



New Mills
**Allotment &
Gardening**
Society



NewMAGS

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Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society November 2014

Event reflection

Seedling Saturday

Another successful Seedling Saturday event was held on 10th May 2014 the attendance looked great when I dropped in – thanks again to Barry in particular for the efforts in putting that event together.

Hague Bar Allotment Open Day - Saturday 28th June 2014

The Hague Bar site Open Day was held on Saturday 28th June 2014, the weather was kind and you can see the efforts that were taken to produce a fine display and yes there was a good turn out by plot holders at least!

Many thanks to all who helped make it happen. The photos below are courtesy of Sheila Brown



New Mills One World Festival – July 5th 2014

The society put on a stall at this year's One World Festival. With help Barry managed to put together a fine display of plants for sale and information about the society itself. The editors were present and can confirm a good amount of interest (30 visitors or more) in the plants on offer and about the activities of the Society itself.

Artisan Food fair – Sunday September 29th 2014

Another cracking display and many thanks to Toby and others for coordinating at this well attended event – thank you to Stephen Evans for this photograph.



News from other groups

Thank you to Paul Green the Secretary of High Lane Allotment Society for the information below.

High Lane Allotment Association held its 11th Open Day on Sunday, 20th July 2014. Attractions on the day, in addition to stalls selling plants and produce donated by the plot holders, included the ever popular cake stall, a home-made jams, preserves and pickles stall, a nearly-new stall, a stall selling home-made rhubarb cordial, an "Ask the Expert" service, a children's quiz based on identifying a variety of things on the site, a stupendous raffle and the most superb refreshments. All this was served-up in the High Lane Village Hall which backs onto the allotment site. One attendee asked for his name to be added to the site's waiting list.

Brilliantly coordinated by plot holder Joan Green, the event raised £736.

As well, attendees could purchase passes to go on and visit 4 private gardens in High Lane, an event put on by the Disley & Lyme Horticultural Society.

On Saturday, 16th August 2014, the Disley and Lyme Horticultural Society put on its 107th Annual Show held at the Disley Amalgamated Sports Club, Jackson's Edge Road, Disley. Individual entries in the flowers, fruit and vegetables classes included plot holders from allotments as far afield as Buxton and Reddish. Incorporated in the Show was the 4th Inter-site Allotment Challenge competition, open to any allotment site. The whole of an allotment site is invited to offer up items and then best items are then chosen by those staging the exhibit. This was won for the first time by High Lane Allotment Association whose exhibit also attracted the attention of the Show Secretary who awarded it the Centenary Cup. 2nd place went to Torkington Allotments, Stockport and 3rd place went to Silverlands Allotments, Buxton. Their winning exhibit is pictured below "courtesy of Mike Morton".



Harvest hoarding? – Top tips for storing the annual glut.

If it feels like nature has been in a hurry this year, that's because it has. The average temperature of the seven months from January to July 2014 were the warmest on record meaning that crop growth could start early (weeds as well of course) and there were virtually no late frosts, more remarkably the summer had some good dry spells – so a little taste of what it's like to have a plot in Kent then!

Hopefully this means you dealt with an early glut. As well as bringing satisfaction, all that produce can bring a few challenges, there's all the washing of produce (ruins my beautiful hands), the time spent picking over and "managing" the wildlife and then the question arises so what shall we do with all then?

Help is at hand and through this kind contribution of Stephen Evans we have helpful some top tips and advice right here right now.

Dealing with the harvest

One of the problems growers have annually is how to deal with produce which all seems to be ready at once. Successional sowing can alleviate this problem to a certain extent but with the northern growing season being so short, a glut is often hard to avoid.

A second freezer is an option where vegetables can be stored for up to 6 months safely. Preparing, blanching and packing is a time consuming activity, but worth it in my opinion. I've had good results with Broad beans, French beans, young runner beans, diced turnip, open frozen and bagged individual peeled garlic cloves, New Zealand spinach, Romanesco Calabrese and fresh herbs frozen in ice cube trays. Soft fruit, open frozen and then bagged, is straightforward too, but you need plenty of space in the freezer to do this. There are plenty of books around to give times for blanching and lists of vegetables and fruits that don't freeze well.

Pickling, chutneys and jams, purees and sorbets are alternatives, but can be time consuming and you'll need plenty of glass jars and storage space to deal with any glut e.g. green tomatoes!

Most of us grow potatoes and if you have been very lucky they can last through until March. After lifting, they need careful drying with the soil on, in a cool dark place. We use the spare room floor or loft with the potatoes covered in newspaper. They need 2 to 3 weeks like this so that the skins harden off. We rub off excess soil with gloves, check for any without perfect skins and reject any that are damaged before storing them in paper sacks [freely available from chip shops like The Crispy Cod: Market St.], again in a cool dark place indoors, like an under stairs cupboard. Paper sacks have the advantage over hessian sacks in that they are more lightproof and a rotting potato in a sack can easily be spotted as a wet patch and removed.

Onions and garlic store reasonably well, provided they are thoroughly dry [3-4 weeks minimum with regular turning; reject any that are "necked"], and let them breathe in a mesh bag or hessian sack stored flat in a cool place. Hanging the bags puts pressure on the lower ones which will bruise them and lead to rotting. Strings of garlic or onions hanging in the kitchen may look chic but won't last; it's too hot and humid an environment.

Chillies are a popular crop but you'll probably have to bring them inside on a sunny windowsill after September for them to ripen fully. Thorough drying on paper towels on radiators or strung individually with cotton thread and hung above the radiator works well and they will store in glass jars to give you a yearlong supply.

Other top tips for storage (From editor research)

We should accept that for some crops the best storage place is probably – well our stomachs! Examples may include artichokes, chicory, cucumber, lettuces and tomatoes.

Other harvest dilemmas come later in the year and guidance from a variety of web sites and the University of Idaho (of all places) suggests the following:

Brussel Sprouts - are hardy and have flavours improved by frost, pick them from the bottom up to improve air circulation and cut mould and disease risk. Sprouts require cool and moist conditions if stored at home which makes me think why pick until ready to eat, but if you think you won't be returning to plot for a while keep them in bags or containers in the fridge and pick off outer leaves if necessary. Alternatively, sprouts can be frozen prior to long term storage http://www.ehow.com/how_2158886_freeze-brussel-sprouts.html;

Cauliflowers - before picking look for compact dense heads without any discoloration, the cauliflower will keep well in a plastic bag in the fridge for about a week or hung upside down in a cool place for up to 3 weeks – otherwise cut into manageable freezer portions and freeze;

Leeks - keep them in the ground until you need them. If you are fearing they will rot life can be extended in a fridge near 4c, especially if surrounded by a plastic bag;

Squashes, pumpkins and marrows – Cut the ripe vegetables from the plant leaving a piece of stalk, then leave to dry in the sun or in a warm shed or greenhouse for about a week until they sound hollow when tapped. Protect from frost, wipe off any dirt and then store if possible in a dry environment with a temperature near 10c and prevent the vegetables touching. That way the pumpkins and marrow can keep till mid-winter and the squashes longer;

All root vegetables including beetroot, carrots, celeriac, parsnips, swedes, turnips and winter radishes (but excluding potatoes) can be stored in the ground. What seed merchants don't always tell you is that some varieties are hardier than others, so read around before you make your choice. Frosts can damage roots, so in New Mills you'll need to give them some protection. Covering the roots with a layer of straw or bracken helps to protect them, and also stops the ground from freezing hard and makes them easier to lift. With parsnips you can generally let the frosts at them as they act to sweeten them up.

How to store carrots and other root vegetables in boxes

An easy alternative for small-to-medium quantities of root vegetables is to lift them before the first frosts (except for parsnips, as mentioned above) and store them in boxes under controlled conditions. To do this you'll need a cool (but not freezing), dark shed or cellar and a supply of suitable boxes or tubs. Strong, lidded plastic ones are best because they are rodent-proof and will last indefinitely: wooden boxes or crates look great, but only last for a few seasons and are quickly targeted by mice and rats. You'll also need a packing material such as moist peat-free compost or horticultural (sharp) sand, to keep the roots separate (which helps to prevent rot spreading) and prevent moisture loss.

1. Lift the roots as carefully as possible. Cut or twist the foliage off them close to the crown, being careful not to damage the root itself. (The foliage in the photo below has been left over too long so that you can see the principle)



2. Brush off any excess soil but DO NOT WASH THE ROOTS. Washed roots may look nice, but they do not keep as well as muddy ones.
3. Sort the roots into two piles: perfect ones and ones with any visible cuts, splits or signs of rot. The imperfect ones should be used up promptly, or cut back to sound flesh and dried, pickled or frozen.
4. Take the perfect roots to their boxes in the storage area. Don't take the boxes to the roots, unless you're happy to carry them when they're full!
5. Cover the bottom of the storage boxes or tubs with a layer of the compost or sand. On top of this, place a layer of perfect roots, crown-to-tail so that as little space as possible is wasted. Ideally, they shouldn't quite touch.
6. Cover the roots with another layer of compost or sand, and repeat until the box is full, topping with another layer of compost or sand, and put the lids on.

Seasonal recipes

As well as worrying about storage we also have to think about what to do with all that harvest produce – here is a little tasty help courtesy of Stephen Evans – enjoy

RUNNER BEANS WITH TOMATOES

Serves 4

3 Tbsp olive oil, 1 bay leaf, 500g runner beans, cut up, 500ml vegetable/chicken stock, 2 red onions diced, 350g cherry tomatoes wholes, 2tbsp dried oregano, parsley to garnish, salt and pepper to taste

Method

Warm the oil in a large fry pan over a medium heat, add the onions and bay leaf and fry, stirring occasionally for 5 minutes until soft. Add garlic and cook for a further minute, add beans and tomatoes, season to taste and cook for 2 minutes. Pour in the stock, add the oregano and simmer, uncovered until tender and the liquid has thickened into a sauce [20 to 25 mins].

FRENCH BEANS WITH FETA, WALNUTS AND MINT

Serves 2 to 4

280g French beans cut up, 3 Tbsp olive oil, Juice of half a lemon, small handful mint leaves chopped, handful of fresh dill, chopped or half tsp dried dill, 150g feta cheese, salt and pepper to taste, 50g walnuts, toasted and roughly chopped

Method

Cook beans until tender, drain and refresh in cold water. Dress the beans with the olive oil, lemon juice, mint, some of the dill and season to taste. Serve topped with crumbled feta cheese, walnuts and the remainder of the dill.



Seasonal jobs – September and early autumn

Just when you are looking to enjoying the fruits of hard work earlier in the year comes the sobering news that the National Allotment Society regards September as the Start of the new growing season. It is a good time to take stock of the season just gone successes and failures and perhaps write some notes on what you think worked, what didn't and why.

Harvesting will continue apace and we have already shared thoughts about storage. The society implores us to dig up potatoes and onions prior to cold damp weather and also that the mere act of picking late berries such as raspberries can encourage the plant to produce more. We know that courgettes can explode in size but get less tasty so try to check them frequently, further to maturing is unlikely after mid-month in a normal year (when did we have one of those?) so you may want to take in the green ones too and use them for chutney.

Sowing and planting

Crops such as winter salad, lettuce, spinach and even oriental vegetables can be planted now, they should germinate while we have warmth and potentially supply leaves through the winter.

Autumn Composting



When autumn does come, all that decaying plant matter and the falling leaves can provide a wealth of carbon rich material will provide good compost for you into the next season. The rich organic matter in compost will improve soil structure, nutrient and potassium availability and can even help neutralise acidic soils.

Top tips

The compost mixture needs about a 50/50 mixture of greens and browns. Greens provide the nitrogen and browns provide the carbon content needed in good compost.

Nitrogen rich greens include grass cuttings, nettles, dead annual weeds, unwanted over crops, hedge clippings, tea leaves and bags, vegetable peelings and pulp, fruit peelings, seeds and pulp, coffee grinds (bring them down from a pot in your kitchen or consider getting a Bokashi in which you can even compost cooked food <http://www.bokashidirect.co.uk/>). Green materials are easy to come by most of the year.

Avoid composting pernicious weeds and it is good practice to remove roots and seed heads anyway. Unless you have murdered them completely through drowning or desiccation it is a good idea to not compost Couch grass, Bind Weed, Japanese Knotweed, Creeping Buttercup and Dandelions.

Carbon rich browns can be in shorter supply near the plot in winter unless you can bring down cardboard, egg boxes or paper receipts to the plot from home.

Autumn leaves are a valuable compost material in the garden as they can easily be incorporated into compost and provide useful carbon within the mixture. Remember to add leaves to compost in small batches and ensure that greens and browns are mixed together as they are added to the bin.

Many of our plots are a fair distance from the trees and even though some will blow in we should also capture and compost the value in finished annuals. Large-bodied plants like tomatoes and broccoli can be chopped a bit smaller to make it easier to compost. It is not advisable to put the root mass system into the compost. Also, avoid composting any plants which have disease or mold problems. In theory, the heat from the composting process will kill disease spores, but in practice not all compost piles attain maximum heat potential. Thick stems and branches will take much longer to break down.

If you have a wood burning stove the ash can make a useful addition to compost. As wood is burnt nitrogen and sulfur are lost as gases and concentrations of calcium, potassium and magnesium rise, this means the ash also acts as a valuable fertiliser within the compost and can also help reduce compost acidity.

Much more information on composting dos and don'ts at <http://www.recycle now.com/reduce/home-composting>

All in all nature makes most compost systems work in the end but I would stop short of the advice I use to get from East Lancashire scrapmen in response to just about any question – chuck it in cock, it'll be reet.

Other jobs

It is a good time to prune back soft fruit bushes, apple or pear trees. With temperature and light beginning to fade, late crops benefit from an input of fertiliser or compost to give them a boost but plants which have finished growing should be dug up and composted. You may want to keep bean and pea plant roots in situ to retain the nitrates they have accumulated.

Normally it may be a case of clearing beds that will be unused through the winter and covering but this year it would be helpful if the space could be offered to help fellow allotmenters at Hague Bar

Kids' corner

More evidence this time thanks to Jill Hulme showing that allotments are for children and grandchildren. These 2 helped with watering, with recognizing a tiny weeny unborn tomato on the vine, with harvesting (and eating) all the blueberries, and larking about - Free fun.



Heads up for Marple Potato Day.

Marple Pota to Day is on February 8th between 10:00 am and 15:00 pm. The Event will be held in The Marple Senior Citizens Hall, Memorial Park, Marple, SK6 6BE www.marpleallotments.org.uk/potatoday.html

Artides Wanted

Contributions are 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 and for more information about the society please see our website www.newmillsallotments.org.uk