



New Mills  
**Allotment &  
Gardening**  
Society



## *NewMAGS*

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# Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society April 2015

## News

### Construction work at Hague Bar site – 2015

The emergency work to the railway being carried out by Murphy on behalf of Network Rail has been progressing at Hague Bar. The impact on the car park, children's playground and allotment site is apparent from photos taken in mid-January 2015 which are available on the Allotment Society web site. The work is to stabilise the railway embankment from the site back to New Mills station and is expected to take a year to complete. Plots 1 to 7 are out of action as a massive haul road is constructed and public parking has disappeared. Members still have foot access to the allotment site. A considerable number of mature trees have been removed which will substantially alter the site's sheltered microclimate, making it more exposed and windy. The contractors have assured the Society that the site will be restored to its former state; 'you won't know we've been here' as their mission statement declares!

Please check the Allotment Society web site for updates on progress of the works <http://www.newmillsallotments.org.uk/>

**Polytunnel Crisis Averted!** - Thank you to Stephen Evans for this reporting on how smart communal thinking helped solve a tricky issue over the winter.

A major issue arose over the winter with the polytunnel roof with the advent of some heavy snow. The roof has a relatively flat profile and as well as accumulations of rainwater between the roof spars occurring regularly, large amounts of snow stretched the skin and were impossible to move until they melted.



The polytunnel tenants met to discuss a solution and initially it was suggested that we should lower the roof height by reducing the length of the spars and take up the slack in the skin by repositioning it. An on-site meeting revealed that this would not be possible because the shape of the arc meant that a height reduction would also reduce the amount of growing space as the walls effectively had to move inwards. Dan suggested that we could insert spacers along the central spar which would reduce the flatness of the roof, making the whole structure more domed. The spacers were made from large polypropylene barrels cut in half. Here's Dan in action:



The solution appears to have worked and has also had the effect of tightening the skin. Several punctures to the skin were also repaired; thanks to Steve Catchpole for the loan of the ladders and to the tenants who helped over two weekends.

## A Welcome to New Members

We would like to welcome to the society new tenants on four plots:

Plot 27 at Ollersett - Michelle and James Bancroft;  
Plot 9 at Hague Bar - Steve and Julie Hudson;  
Plot 11 at Hague Bar - Michael Chamberlain;  
Plot 15 at Hague Bar - Lucy Cooke and Gavin Zurich;

I am sure we will all make them feel welcome and we wish them all the best for successful and enjoyable growing efforts.

## Event reflection

### Seedling Saturday (Thank you to Barry Bate for this update).

Many thanks to all the people who contributed seeds or attended the Seedy Saturday event at the Volunteer Centre on the morning of Saturday March 7<sup>th</sup> 2015. The weather was fine so promotion of the event could take place out on Union Road and that resulted in the vast majority of the seeds being taken away. Some of the remainder will be 'stock' for next year's event and others will be planted to provide some of the seedlings for Seedling Saturday.

## Events - Forward Look

### Seedling Saturday - Saturday 16th May at the Torrs from 10.00 until 12.00

Hopefully this will be a nice 'social' event as the cafe will be open all morning serving their usual food and drinks. This is a reminder that we need SEEDLINGS in order to make the event successful - even if they are just a few 'left over' from people's main sowings. The Society will provide some pots and compost for re-potting (which is always a fun activity for children as well as grown-ups) as well as growing advice.

## New Mills One World Festival – July 4<sup>th</sup> 2015

The Society has been asked to take part in the One World Festival again. However, this can only happen if there is a small group of volunteers who can give an hour or so to staff the gazebo, talk to people during the event and pack away at the end. Volunteers can contact me and I will draw up a rota for the afternoon. It would be ideal if it could be organised in 'one hour' shifts so that everyone gets to see the rest of the Festival as well. People can contact me by email or mobile (07921255551) to offer help. Recycling and composting information will be available again which added to the event last year.

## Open Garden Events 2015

Given the time of year and if you need some inspiration, ideas or just a break from your own garden or allotment don't forget that you can find a full list of Open Garden event days in Derbyshire and Cheshire through the following web site link. We are quite lucky in this area as there are lots of events further south in Derbyshire which could be combined with a day out in the Peaks <http://www.opengardens.co.uk/index.php>. Search under the Gardens by county section for local details.

**New Mills High School** is our 'local' contributor again this year. The School gardens will be open to the public on Saturday 11th July (10-5) and Sunday 12th July (1-5) admission £3 (children free) with the usual selection of hot and cold beverages and a selection of sandwiches, cream teas and homemade cakes available.

The School is entering the Tatton Garden Festival this year. They have been working with the Heritage Centre to design their competition garden and will be exhibiting it at Tatton Park on Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th July. The Society wishes the School all the best with this exciting venture and congratulations to Chris Barker, Craig Pickering and all the pupils who are taking part.

## National Allotments Week

This will be held between August 10<sup>th</sup> and August 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. Check out [www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk) for more details about collective action to protect plots which are under threat nationally and [click here \(http://www.nsalg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/National-Allotments-Week-2014-Local-Events-for-web.pdf\)](http://www.nsalg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/National-Allotments-Week-2014-Local-Events-for-web.pdf) for details of local events to celebrate the week.

## 2015 International Year of Soils

The 68th UN General Assembly has declared 2015 the International Year of Soils (IYS). The intention is to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of soil for food security and essential ecosystem functions.

**The specific objectives of the IYS 2015 are to:**

- Raise full awareness among civil society and decision makers about the profound importance of soil for human life;
- Educate the public about the crucial role soil plays in food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, essential ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and sustainable development;
- Support effective policies and actions for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources;
- Promote investment in sustainable soil management activities to develop and maintain healthy soils for different land users and population groups;
- Strengthen initiatives in connection with the SDG process (Sustainable Development Goals) and Post-2015 agenda;
- Advocate for rapid capacity enhancement for soil information collection and monitoring at all levels (global, regional and national).

Find much more detail and lots of resources some of which perhaps could be used to support Allotment Society Events this year at <http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/about/en/>

## Growing tips for the new season

After last year's very warm conditions 2015 has seen a return to normal weather wise and this spell of proper winter was captured nicely at Ollersett through these photographs taken by Hilary Hamer.



With the season advancing fast I put out a call for insight on best practice growing techniques and top tips from the Society's experienced growers. We are so lucky to have such experience within the society and thanks to the efforts of Rick Seccombe we can share some top tips with you for growing Leeks, Onions, Garlic and Shallots.

### Leeks, Onions, Garlic, Shallots

I divide my plot into 20 beds, each around 1.2m x 2.5m (or around 4 foot x 8 foot). This year I will be growing Leeks in 3 beds, onions and shallots in 2 beds and garlic in 1 bed, 6 in total.

I grew around 225 leeks in 3 beds in 2014. This provided a crop that has lasted all winter. I picked the first leeks on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2014 and on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015 there were 25 left.

I hope to do the same this year and I will need to sow 5 varieties (all available from Kings Seeds). The earliest variety, Jolant can be harvested from early September, Prizetaker from October to December, Giant Winter from November to February, Musselburgh from December to March and Blue Solaise from March to May. I started sowing the Jolant leek seeds on 2<sup>nd</sup> March this year and sowed the last of the Blue Solaise early April. I find standard seed trays too shallow for leek seedlings and prefer to grow them in a deeper container. Wholesale mushroom boxes are ideal. They need holes drilled in the bottom and can then be filled with compost 10cm deep. I always use New Horizon Multi-Purpose Peat Free Compost for all vegetable seed sowing. I will sow 2 of these boxes for each variety. I will probably only use 6-8 of these for the crop above – I always grow more in case of poor germination. Any surplus seedlings have been on the plant stall at the open days. Last year I planted out the first leek seedlings on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and the last on 17<sup>th</sup> July.

These 2 photos were taken on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015 showing a freshly sown box of Giant Winter and 25 Blue Solaise left to harvest from last year's crop. Growing and harvesting leeks is a year round activity.





I always buy Garlic bulbs to sow rather than using my own bulbs. In October I bought 9 bulbs of Germidour that split into 66 cloves and 3 bulbs of Thermidrome that split into 19 cloves. The Germidour cloves were planted on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2014, each one under a plastic bottle with the bottom cut off. 2 litre clear plastic bottles are ideal. Ollersett allotment site is not sheltered so I do need to string all the necks together and tie to stakes to prevent them blowing away. The plants were nearly tall enough by 17<sup>th</sup> March to reach the top of the bottles so I have now removed all the bottles. You have to be careful to gently ease the bottles out of the soil so as not to disturb the plants. (See pictures below).



I sowed the Thermidrome bulbs, each in a 9cm pot, in my greenhouse at home on 16<sup>th</sup> January and planted these out on 13<sup>th</sup> March. This is mainly an insurance policy in case there are any failures from the November crop (not this year so these are extras).

Last year I harvested most of the garlic crop on 6<sup>th</sup> July, dried them off at home and then made garlic braids to hang in the shed. There are plenty of websites to show how to braid garlic – just search for “garlic braid instructions”. I am still eating last year’s crop – they will probably last until the end of April.

It’s good to start shallots early. I sowed 9 Golden Gourmet and 10 Biztro bulbs in pots in my greenhouse on 16<sup>th</sup> February this year and can plant them out end March/early April. I haven’t grown Biztro before. I only use shallots for pickling and Golden Gourmet has produced a good pickling crop in previous years.

I grow red onions from seed. The Mammoth Red variety has done well in previous years and produces a large mild onion that I use to make coleslaw. I sowed the first batch of these in small pots on a windowsill on 16<sup>th</sup> February and expect to plant them out during the first week of April. Last year I had 30 onions.

I have tried growing white onions from seed and had poor results. So this year it will be sets again. I sowed 16 Stuttgarter sets in pots in my greenhouse on 15<sup>th</sup> February (see picture below) and planted these out on 21<sup>st</sup> March. I should be able to harvest these in the latter half of July. I planted the rest of the Stuttgarter sets and Sturon sets in the ground on 21<sup>st</sup> March and expect to harvest these during August. The crows up at Ollersett site are a nuisance, so each row of sets needs covering with a tunnel of narrow mesh chicken wire, staked out to stop it blowing away (see picture below). I remove these tunnels when the onions are tall enough to reach the top of the wire. I expect a crop of 120 white onions which should last until November.



I find White Lisbon Spring Onions the most reliable for the Olle rsett site and I sow a 45cm row every 2-3 weeks. In April I have sown in guttering in the greenhouse and then slid into the ground when the soil warms in May. I have sown direct into the ground from May to July.

## Other Crops

There is good advice on growing techniques and requirements for a variety of crops on the National Allotment Society (NAS) web site. Here is a look at some of the key advice relating to some crops which can be commonly grown in the cool moist climate of New Mills and which can be started or sown during spring.

### Beetroot

According to the NAS guidance we should look for bolt resistant varieties such as Bolterdy, Bikores and Moneta when purchasing beetroot seeds. Bolting is where crops flower and set seed rather than producing edible roots. Bolting can be induced result from cold snaps or droughts.

Beetroot will grow in any reasonable garden soil but will require fertile conditions and is best grown on ground that was manured for a previous crop. Freshly manured ground however could cause the roots to crack.

It is recommended to sow three seeds at 6inch/15cms intervals in 1inch/25mm deep rows about 18inch/45cms apart. Do this at fortnightly intervals from mid-April to July for a succession of tender, tasty roots. When the seedlings are about 1 inch/25mm high thin them out to leave one seedling per 6inch/15cms station. Always water along the rows before and especially after thinning them. This helps settle the seedlings back into the soil after the disturbance of thinning. Water the crops weekly days in dry spells.

### Carrots

It is recommended that carrots are sown from April through to the start of July. Carrots prefer a stone and clay free soil (oh dear). On heavy clay, stony or chalky soil or on ground that doesn't drain particularly well it is better to use main crop short-root types which cope better with these conditions. Alternatively stump rooted varieties can be grown in bags or containers but bear in mind carrots should not normally be transplanted. They have to be sown directly into the soil and thinned out later to produce quality roots. Sow the seed thinly along drills that are 1inch/25mm deep and 6inch/15cms apart for the early carrots and 12inch/30cms apart for later sown main crop carrots. Water every 10-14 days in dry weather to keep them growing steadily and prevent the roots from splitting and hoe between the rows to keep weeds to a minimum as they will compete with the carrots for light, water and nutrients.

Carrots in containers



Seedlings after 10 days (if you are lucky)

A week or so later and ready for thinning (ensure about 12/13mm apart).

## **Parsnips**

Parsnips are a great crop to grow as they can be planted now and potentially harvested for use next Christmas. It is much better to delay sowing until the conditions are warmer which may mean waiting until early May. However parsnips sown later may be slightly smaller. Always wait for a still, calm day to sow the seed in 1inch/25mm deep drills, water along each drill with a watering can containing liquid seaweed before hand to help the germinating seedlings. It saves on time and seeds to sow 2 or 3 seeds at 6inch /15 cm spacing along the row. Thin the seedlings to one at the first true leaf stage before eventually thinning to one seedling at every 12inch/15cm apart. After the parsnip seedlings have been thinned and begin to grow all they require is regular watering to encourage steady growth of the roots. Feed your parsnips once a month with liquid seaweed if practical. Because of the wide spacing between the seedlings and the rows during the early stages of their growth it is important to regularly hoe between the plants to keep soil free of competitive weeds and to create a dust mulch that will help to conserve precious soil moisture.

## **Peas**

According to the NAS peas seem to like cool and cloudy summers which could mean they are a good bet in this area. At this time of year we can plant wrinkled seeded cultivars suitable for late spring and early summer sowings when the weather has warmed up. These can be sown from late April until the end of May. These cultivars only grown to about 2ft/60cms but will still need some form of support to keep the crop off the soil.



Sow the peas directly into the soil in 2 inch/5cm deep shallow drills or a flat wide trench the width of a garden spade. The pea seed is spaced at 3 inch/7.5 cm along the drill or sown in three rows along the trench at the same spacing. Make the distance between the sets of rows the same as the ultimate height of the plants. It is a waste to broadcast sow the seed in the trench because it will only lead to overcrowding problems later on. Cover the seed by gently drawing the soil back over the drills or trench and lightly drag a garden rake along the length of the row to camouflage it and hopefully fool the birds. The newly sown seeds will always need protection from birds and mice, so, from the outset cover the seed beds with netting and set traps for the mice.

## **Growing on**

It is essential to protect the young pea plants from birds because they will devastate a crop before breakfast time. Main crop peas can grow from 3ft/1m up to 6ft/2mts tall. It is essential to provide them some form of support from the start. The most commonly used is brushwood cut from the hedgerows or plastic pea netting hung from strong stakes or canes. Water regularly because if the pea plants are allowed to go short of water they will stop growing and never recover. Keep the root area cool and moist at all times. Peas manufacture their own nitrogen on their roots so should not require any extra feeding.

## **Courgette and Marrows**

Courgettes are grown from seed. Sow the seeds in warm environment in 3 inch/9cm pots filled with fresh seed compost during April – May. The seed is easy to handle and must be planted on its edge to prevent it rotting off in the damp compost. Push the seed pointed end downwards into the compost and tap the pot to settle the loose compost around the seed. Cover the pot with a sheet of glass or plastic and shade using a sheet of newspaper until the seed germinates in about 10 days. The seed can be



sown in the open ground during June, alternatively when the seedlings begin to produce their first true leaves they can be potted on into 6 inch/15 cm pots filled with fresh potting compost.

When the roots begin to show at the bottom of the pot they are ready to transplant into the open ground. Courgettes like a well dug, water holding soil containing plenty of organic matter. Create a shallow raised conical mound by digging a "moat" and throwing the soil up to create the mound. Plant the courgette at the center of the mound and water it in well. Never let the plant go short of water. Plant out at 1 metre spacing. As the courgette plant grows it will produce a mass of white roots on the surface of the soil. Cover these with potting compost, garden compost or well-rotted manure. Keep covering the roots as they appear and gradually over the course of the summer the moat will disappear and the mound will spread outwards. The plants must be kept well watered at every stage of their growth. If the roots are allowed to dry out it will lead to an attack by mildew and the plants will be ruined. Feed the plants once a week with liquid seaweed to encourage plenty of strong healthy growth. All courgettes are bush plants they will not need pinching out. Hoe regularly between the plants to keep the weeds under control.

The guidance for Marrows is very similar.

### **Broad Beans**

As part of the legume family beans are brilliant at locking nitrogen into the soil and helping to improve fertility. For summer crops, seeds can be planted straight into the soil from late March to May (use a cloche for protection during the first few weeks if sowing when the weather is still cold). Each seed should be sown 2 inch/5 cm deep at 9 inch/20 cm spacing in the row. If planting in double rows ensure there is 12 inch/30 cm between each pair of rows. When the first flowers and small pods appear water the plants regularly to help the pods swell. If there is a drought you may need to water more frequently. Broad beans can grow up to 36 inch/1 m tall so to prevent them falling over construct a cat's cradle of sticks and string to hold them upright. When the first flowers and small pods appear water the plants regularly to help the pods.



### **French Beans (aka Climbing, Snap, String and Dwarf beans)**

French beans can be sown earlier than runner beans because they are slightly hardier but still cannot be sown or planted outdoors until after the danger of late frosts has passed. It is best to start the earliest sowings off under glass in pots or trays filled with good quality compost and then plant out from mid-May onwards. The plants should be planted out 12 inch/30 cm apart in rows and have at least 2 ft/60 cm between each row. Alternatively if space is tight the plants can be grown up a wigwam structure. All French beans like sunny positions and as little wind as possible. Support the climbing types with canes or netting. All types of French beans self-fertilise so the flowers will set and form beans without any problems. When the first flowers and small beans appear water the plants regularly to help the beans swell.

### **Runner Beans**

Runner Beans should only be sown outdoors once all the late frosts have passed. Make sure your ground has been well conditioned the previous autumn by the addition of plenty of organic material, as these beans need moisture holding soil, don't be tempted to overdo the manure otherwise you will have all leaves and no flowers.



For best results start the sowing under glass in pots or trays filled with good quality compost from late April to the end of May. Transplant after hardening the plants off between late May and June, when the soil has warmed up. Set the plants at 12inch/30cms intervals in the row with 3ft/90 cm between rows planting them on the left side of the cane or pole to allow them to climb up naturally. If you are sowing them directly into the soil dig a shallow hole about 3inch/75cms deep and drop in two seeds removing one after germination. Runner beans can also be grown up wigwams or netting.

Encourage the plants to grow up the canes by trailing and loosely tying the leading shoot round the bamboo/pole. Runner beans need to be pollinated by bees because they move the pollen around the flowers. If the flowers are slow to set try watering the plants with lime water (1 good handful of lime per 2 gallons of water) it sometimes helps.

After first flowers and small beans appear water the plants regularly to help the beans swell. (If there is a drought you may need to water more frequently.)

## **Seasonal jobs – April and May**

### **April**

April provides a last chance to make preparation for the busy growing months to follow. Preparatory activities might include weeding and raking beds in preparation for planting pruning, mulch feeding fruit bushes and pricking out young seedlings into bigger pots or larger modules to allow them to develop their own root systems. Newly planted potatoes should be covered by ridges of soil to ensure protection from late frosts whilst old brassica stumps such as cauliflowers and cabbages can be removed from the ground once harvested to avoid risk of disease.

Those with ambition and time might want to experiment moving plants raised indoors outside and then back in the greenhouse. The text books talk about building canes and pea sticks but as I write this the wind is gusting 50 mph (you may want to leave it a while).

Herbs can be propagated by digging up and re-planting and dividing the likes of chive mint and majoram.

### **May**

May is certainly a month for sowing crops but there remains a risk of sowing some crops too early and sowing all the crop at once (which results in a one-off glut later on). If possible succession sowing of small batches of seeds every 2 weeks of crops gives a better chance of success.

Crops that can be sown in May include:

Cabbages, cauliflowers, sprouts and broccoli (either indoors for transplant later or directly) if already grown indoors they could be planted out if the weather is kind.

Courgettes, pumpkins and other squashes can be sown indoors in preparation for June planting, root vegetables can be planted with more confidence.

The extra warmth should mean it is safe to plant lettuces and salad crops and if the weather has been reasonably warm, Florence Fennel and Kohl Rabi can go in toward the end of the month and Sprouting Broccoli seedlings can be planted into firmly packed soil and brassica collars are recommended to prevent cabbage root fly.

Overall there is an emphasis on not planting too early and staggering planting if possible. So much is weather dependent for information the Met Office are hinting at a cool period early May but that is not guaranteed.

### **Problems to watch**

Watch out for slugs and snails and if you want to go to town re-assessing the options for combatting them and have some minutes to spare here are 20 slug control options <http://www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/20-ways-control-slugs-permaculture-garden-or-allotment>

Nets might be required to deter pigeons although everything is a balance isn't it as the very same pigeons may be killing your slugs. To add to the fun, aphids may begin to infest soft fruit bushes in mild damp periods, again there are various controls that can be used but for many regular inspection squashing by hand might be the best option.

## Composting

Just in case you need a compost bin Derbyshire County Council are running a free bin giveaway competition to celebrate Compost Awareness Week which runs from May 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 8<sup>th</sup>. You can find details here <http://your.derbyshire.gov.uk/enewsletters/20150417/articles/compost-bins>. Please don't enter if you have won a free bin from the County Council in the last 3 years.



**“Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie” [To a mouse – Robert Burns]**

Hague Bar has a large population of mice, voles and shrews who will ruin attempts to grow legumes like peas and beans. They dig up and eat seed planted directly and also eat the shoots of young plants which are started off in pots or modules and then planted out. They seem not to attack more mature plants; it's the first 2 or 3 weeks which are the critical period. The good news is that although they will dig up and eat the seed of broad beans, they seem to leave the young plants alone.

Direct sowing is more or less a waste of time, and a failed planting will mean that you'll have to start all over again, so it's better to start them off at home, then plant them out and then try these protection methods:

- Fine gauge pea and bean mesh pegged over the seedlings at soil level
- Use holly, rose or bramble stems laid between plants and rows; this seems to work reasonably well
- Use cut plastic pots e.g. soup containers around larger plants e.g. runner and French beans with the solid edge pushed into the soil. Yoghurt pots aren't tall enough; the mice will climb them! Quite effective against slugs too if you make the cut edges jagged
- You could try solar powered mole repellent devices which emit a regular vibration through the soil. I've tried these and am unsure whether they work or not as rodents seem to learn quickly! They might give you a window in which your young plants can put on enough growth to survive

Don't forget the next meeting!!!

After the excitement (?) of the General Election please don't forget that the next meeting of New Mills Allotment Society is on the same day at 7.30 in the Library Reading Room on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May. Everyone welcome.

## Articles Wanted

Contributions are welcomed for future editions. Please contact David Brown [mtlanin@supanet.com](mailto:mtlanin@supanet.com). If you wish to contact the society for any other reason please email: [secretary@newmillsallotments.org.uk](mailto:secretary@newmillsallotments.org.uk) and for more information about the society please see our website [www.newmillsallotments.org.uk](http://www.newmillsallotments.org.uk)

Happy Gardening/Allotmenting (just invented a word there) to you all!