside, it's interesting to note that the word 'road' probably arose from the word 'rod'.

In mediaeval times heavy wooden carts were pulled by oxen which required a wide road in order to turn round. 'Rod' spoken with a broad English accent is thought to have sounded like 'ro-ad'

- The French 'Perch' - derives from the Norman French term 'Perche' - simply meaning a pole.
- The English 'Chain' - was defined as 22 Yards (i.e. four Rods or Poles).
- The English 'Acre' - in medieval times a strip of ploughing land that was one chain wide (22 yards) by 10 chains long (220 yards or one 'Furlong') = 1 Acre. (i.e. 4,840 Square Yards).

Still with me so far?

I guess this will take you right back to your school days but believe me it's

good for exercising the grey matter – if you can take just a little bit more, it'll be worth it!

If all else fails, try a stiff whisky before reading on...

So there you have it, 'Rod', 'Pole' or 'Perch', they're all the same! As is a 'Lug' by the way, but I've yet to find an explanation of this term – does anyone else know of it's derivation?

Now, I hear you say, what has all this to do with your Allotment? In it's simplest form, here's how all of this links to the size of your plot at Sunnyside which will be either 5 'Poles' or 10 'Poles' in size:-

As explained, a 'Rod', 'Perch' or 'Pole' equals 5 Yards in length = of a 'Chain'.

A 'Square Pole' = 5 yards x 5 yards = 30 Square Yards.

This was the amount of land that could be dug by a 'fit peasant' with a mediaeval wooden spade in just one day (not bad going 'eh considering the mainstay of their diet was Bread and Beer!).

A typical 10 Pole Allotment –

Was 10 poles x 30 Square Yards = 302 Square Yards = 10 days digging!

Number of 'Poles' per 'Acre' –

Is therefore 4840 Sq. yds divided by 30 Sq.Yds = 160 Poles per acre.

Number of 10 Pole Allotments per Acre. –

Therefore, the number of 10 Pole allotments in one Acre = 16 (ie.160 divided by 10).

Finally, how big an area is Sunnyside Allotments?

As far as I can ascertain, on SS Old plus SS New there are 235 Plots of 10 Poles = 2,350 Poles.

If you then take your trusty calculator and divide 2,350 by 160 poles per Acre you should find that Sunnyside allotment land area is approximately 14 acres. So there you have it!

My thanks go to 'Old Pete's Ramblings' from the NASLG News which provided the historical context for this article.

Date for your diary

Our AGM takes place on Saturday 25th November at 10.30am. This is not only a review of the past year but also gives all members chance to air their views and to help the Society make plans for the coming year. Please try to come along.