A Walk Around the Plots

By Sue Whittles, Manager

A recent walk around the allotments gave us a chance to take stock of how the site is looking – and perhaps the first thing to say is simply: well done, everyone.

This has been an exceptionally difficult growing year. Long dry spells, hard ground and the constant business of trying to keep things watered have made maintaining a plot considerably harder than usual. In places, the ground has felt more like concrete than soil, and the fact that the water supply has held out – just about – has been something of a blessing.

Against that backdrop, there is an enormous amount to be proud of.

There are some remarkable plots around the site, but more importantly there is evidence everywhere of people simply doing their best in difficult circumstances. Allotments inevitably ebb and flow. Work gets busy, holidays happen, families need attention and sometimes illness or other circumstances mean a plot can't receive as much attention as its holder would like. That's part of allotment life.

If you are struggling with your plot, for whatever reason, do let us know. It is much better to have a conversation and see whether there is anything we can do to help than to struggle on alone.

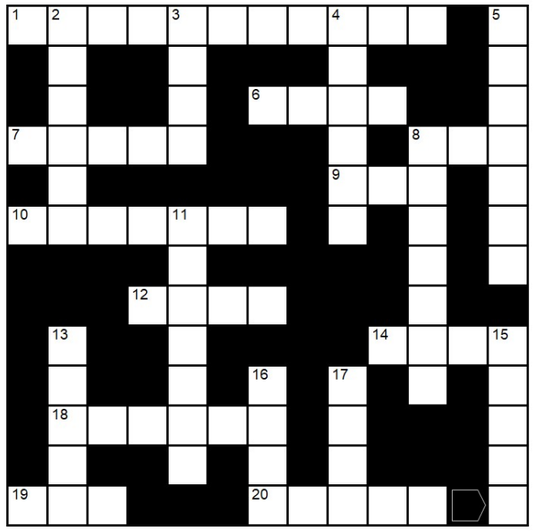
There are, inevitably, a few things we need to keep working on. One issue noticed on the walk-around was the accumulation of piles of unwanted materials and rubbish, particularly around some of the plots towards the back of the site. Small heaps have a habit of becoming large ones surprisingly quickly, so we'd ask everyone to have a look around their own plot and remove anything that is no longer needed rather than allowing it to accumulate.

We are also planning another metal collection, like the one kindly arranged by Anne Fletcher previously, so there will be an opportunity to get rid of unwanted metal from plots. We'll share details once arrangements have been made.

But the overwhelming message from the walk-around isn't one of criticism. After the growing conditions we've all faced this year, it's one of appreciation.

Whether your plot is immaculate or you've simply managed to keep things alive through the heat and dry weather, here's to everyone who has kept digging, planting, watering, weeding – and carrying on.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. We filled hundreds of these this year (8,3)
6. A delicate herb. Great with salmon (4)
7. _____ saw. A series of links that does the cutting. Useful tool for Autumn clear up (5)
8. Lives in a formicary (3)
9. The colour of a ripe strawberry (3)
10. A Mediterranean herb that's a pizza topping favourite (7)
12. Flowers traditionally used to flavour beer. Growing on the arch on plot 28 (4)
14. Sensory appendage near an insect's mouth (4)
18. Long bladed cutting tool for cutting hay (6)
19. A good source of potash (3)
20. These red tissue paper like flowers live for one day (5)

DOWN

2. Pollen-bearing part of a flower's stamen (6)
3. None of this at all this summer (4)
4. Traditional accompaniment to Bloody Mary (6)
5. Terry tells us use this to cover all your onions, leeks and garlic (7)
8. Red _____ species of migratory butterfly with a fondness for buddleia nectar. Seen on Barton Lane this year. (7)
11. Poisonous plant such as monkshood or wolfsbane (7)
13. Found living and buzzing in a dumpy bag on Julia and Charlie's plot (5)
15. Colourful leaf-like parts surrounding the centre of the flower (5)
16. A pile of garden waste (4)
17. A quick, small cut when trimming a plant (4)

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BARTON LANE ALLOTMENTS

The Plotter's Gazette



"What dreadful hot weather we have!
It keeps me in a continual state of inelegance."
– Jane Austen

The poppies and the bees: dance

By Andy Graham



By Andy Graham

I wrote this article at the beginning of the summer. Before the green turned to brown… Written in a riot of buzzing red. Now the summer is drawing to a close, I include it here as a reminder of the season just past.

Something wonderful is happening on the allotment. A perfect dance between the poppies and the bees – particularly the bumblebees.

Every morning the garden erupts into a riot of red, signalling that the bee buffet is open, and they arrive en masse. White-tailed, buff-tailed and red-tailed bumblebees. Cuckoo bumblebees, solitary bees, carder bees, and even the occasional honey bee from the hives down in the wild area.

The give and take of nature – elegantly tuned. A dynamic equilibrium. A thermodynamic contract with pollen as currency.

The flowers need pollination. The bees need pollen to feed their young.

I recently discovered that this baby food carries the charming name *bee bread.* A wonderfully Beatrix Potteresque description.

Female bumblebees leave a store of pollen in a cell, lay an egg and seal it shut. The pollen provides the proteins, nutrients and trace elements the grub will need to thrive.

Poppies offer limited nectar but abundant pollen – perfect for making bee babies.

Their strategy fascinates me. Not one flower lasting many days, but many flowers across many days. Like red tissue paper, each bloom lasts barely a day. Every morning a fresh cohort opens for business. The bees arrive, feed, gather, pollinate. By evening the petals fall and litter the grass crimson.

Then, the next morning, a new batch appears. Maximum pollination. Maximum bee bread.

The relationship feels so beautifully calibrated that one is tempted to infer design.

For the record, I don't.

I think elegance – and its brother ugliness – are thermodynamic consequences rather than gifts from the heavens.

But whatever your metaphysics, the lesson remains. If we study nature closely, if we pay attention to the connections and exchanges, there is much to learn.

The poppies give pollen and receive pollination.

The bees take pollen and return pollination.

Everyone gives. Everyone gains. The arrow of time stays in flight. The system calibrates itself – not too much, not too little.

The bees survive. The poppies survive.

It is never too late to create a poppy field and invite the bees to do their thing.

Create places where the natural contract can thrive.

As Vulcan law wisely advises, this is the way to: 'live long and prosper.'

On our plot, we give the poppies space to feed the baby bees. The bees, in turn, pollinate our vegetables.

Everything is connected.

Dynamic equilibrium. Elegant harmony.

To believe we can take without giving – that is hubris.



Under the apple tree. A summer gathering *By Sue Whittles*



It was one of those halcyon summer days: warm, sunny and completely still. With barely a breath of wind, a kind of calm settled over the allotments – the perfect excuse to put down tools and watering cans for a while, forget the cares of a difficult growing season and simply catch up.

Around thirty allotmenteers, friends and family came along to our summer gathering, which was a remarkable turnout in the middle of the holiday season. It was particularly good to see some of our newer plot holders joining in, and the bigger shared tables meant people naturally mixed, chatted and got to know one another.

And, of course, there was food. Lots of it.

There was something particularly satisfying about seeing produce from the allotments making its way onto the table. Tony deserves a special mention for a splendid Greek salad featuring his own tomatoes and cucumbers, while other contributions included salads and quiches made with produce grown just a few yards from where we were sitting. Add in plenty of good wholesome food – and some decidedly sticky cakes – and nobody went hungry.

We are also very grateful to Bill for allowing us to gather on his plot under the apple tree. Although he wasn't well enough to join us himself, he had thoughtfully made sure the grass was cleared of fallen fruit beforehand.

Sitting there in the shade, listening to the hum of conversation around the tables, was a lovely way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

And conversation is really what these gatherings are about. People swapped ideas, compared what had – and hadn't – worked this year, shared tips and generally caught up. After such an exceptionally difficult growing season, it was a welcome reminder that allotments are about much more than what we manage to grow.

Thank you to everyone who came along, brought food and helped make the afternoon such an enjoyable one.



Tales from the starter plot

By Tim and Jaki (Plot 36A)

Her we are 8 months in and I can't believe how quickly the time has passed. It's been a real pleasure seeing the fruits (and vegetables!) of my hard work appearing not just in the ground but on my plate.

So far we've enjoyed radishes, lettuce, onions, spring onions, garlic, beetroot, courgettes, potatoes, sugar snap peas and broad beans.

With no greenhouse, we had to take some chances and plant things sooner than I would have liked but on the whole they survived the late frosts well and did well. The early summer hot weather has been more of a problem. Lots of bolted lettuce and a real dedication to watering!

A typical day involves some pondering… cup of tea… more pondering… a bit of work…. more tea… maybe a biscuit (or two) with that… a bit of work… Pondering with a cup of tea in hand is the best form of mindfulness and I can heartily recommend it! Some thoughts on our experiences so far…

Mulch – wish I'd done it sooner

Rhubarb – where the heck did that come from? It pops up in the most unexpected places! interestingly where it popped up near my garlic, both the rhubarb and nearby garlic bulbs didn't do well. I take that to indicate if it doesn't go well together on the plate, it ain't gonna do well in the ground either.

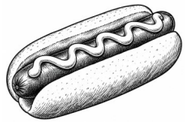
Poppies – see rhubarb

Water – I can't believe how satisfying and enjoyable it is to physically pump water. I thought it would be a chore but it's like a water cooler in the office, everyone gathers there and chats while you also get some exercise in the process.

A special friend has been the robin that visited me daily during the winter and spring. Sadly I didn't get a pic of him feeding from my hand but he would regularly sit at the table with us or sit on someone's foot or shoulder. He's had less need of us in the warmer weather but he pops in to say hello occasionally.

Here's hoping to a fruitful second half of the year for us all and we hope to be tenants for some time to come!











There will be sausages!

There's plenty happening at the allotments over the next few months, so here are a few dates to get into your diary.

Autumn Clear-up – 4 October, 10am

Our autumn clear-up will take place on **Sunday 4 October from 10am**.

The clear-up is an important part of keeping the allotments running and is something we hope all plot holders will make every effort to support. Maintaining the paths, hedges, trees and other communal parts of the site is a shared responsibility, and there is always plenty to do.

There is also a practical reason for getting as many of us involved as possible. Jobs we can't tackle ourselves ultimately have to be done by paid contractors through the Trust – and those costs inevitably feed through into what we all pay. So, if you possibly can, please come along and lend a hand. Many hands really do make light – and cheaper – work.

If you have them, bring wheelbarrows, secateurs, clippers and other useful tools. We'll be concentrating primarily on the usual cutting back, clearing and tidying of the communal parts of the site.

If there is time, we may also turn our attention to painting and maintaining the gates. The new communal area by the wild area could also do with some attention, including better seating and fresh bark. This may need to be tackled on another occasion, so if you have some time to spare and would be willing to help with either of these projects, please let us know.

And, of course, there will be sausages and baps at mates' rates to cover costs!

Allotment meeting – 3 November

Our next allotment meeting will be held on **3 November at the Friends Meeting House**. We've returned to the venue we used for our first meeting as it is a little nearer and, we hope, convenient for most people.

This is your meeting, so if there is something you would like discussed, please **email us beforehand with items for the agenda**.

One subject we're already looking at is how we manage mowing around the site in future, including the possibility of moving to electric equipment. Nothing has been decided – we'd like people to have the opportunity to think about the options and have their say.

And once the business is concluded, there will be a definite adjournment to the pub.

Christmas social

Finally, plans are beginning for another Christmas get-together and carol singing evening, following the success of the last two years.

After two seasons at the helm, Andy is stepping down as Musical Director. His enthusiastic but largely theoretical approach to conducting has resulted in some memorable performances – perhaps best described as a celebration of deconstructed cacophony – and our ears are grateful that he has finally recognised where his talents do not lie.

We are therefore looking for a new Musical Director to take up the baton. Musical ability would be an advantage this time.

If you can hold a tune, marshal a band of willing carollers and point us all in roughly the same musical direction, we'd love to hear from you.

More details about the Christmas gathering nearer the time.

From waste to garden gold *By Ken Wallington*

A good compost heap turns everyday garden waste into one of the most valuable things you can give your soil. Compost slowly releases nutrients, improves soil structure, encourages worms and beneficial organisms, and helps soil hold onto moisture – meaning healthier plants and potentially less watering.

The secret? Think green + brown. Mix soft, nitrogen-rich "greens" such as grass clippings, vegetable peelings and manure with carbon-rich "browns" such as autumn leaves, shredded prunings, paper, cardboard and straw. Chop up woody material to help it break down faster, keep your heap covered, and once your bin or pile is full, leave it to work its magic rather than continually topping it up.

What can go in? Fruit and veg scraps, coffee grounds, grass clippings, leaves, cardboard, paper, herbivore manure and untreated wood shavings are all useful additions. Avoid meat, dairy, egg shells, bones, pet or human waste and diseased plants. Perennial or invasive weeds should only go in once they're completely dead.

Quick win

When your compost is ready, simply spread a generous layer over bare soil as mulch. The worms will help do the rest, while the compost suppresses weeds and helps the ground retain moisture.

Think of compost as another crop: nurture it, harvest it, and put it straight back into your garden.