



New Mills
**Allotment &
Gardening**
Society



NewMAGS

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Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society October 2013

Event Alerts

New Mills Allotment and Gardening Society AGM - This will be held from 7:30 pm on Thursday November 7th 2013 in the Council Chamber at New Mills Town Hall.

This is a chance to catch up with all the news from and plans for the Society. Members are invited to bring along drinks and refreshments to the AGM for all to share and enjoy at the break.

Future Meetings

It has been proposed that future meetings will become more subject focused and include refreshments whilst the time dedicated to administrative duties will be reduced. Guest speakers and a focus on specific allotment and gardening related topics would then become an integral part of future meetings.

Seed Potato Day – Marple

Marple and District Allotment Association will be holding a seed potato day on Sunday 9th February from 10am until 3pm at Marple Senior Citizens Hall near the Memorial Park, Marple, SK6 6BA. Last year was well worth attending to purchase seed potatoes.

Event Reflection

Toby Hardwick ran a stall at the Artisan Food Fair in the Spring Bank Arts Centre during the recent New Mills Arts Festival. Toby displayed the high quality of produce grown by the very professional plot holders at Hague Bar and Ollerset and encouraged people to grow their own food by showing what can be achieved in New Mills. The photograph is of the excellent display. Significant interest was shown from the many visitors during the day so thanks very much to Toby and to all who helped by contributing food or time.



New Mills One World Festival

This coincided with the start of our blistering summer (well fortnight anyway). Well done to Veronica Hyde, Jeanne Daniels, Barry Bate and Helen Hamilton who represented the society at the event. Apparently it was quiet in the gazebo, which means you must have missed out on the fighting and other shenanigans I saw at the other side of the event!

Seedling Saturday

Seedling Saturday went very well with lots of people dropping in and discussing what plants to grow and how to grow them. There are plans for further Seed Savers in future and further details will be sent out in due course. These will be supported by the Allotment Society.

How Much Food Can You Grow On A Hundred Square Metres?

Somehow Rick has found time on top of all the other duties to report on his own experience – Enjoy and learn! (Editor)

I decided to write this in response to a recent article in The Guardian¹ whose author had “certainly spent more on what comes into the allotment than the value of what we’ve taken out”. I thought that whilst he made the case for the spiritual and psychological rewards of keeping an allotment, he presented a somewhat pessimistic view of the potential harvest from a plot.

I have worked my current plot for 9 years and have harvested each year a significant contribution to our annual household vegetable consumption which more than covers our expenses of running the plot. We are a 2 adult household with a vegetarian diet and low cheese/eggs consumption.

The full size plots on the two New Mills Allotment sites are nominally 100 square metres². 2013 was a good year to grow vegetables. (2012 was less successful but not a complete write-off.) I thought that I would keep a record of the number of plants of each vegetable I was able to fit into the size of the beds and then record whether the crop had met my expectation and how long it took us to eat it (or how long we expected it to last us). It is not a scientific survey, I didn't weigh the crops nor will I measure exactly how long it will take us to eat them. I just wanted to give people a picture of how important home grown vegetables are to our household.

I cultivate the plot organically. I try and deal with pests without using chemicals but I do use organic slug pellets to stop slugs attacking seedlings. By growing twice as many cabbages than we need, we end with a reasonable harvest that has not been damaged. I do get the odd mole arriving and an occasional cat passing through so I am expecting a little collateral damage.

The hundred metre plot

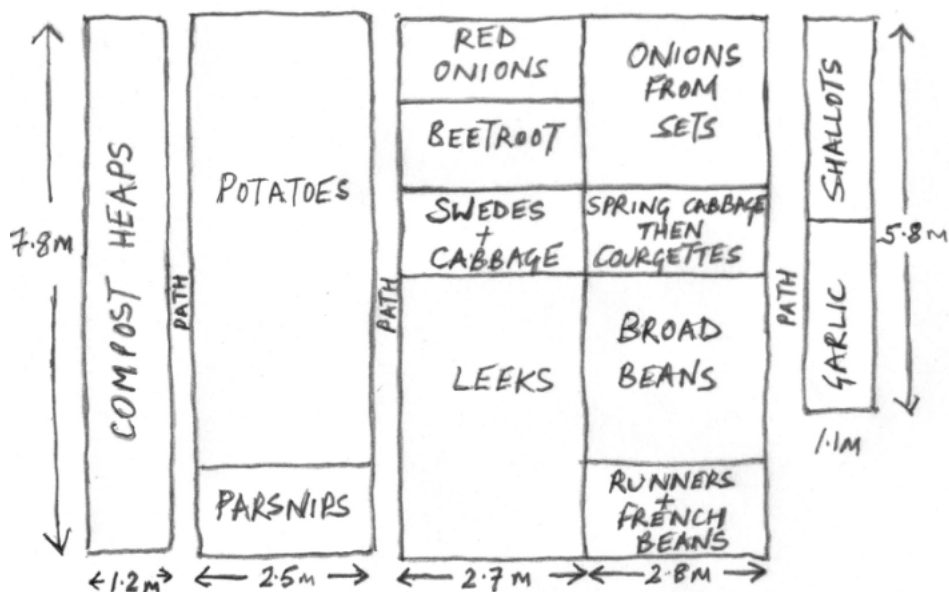
The dimensions of the plot in metres are below (to nearest 0.1 metre). This shows the dimensions of the cultivated areas. The paths are narrow (between 0.4 and 0.5m). There is also a path at the top and bottom of the image that separates the plot from the adjacent plot.

This is the 2013 harvest. I operate approximately a 3 year rotation, so future years will have crops in a different location.

¹ Are allotments going out of fashion? By Julian Baggini.

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2013/jul/07/allotments-becoming-less-popular>

² We took the decision when we established our first site in 2005 to make the plots around 100 square metres so we could accommodate a sustainable number of plots and at the same time offer an area of land that would potentially provide a reasonable harvest for a household.



I don't have raised beds separated by wide paths, but even allowing for the 3 narrow paths through the middle of the plot, the paths between my plot and the adjacent plots and the area of compost and manure heaps³, I am left with only 70 square metres for cultivation.

So what did I grow in 2013?

Potatoes took up the largest area of the plot – 10 rows of 8 plants, most plants produced at least 6 potatoes of varying size. So that is a harvest of between 400 and 450 potatoes. We started eating the early varieties in the middle of July and looking at the remaining crop I expect we will have potatoes to provide 70% of our carbohydrate until well into November.

Onions from sets – 2 beds each 12 rows of 8 sets, say 200 plants – this would normally last us until January but this year for unexplained reasons the crop grew small so we will probably run out in November. Getting good crops is not guaranteed – better luck next year!

Red onions from seed – this was an excellent crop of 30 mammoth red variety – we love eating raw red onions in salads and with cabbage in coleslaw – if the onions store well they will last until December.

Shallots – 11 rows of 5 sets, 55 plants enough to make 30 jars (traditional 1lb jars) of pickled shallots. We use malt vinegar spiced with pepper and chilli – our shallots taste hot!

Garlic – 14 rows of 7 cloves. We ended up with around 80 bulbs of varying size which will last us until well into 2014. The best bulbs we plait and hang in the shed.

Leeks are a great crop for the winter. I have 3 beds, each bed 13 rows of 6 plants, allowing for few failures, say 225 plants. I grow early, maincrop and late varieties which provides us with leeks to eat several times a week from September until March/April (unless it's too cold to lift them from the ground).

Sweedes – 3 rows of 8 plants – 2013 was a very good year for sweedes, some are huge – 24 sweedes will last us until December if we store them well.

Parsnips – 11 rows of 7 plants, say 70 plants surviving. These are an excellent root vegetable to provide a crop to eat between December and February.

Beetroot – 8 rows of 8 plants, say 60 plants. I have already lifted the first 2 rows (7 lbs in weight) which was enough to make 12 jars of beetroot relish. 2 rows are a pink and white variety⁴ that we use in stews, curries and casseroles because it does not stain the meal dark red. The rest of the dark red beetroot we will use to make beetroot soup or grate raw to make a delicious salad.

³ Composting is an important element of organic gardening, I have 3, one being added to, one rotting and one ready for use. I also have a manure bay to enable manure to rot for at least one year.

⁴ Beetroot Barbabie tola Di Chioggia from Kings Seeds.

Broad Beans – 3 double rows of 24 plants. We love eating broad beans raw in salads. By not sowing the last double row until May, we were able to have a broad bean salad on the go for most of July and August.

French Beans – 2 groups of 12 plants⁵. **Runner Beans** – 3 groups of 12 plants. We eat this crop through August and September and freeze enough for 25 meals over the winter.

Cabbage – 8 rows of 6 summer cabbage plants. I grow varieties that form solid hearts because we like to eat cabbage raw in coleslaw over the summer. Some of the crop has been eaten by pests but we have been eating cabbage from July and expect to have enough to last until November (say 25 cabbages).

Kale – 48 plants planted where the garlic was lifted. **Spring Cabbage** – 12 plants planted where the shallots were lifted. The garlic and shallots are lifted early in the summer so I am using 10% of the plot for another crop each year. Kale is a great crop to provide greens from November through to March. Last year only 6 of the 12 spring cabbage I planted survived, but they grew huge and provided cabbage in May and June this summer.

Courgettes – 10 plants were planted after the spring cabbage had been lifted. I pick the courgettes small (rather than let them grow to marrow size) so the skins are tender. We have been eating courgettes in most meals in August and September.

Salad crops – we have a few square metres in our garden at home cultivated with salad crops and herbs. If we didn't have this we could grow salad crops instead of say 2 rows of potatoes on the allotment.

Fruit – I wanted to grow the maximum amount of vegetables on the plot so took the decision not to grow fruit. If I had another 50 square metres I would certainly have gooseberries, raspberries, blackcurrants and strawberries.

So was this a lot of work? Yes, but not at the exclusion of other activities in life. I have been at work full time for most of the last 9 years, so I do fit gardening into available leisure time. The key is to have enough time to spend to sow, plant out and harvest crops at the right time so that the plot is as productive as possible. It is also important to find the time to keep the weeds down from the growing plants so that they do not get choked. My goal is a productive plot not a prizewinning garden. People ask me, is it a chore to have to walk down to the allotment after work to water seedlings in hot weather? I say to them, it's my leisure interest and after walking down to the allotment, watering for say 20 minutes and walking back, I don't need to go to the gym! It's difficult to put a figure on the amount of time I spend gardening – it will be more than 200 hours a year – but it's a fantastic way to spend my leisure time.

Rick Seccombe

Seasonal Jobs

The National Allotment Society (NAS) <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/> web site is full of helpful advice, especially for the less experienced amongst us. Here's a sample of the tasks the Society thinks we should be paying attention to during the autumn.

Harvesting

- Through November harvesting attentions may turn to harvesting Brussel Sprouts, leeks and parsnips. Parsnips and leeks can be lifted now or left until needed but there are differences in hardiness between varieties with some tougher than others, that's why it is important to find out as much as possible about the variety upon purchase. Also bear in mind a prolonged wet spell can do as much damage as a long freeze.
- It is better to wait until after a frost to pick parsnips as the chill turns the starches to sugars providing the sweetness. If a big freeze is forecast though other root vegetables will become vulnerable unless very well protected. The RHS provides more info on protecting root veg at <http://apps.rhs.org.uk/advicesearch/profile.aspx?pid=666>.
- Another strategy to consider is lifting root veg before winter sets in and storing the veg in boxes in a cool dark space. Plastic lidded boxes may be best as they are mice proof. Fuller instructions for you to consider can be found here <http://www.farminmypocket.co.uk/food/store-carrots-et>
- Brussels should be picked from the bottom of the stalk upwards giving all the sprouts chance to swell whilst redundant leaves at the bottom are removed to allow air circulation.

⁵ I grow Runner beans and French beans around a group of 8 beans poles tied together at the top (looking like a tipi)

Sowing and Planting

- Right now this could include spring cabbage, over-wintering types of onion and garlic, winter lettuce.
- The NAS refers to sowing crops of your favourite variety of round seeded hardy peas in pots at first and then transplanting to a sheltered spot. This is New Mills though so perhaps we should specify very sheltered and very hardy!
- The winter varieties of hardy peas are allegedly tough enough to withstand most British winters but it is always best to have some protection on hand ready to protect them if needs be and wet growing conditions can wreak as much damage as the cold. If you have had success with growing hardy peas in the New Mills Winter please advise of any top tips which could be shared in the next newsletter.

General Duties

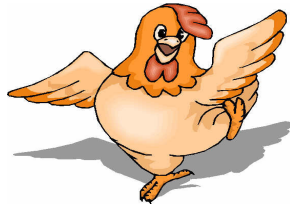
- Clean and clear the plot of spent crops and take down your runner bean poles. Clean the soil off the bottom of them to retain the nitrogen before storing the poles somewhere cool and airy ready for use next year.
- Dig for future victory as autumn progresses. Digging over heavy ground and leaving it in lumps or ridges will allow gradual break up of soil winter frosts. With all that lumpy clay in New Mills it really is worth trying to break it up on plots cleared of produce. Even a mild winter should provide one or two frosts to help out.
- Consider insulating your greenhouse to protect over-wintering plants. Potentially use horticultural fleece or plastic bubble sheeting; newspaper is an excellent substitute and you can lay several layers over your most precious plants whenever a frost is forecast. It is also a good idea to wrap their pots in bubble wrap to insulate their roots. A few more insulation ideas and video clips on these

<http://apps.rhs.org.uk/advicesearch/Profile.aspx?pid=376>

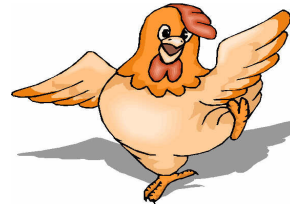
<https://www.google.co.uk/#q=insulating+greenhouse+winter>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REFdF6z9aYk>

- Crops that need protecting include chard plants, spinach, winter lettuce, peas, broad beans and any other crops that you are overwintering from the worst of the winter weather. Keep some fleece, plastic or have cloches nearby ready to use.
- Stake Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli plants to prevent them from being blown over in strong winds, it is also worthwhile dragging soil up around the base of the plants to give them extra support.
- It is a good opportunity to cart barrows of manure or compost over to your plot and the more that you can get done before the end of the year the better. Most of the leaves will have fallen by November's end, they can then be collected for leaf mould http://www.recyclenow.com/home_composting/making_compost/leafmould.html.
- Set aside a little time to check on door locks, window catches and to secure anything loose or flapping that may be the source of damage or danger to neighbours on the site.



Chicken Run!



A little light relief and high drama at Hague Bar

It appears that news of this year's successful allotment harvests crossed the species barrier recently, when one damp Sunday afternoon two well-bred chickens made a surprise visit to the allotments at Hague Bar!

First spotted by Gilly Gostick as they entered the site through the open main gate, they made their way purposefully down the central path, looking with interest at all the tempting crops on display. Gilly looked around for help from any other allotment holders on site and found Paul Walters. Together they began the rather challenging process of removing them from the site. This involved shooing them back, running to block up the entrance to Amy's plot when they nearly took a rush into her open gateway, and eventually each picking up a hen and carrying them off site.

Gilly, Paul and both hens then went on walkabout in Hague Bar – first to Woodlands opposite the car park, where regrettably the owners did not keep hens. Grandchildren stroked the hens whilst a large cardboard box was found, and the hens placed (under considerable protest) inside. Paul then carried the moving box up into Hague Bar and further efforts were made to find the possible hen-keeper.

Paul knew of a neighbour who kept hens, but unfortunately he wasn't at home. Thankfully another neighbour -Janice, came to the rescue. Janice led the party round to the back of her house, where the same absent neighbour kept his hens. An empty coop was found, the ladder released so they could roost, water was provided, and the hens were released into this temporary place of safety. Other hens in adjacent coops looked on in noisy excitement.

Although Janice believed the adventurous hens didn't actually belong there, she agreed to do her best to establish the true owner whom she thought would be Bob -another neighbour, who lived a bit further away. A week later Gilly saw Janice walking her dog, and learned the hens had been reunited with their rightful owner Bob, and that their home coop was behind the topmost allotments on the other side of the railway - which means they must have crossed the railway line to go on their afternoon out !

Gilly Gostick

The Art of the Possible

This time the amazing pictorial encouragement for beginners comes from Jeanne Daniels at Ollerset.



Preparation (2009)



4 Years On (2013) – Just splendid!

Jeanne offers her reflections on this achievement below ----

I have always enjoyed growing fruit and vegetables and when we moved to New Mills nearly 15 years ago was disappointed that our small north facing garden of turf over builders' rubble wouldn't let me continue with this. There were no allotments in New Mills at the time. When the allotment society first got going I didn't put my name down as I knew that I would struggle to find the time to manage a plot as I had a young family.

However my friend Chris agreed that she would like to share an allotment as she likes to grow fruit and veg and also has a very small garden. And limited time.

We put our names down and in April 2008 we took on a half plot. The plot had been covered but not cultivated at all so we took back the covering a bit at a time to start cultivation. We started with broad beans and Runner beans and got reasonable crops at the end of the first season. In 2009 we were offered the other half of the half plot, which had a raised bed on it. We were still not able to get all of it cultivated but kept the unused bits covered. We had considerable problems with drainage and shading, but found that working the soil helped a lot and we managed to get some of the overhanging trees pruned back. We also put in some raised beds. In 2010 we had help from the society who purchased drainage materials and arranged for a digger to come and create drainage channels adjacent to several plots with drainage problems. We dug supplementary channels and were able to use the materials to improve the drainage. By 2011 we had most of the plot was cultivated and had good crops. 2012 was difficult for everyone.

This year has been great. Every year we dig over and condition part of the soil on the plot. We have an ongoing battle with weeds, some areas are more difficult than others. Our successes? Courgettes, Runner beans, sugar snap peas, Borecole, Chard and garlic. We have had mixed success with Potatoes due to blight and rogue manure. French beans really don't like cold wet conditions. We have some soft fruit and this year it has done really well. We have found that we each need to work on the plot at least once a week during the busy parts of the year, and being able to get to the site out of the growing season to prepare for the coming year really helps. Leaving the soil preparation until you are ready to plant out really doesn't work.

Allotment gardening is a constant learning curve – to get to know your own plot and what will and won't do well in different seasons. But it is also extremely satisfying.

Jeanne and Chris, Ollersett

Pests Bugs and Disease (PBD!)

Steve Evans provides startling photographic evidence of the devastation caused by cabbage whites but are there any top tips for protecting against them next year?



Prevention

- Inspect vulnerable plants in the growing season and remove any eggs/caterpillars found. The site of white butterflies hovering around susceptible plants almost certainly means eggs have been laid.
- Cover plants with insect-proof mesh or fleece, although this can lead to overheating during the warmer summer days (probably not a major concern in New Mills).
- Transfer any parasitised caterpillars to plants where new caterpillar infestations are expected.
- Avoid planting colourful, high nectar plants near the cabbage patch as these will encourage adult butterflies into the garden (trade off though as you may like/want other butterflies).

Organic Protection

- Inspect the undersides of leaves and remove any egg clusters.
- Remove caterpillars by hand, particularly before cabbages begin to develop hearts.
- Encourage insectivorous birds within the garden by using bird-feeders in winter and nest boxes in spring.
- Don't remove dead or older caterpillars that have become parasitised because these will produce many more parasites that will attack and kill further generations of caterpillars.
- A naturally occurring bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, kills only caterpillars and not the predatory insects, and is very effective when sprayed thoroughly above and below leaves.

Thinking forward to the 2014 growing season, bear in mind this BBC web site for top tips on tackling pest and disease threats including ones you may never even have heard of!

http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/advice/pests_and_diseases/identifier.shtml?m

Recipe Ideas

Just in case you are feeling flat and short of inspiration, here are just a few sites to help you find seasonal inspiration for all that autumn produce. Plenty of squash, root veg and pumpkin ideas.

<http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/autumn>

<http://england.lovefoodhatewaste.com/recipes>

<http://www.nsaig.org.uk/families-schools/recipes/>

Forward Weather Look – (Warm and wet past bonfire night)

Met Office UK Outlook 2 Nov to Saturday 16 Nov 2013:

The unsettled or changeable conditions expected towards the end of October will probably carry over into the first week of November, with slightly above average rainfall amounts at first. Temperatures during this period are more likely than not to be close to or a little above average throughout, especially in the south, leading to a lower risk of frost here than can usually be expected at this time of year. There are some indications that from the second week of November northern parts are most likely to be affected by the changeable weather, whilst slightly more dry and settled conditions further south would bring an increased risk of overnight frost and fog, which may be slow to clear. Temperatures during this week will probably be close to the seasonal average.

Articles Wanted

Contributions welcomed for future editions. Please contact David Brown mtlanin@supanet.com. If you wish to contact the society for any other reason please email: secretary@newmillsallotments.org.uk

For more information about the society please see our website www.newmillsallotments.org.uk