



New Mills
**Allotment &
Gardening**
Society



NewMAGS

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Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society April 2013

Event Alerts

Seedling Saturday - Saturday 10th May 2014 between 10:00 am and 12 noon

Seedling Saturday went very well in 2013 with lots of people dropping in and discussing what plants to grow and how to grow them. The next Seedling Saturday event will be held at the The Torrs, Market Street, New Mills. Donate, swap or acquire seedlings if you are a bit behind or have a germination failure. This is a fantastic opportunity to try growing your own and to get lots of advice, if you need it! Refreshments and general advice available. Bird boxes and 'paper potting' will also be done by the Derbyshire Rangers Service. For further information contact Barry (07921255551) or Amy (amyclareshephard@googlemail.com)

Hague Bar Allotment Open Day - Saturday 28th June 2014 – from 1pm to 4pm

A great opportunity to come and see how to grow vegetables on an allotment plot. There will be light refreshments throughout the afternoon and a plant stall. The event is free and everyone is welcome. The site can be accessed from Hague Bar car park (next to the children's playground) off Waterside Road. Open days will be held at each of our 2 sites on alternate years – so in 2015 there will be an open day at our Ollersett site. If you can spare some time to help out this year please contact Barry or Steve Evans.

Gardening inspiration

If you are looking for new gardening ideas or just an excuse for a trip out this web site gives you a full list of all the Open Garden Events in Derbyshire during summer 2014. Go to http://www.opengardens.co.uk/open_gardens_in_derbyshire.php (It is a national site so Cheshire events will be on there too). Don't forget that, as part of this scheme, the gardens at New Mills High School will be open again this year. Their dates are Saturday 12th July (10 – 5) and Sunday 13th July (1 – 5). This is one of the few schools in the country which enters the scheme and one of the very few exhibitors which has a photograph in this years' booklet. Have a look at all the work done by Craig Pickering and the pupils there.

Transition New Mills Food Group

Transition New Mills is part of a global network which aims to help the whole community work together and seeks to make our town cleaner, fairer and more vibrant and better able to withstand economic and environmental challenges. The Transition New Mills Food Group has been set up to promote locally produced food and drink, whether that is growing it in gardens, allotments or other open spaces. The group also promotes food sold in shops around the town or food produced and sold by local farmers and local food and drink producers. Cooking, baking and preserving at home and within schools is also encouraged.

The Food Group is currently setting up a 'Growing Spaces' project to help people grow more food in New Mills. The Allotment Society and the Seedsavers Group are part of this project. Transition are seeking volunteers who could get involved with a community gardening project at Beardwood Farm in Furness Vale. If you think you may be able to commit some time to this project contact Beardwood Farm. Furness Vale. SK23 7QF; Tel. 01663 749038; Mob. 07793982648; Email beardwoodnlp@gmail.com.

Weeding out the enemy - a focus on weed management techniques and strategies



Ok, it's that time of year again when allotment holders and gardeners are already or are preparing to get busy. The trouble is that after the mild winter (fifth warmest on record) one particular set of plants have already been active for weeks and with every day that passes can grow and spread. In fact, a failure to act on neglected plots can mean harder work in future, not just for you the plot holder but plot neighbours too. Weeds just love to spread, they love wind, warmth and rain too, so the start of 2014 could well be heaven for weeds but harder work for plot holders.

In every square metre of soil it is estimated that there may be as many as 100,000 weed seeds but I reckon that at New Mills Ollerset (sorry can't speak for Hague Bar) there are more. We know there's nothing intrinsically wrong with a weed, they are just plants after all and several like creeping butter cup are attractive and good for bees. On a plot however, such plants will be drinking water, cutting out light, spreading diseases and stealing nutrients from your precious crops. Much of the information below here is from the book Organic Gardening by the Royal Horticultural Society.

Offensive Strategies - Plot Preparation

Digging and burying weeds

Turning the soil with a spade and burying weeds is one strategy for clearing annuals and shallow rooted perennials even if it contains couch grass. This technique has the advantage that the overturned turf will provide nutrients and planting can begin quickly afterwards. This is not suitable if you only have thin topsoil as the weeds should be dug to a depth of 15cm.

Mulching

Using a mulch can cut out light, exhaust their roots and help to limit and kill weeds. Mulches should be laid in spring as weeds begin to grow. Black plastic, thick cardboard and hessian backed wool carpet can all work. Wool carpets should be removed from plots before breaking down as dyes and even pesticides may have been used in their manufacture. Mulches and covers work best in the late winter in a mild year and during spring in a cold one. The need is to cut off light for the weeds just as their growth is beginning.

Mulching Options

Black Polythene (400-500 gauge) - can last for 3 years and be reused. The material can absorb sunshine helping warm the soil prior to crop planting.

Cardboard - Needs to overlap by 10 to 15 cm, bricks and wood can hold in place, probably effective for one season only.

Carpet - Hold it down with pegs after punching holes with strong nails, generally only effective in one location for one season.



Newspaper –Lay and cover with 5-10 cm layer of hay, straw or grass mowings – can suppress weeds for a couple of months.

Timing for mulching

Annual weeds need to be mulched for only one or two months and creeping weeds will be killed after one growing season but deep rooted perennials will resist this for longer. The plot can be used while the offensive is underway as vigorous vegetables can push up through some mulches and holes can be made for them.

Weeding out the enemy - Active Plots

Even when the plot is active and you are ready to make full use of it for another year the weeding job is not done (it never is!!!!), weeds will look for ways to invade. Here are a few ***defensive options***.

Weed barriers

A deep trench dug at least 15-20 cm deep around each bed, lined with heavy duty polyethene and filled with soil will aid defence against many annuals. Stronger perennials will still find a way through and seeds will be blown in “over the top” so other techniques will still need to be deployed.



Okay so that's a little extreme!

Mulching on active plots

Loose biodegradable mulches such as straw, leaf mould, bark and shreds put down on clean ground between plants help prevent weed seeds germinate and grow. About a 10 cm layer of mulch between crops will cut out light from the surface but even a thin layer can increase soil friability making weeds easier to pull out. The effectiveness of these mulches can be increased by putting a layer of newspaper and cardboard underneath as a ground clearing.

Plastic Sheeting

For small closely spaced plants the sheet must be put down and holes cut before planting but the soil beneath should be moist if you are doing this. The plastic can be removed and reused next year however non degradable mulches have the disadvantage that organic matter and moisture can be harder to apply, so sufficient organic matter will be needed before the sheeting is added. There are pros and cons to the possible range of mulches that can be used but black polypropylene (sometimes sold as black fleece) has the following advantages –

Lasts about 4 years

Porous

Easy to plant through

Black fleece in action



Cuts out light but warms the soil

Close spacing your plants

Vegetables planted close together in blocks can smother small weeds. For example try displacing weeds by planting lettuces between your cabbages or plant quick growing crops to cover areas with broad leaf crops such as spinach.

Modules

Modules – Plants started off in pots, trays or modules can be given a head start and compete effectively against weeds particularly early in the year.



Stale Seedbeds

A **false** or **stale** seed bed is a useful organic weed technique which involves creating a seedbed some weeks before the seeds are due to be sown. Prepare the seed bed by sowing and raking and then let the weeds get a head start and hoe them off. Then, set your seed and perhaps cover them with leaf mould or weed free compost.

Hoeing

Can be one of the quickest way of cutting off weed seedlings as they grow but again persistence will be needed to see off deep rooted perennials. The best hoeing needs sharp blades and sunny dry weather (well, miracles can happen!!!), try to hoe shallow and just below the surface – all easier said than done but worth the reward.

Hand weeding

Many weeds can be removed by hand but deeper rooted ones may need persuasion with fork, again friable mulch based soils make this job easier. I find there can be something strangely relaxing about this activity but my psychiatrist suggests it is quite normal.

Poor old weeds. We don't object to you really, you fix carbon, nitrogen and can help insects. It is just that you are in the wrong place at the wrong time – apart from that, no hard feelings and here is a poem all about you by **Getrude Hall**.

You bold thing! Thrusting 'neath the very nose
Of her fastidious majesty, the rose,
Ev'n in the best ordained garden-bed,
Unauthorized, your smiling little head!

The gardener, —mind, —will come in his big boots
And drag you up by your rebellious roots
And cast you forth to shrivel in the sun,
Your daring quelled, your little weed's life done.

And when the noon cools and the sun drops low
He'll come again with his big wheelbarrow
and trundle you, —I don't know clearly where, —
But off —outside the dew, the light, the air.

Meantime—ah, yes! the air is very blue,
And gold the light, and diamond the dew,—
You laugh and courtesy in your worthless way,
And you are gay—oh, so exceeding gay!

You argue in your manner of a weed,
You did not make yourself grow from a seed,
You fancy you've a claim to standing-room,
You dream yourself a right to breathe and bloom.

The sun loves you, you think, just as the rose;
He never scorned you for a weed,—he knows,
The green-gold flies rest on you, and are glad,
It's only cross old gardeners find you bad.

You know, you weed, I quite agree with you;
I am a weed myself, and I laugh too,—
Both, just as long as we can shun his eye,
Let's sniff at the old gardener trudging by!

Seasonal Jobs - April is off to a warm start, giving a green light for activity. Here is a list of jobs to consider this month:

Sowing and planting

Consider planting early seed potatoes by the end of the month but keep a look out for late frosts and be prepared to cover emerging shoots. Garlic should already be in with onions to follow.

Successional sowings of beetroot, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, spinach, spring onions, Kohlrabi, radish, turnips, early peas and Swiss chard can be made near the end of April depending on the weather. In early May, the main crop beans and main crop peas can be planted - The National Allotment Society says April but an adjustment to later should always be built in for New Mills.

The seed of Brussels sprouts, summer cabbage, broccoli, onions and leeks in short rows can be sown on a "nursery seed bed" and transplanted to prepared beds at the end of the month.

If you can offer the protection of a greenhouse, sow the seed of celery, celeriac, French beans (they are hardy enough to be planted out before the runners) and cauliflowers to transplant on the open soil next month. By the end of April we can even think about putting up the runner bean poles and preparing seed beds for outdoor sowings of vegetables.

Go to <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/> for more detail on monthly jobs

Kids Corner

Hi there, got a mum and or dad with an allotment and want them to make it more interesting?
How about persuading them to make a scarecrow, take you on a bug hunt, make a birdfeeder, take colouring sheets to the allotment on a summer's day?

Scarecrow Instructions



Required - 3 bamboo canes (about a 2m in length, 1m in length and 30cm in length), a set of old clothes including a pair of tights and a hat, a large bag of straw and some string, plus some permanent markers or paint, for the face. Start by tying the 1m cane onto the 2m cane to make a cross shape; this will be the scarecrow's body and arms. Next take the 30cm cane and tie this onto the 2m cane about half way down, to make the scarecrow's hips. To make the scarecrow's head, fill one of the tight's leg with straw, firmly packing it down until you have a head shape. Tie off the end and don't forget to cut off the other leg. Take your permanent markers or paint and draw on a face. Once completed, tie this tightly onto the top of the 2m cane, and place a hat into its head.

Next, dress your scarecrow by placing a shirt, jumper or blouse onto the body of the frame, followed by a pair of trousers over the hips. Tie off the ends of the clothing and stuff with straw, remembering to secure the trouser waist and shirt waist with string onto the frame – now your scarecrow is ready and can be stuck into the ground. Again see <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/> for more detail.

The Last Onion – thanks to Jill Hulme



Here is the last onion of my crop. Ahhhhhh. I planted sets of overwintering red and yellow onions about September/October 2012 and the majority got through OK. I began eating them in June 2013 straight from the ground and eventually lifted, dried and strung up the bulk of the crop to store. I had intended to be self-sufficient in onions this time but I was so chuffed with the harvest I gave quite a few away to family and friends. Hubris? So, I am quite pleased to have lasted almost 9 months without having to buy any. This autumn there was less ground prepared and I put in only about ½ the normal amount. So far they have all made it.

Every season is a challenge to relish!

Growing your recipe repertoire

The national "Love food - hate waste" campaign is encouraging us all to expand the variety of food combinations in our meals. Apparently 90% of us are in a recipe rut - cooking the same meals time and time again - but the "Love food - hate waste" campaign is here to help with a whole set of recipe ideas. Take a look at all the options at <http://england.lovefoodhatewaste.com/content/growing-your-recipe-repertoire>

Weather forecast forward look.

The Met Office are suggesting that there will be routine changeable weather toward the end of the month bringing some good drier spells, nice days and cooler nights. Be warned though, there is also a chance the high will retreat to Mid and Northwest Atlantic in early May – if it does, frost and wintry showers could follow. There is talk of a hot summer but also a load of unusually cold water in the Mid- Atlantic that could kibosh it – as usual we haven't a clue!!!!

http://weather.unisys.com/surface/sfc_daily.php?plot=ssa&inv=0&t=cur

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