



New Mills  
**Allotment &  
Gardening**  
Society

## *NewMAGS*

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# Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society

## November 2015

### News –

#### **Construction work at Hague Bar site – 2015.**

Although it has been a frustrating year for all tenants at Hague Bar either because they have lost the use of their plots or have been inconvenienced by changed access, the line improvement works undertaken by Network Rail are coming to an end and plot holders are looking forward to things getting back to normal in 2016. The collapsed culvert near the entrance has been replaced and hopefully this should reduce the amount of water running across the site.

Despite the works, site development at Hague Bar actually continued during the year through the efforts of volunteer work parties (well done to all involved). The polytunnel has been improved with work to the roof, installation of double doors at each end and by new automatic opening vents. Separately, the roof on the old stable has been lifted to improve its water collecting ability and the guttering has been renovated. New manure and woodchip bays by the gate have been constructed using materials donated to the site by Murphys. These are larger and more accessible and should last a few years. In addition two new small plots have been created and another is planned. The communal area has also been improved and will be developed further. **Thanks are expressed to all who have helped with these activities.**

#### **Polytunnel improvement on-going**

Members with small plots within the communal polytunnel at Hague Bar are proving its benefits by extending the growing season both at the start and the end. Winter lettuce can be grown in the polytunnel without protection and broad beans and peas in February. The new doors and automatic vents installed earlier this year will provide a virtually frost free environment. Tomatoes can be grown which have ripened by August, and the growing of chillies, capsicums, aubergines, cucumbers, sweetcorn and even melons and sweet potato has also proven successful.

Here is some pictorial evidence **from Amanda and Stephen Evans** showing just half the Chillies grown by Steve and Amanda within their polytunnel plot and the very tall sweet corn grown by Jill Hulme



Over the summer the polytunnel 'ends' have been finished off. A small working party over two sessions installed an opening window at each end with automatic openers and constructed door frames. The north end has a single door and the south a double. At the same time the skin was pulled tighter over the roof to hopefully remedy water pooling issues. Later work will focus on protecting the skin on the doors and windows with 2mm Perspex panels. **Thanks to those who volunteered for the work days.**



(Photos above are courtesy of Stephen Evans).

If any member is interested or would like to find out more, please contact Amanda at [NMAGSlettings@hotmail.com](mailto:NMAGSlettings@hotmail.com).

## Events reflection.

### St George's Primary School Visit

All children from St George's Primary made a visit to Ollersett Allotments on Thursday 21st May 2015. Infants visited in 2 groups in the morning and juniors visited in 2 groups in the afternoon. As well as looking around at the different allotment plots some of the plot holders talked to the pupils about tools that we use, different crops that we grow and how we manage the site. Many thanks to Jen Dale and Chris Moore who made star appearances displaying their lovely (and very productive) plots.



## **Ollersett Open Day.**

The Ollersett site hosted a successful Open Day on 11<sup>th</sup> July which was linked with the Open Garden scheme featuring New Mills School's gardens.



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

The society provided a stall, examples of produce and information in order to promote the society at the One World Festival. It was another fine day for the event enabling plenty of interaction with the public and opportunity to answer various questions.

## **Sunday October 11<sup>th</sup> – Artisan Food Fair.**

Allotment Society produce was displayed with aplomb at the Artisan Food Fair held on Sunday October 11<sup>th</sup>.

Below from left to right Isobel, Helen, Jean, Andy and Julie add to the fine display!



**(Photo provided by Barry)**

Many thanks to the volunteers who assisted with these events.

## **Events Forward Look.**

### **Annual General Meeting - Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November at 7:30 p.m. in the Library Reading Room.**

Normal business will be strictly limited so that we can make this a more 'social' occasion. If you have any suggestions about how we can make the meeting more social (whilst not causing anyone to get arrested) please forward them to the Society Secretary as soon as possible.

### **Request for help - New Mills Primary School.**

The Allotment Society has been invited to help out at New Mills Primary School. They have raised beds, a pond and want to develop a gardening project for small people. If you have some time and would like to explore working with children please contact Claire Whetstone, the Head teacher, at the school.

## Date for the diary -7<sup>th</sup> February 2016 - Seed Potato Day at Marple Memorial Hall.

Also check out the National Allotment Society Website for details of other Potato Day local events  
<http://www.nsalg.org.uk/news-events-campaigns/potato-day-2016/>

### An offer of help!

Jordan Cooper is a trained horticulturalist and manages a local business on a Community Enterprise basis. Jordan is happy to help plot holders who are struggling with their plots for one reason or another. He charges £10 an hour to dig out and remove weeds from site. He can also line raised beds with terram to help prevent the weeds growing back in from underneath or the sides. He's a young, fit man so I imagine he will work quickly. For example, he quoted £80 to remove all the weeds and Horsetail from plot 22!

He is a trained horticulturalist and manages a local business on a Community Enterprise basis. He uses volunteers when he can to help keep costs down for people. If you feel you could use a little help you can contact Jordan through his company which is called How Does Your Garden Grow?

**Email:** [jcooper.howdoesyourgardengrow@gmail.com](mailto:jcooper.howdoesyourgardengrow@gmail.com) **Telephone:** 07585936941. Jordan also has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/761233187248617/?fref=ts>

### Allotments and inspiration.

Earlier this year Annie Mackenzie, daughter of Ian and Caroline was required to complete a dissertation for her Sheffield Hallam University Food and Nutrition degree. The dissertation concerned the motivations of allotment holders for growing their own fruit and vegetables. As part of the project she disseminated a questionnaire to members of the New Mills Allotment and Gardening Society, as well as to one or two other groups. Thanks to Barry's support and members' enthusiasm and interest, she received a fantastic completion rate.

Here Caroline and Ian report on the findings of Annie's dissertation. It has been a great piece of work and the main points are summarised below;

The UK is undergoing an allotment renaissance. There are around 30, 000 allotments in the UK, with some parts of the country having 40 year waiting lists;

- Some studies indicate that an increased interest in organic produce may explain a resurgence of interest in allotment holding (though not all allotment plots are organic);
- Other studies indicate that in times of economic uncertainty people go 'back to the land', with a desire to take control of their own food security;
- It is widely agreed that gardening is a relaxing pastime, a stress reliever and a sustainable occupation;
- Analysis suggests that UK allotment holders associate allotment holding with leisure, whereas in other parts of the world (e.g. parts of Eastern Europe) allotment holding is regarded as an economic necessity;
- There were 56 people who filled out Annie's questionnaire. Respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 71 yrs. 79% were over 51 yrs of age. 61% were women. 41% were retired. 32% were in full time work and 23% in part time work. 4% were either unemployed or 'on the verge of retirement';
- 93% of the sample reported visiting their plot more than once a week in the planting, growing and harvesting season;
- Annie asked allotment holders what their original motivators had been for keeping an allotment. 80.4% indicated a desire to be outdoors, and 42.9% said they were motivated by the ability to meet like-minded people. 69.6% identified enjoyment of gardening as an original motivation. 62.5% stated their home garden did not suit their needs. 66.1% of participants specified exercise as a motivator;
- In terms of food related motivations, 28.6% referred to less dependency on supermarkets with 25% indicating the desire to increase the variety of food that they consume and 30.4% wishing to grow organically;
- Every participant spoke of the enjoyment of being an allotment holder, be it the enjoyment of the challenge or the fresh air;

- 98% of respondents mentioned allotment grown produce having a superior taste;
- Exercise and physical health and relaxation and peacefulness were major motivators for plot holders and being outdoors and being at one with nature was mentioned by 46% participants;
- 79% of people identified meeting like-minded people and socialising as a subsequent benefit of allotment holding, but only 42.9% identified this as an original motivator;
- 32% identified allotment holding as being good for mental well-being, as well as a challenge and hard work. A number also cited a sense of achievement, increasing one's knowledge, keeping in tune with the seasons and competition, none of which they had identified when they first took on an allotment;
- Interestingly there was practically an even split of people who suggested that the ability to grow organically did or did not motivate their original allotment use. Organic growing seems to become more important to plot holders once they begin to use their allotment as opposed to motivating them to become an allotment holder in the first place. This could be due to increasing their skills and knowledge;
- 21% of participants alluded to a theme of control with allotment use, including controlling chemicals, food miles and growing methods.
- 98% of participants agreed to some degree that having less dependence on supermarkets was a motivation of their continued allotment use, though only 28.6% reported this as an original motivator.

Data from Annie's study indicates that the use of allotments is motivated by much more than just the produce produced. It has numerous social, mental and physical health benefits and largely no financial benefit. It is apparent, too, that once people become allotment holders they discover previously unconsidered benefits of keeping an allotment, in addition to those they originally identified.

Annie would like to extend her thanks to everyone who responded to her questionnaire. We are happy to report she achieved a 1st for the dissertation, as well as a 1st class degree overall. She is now working as a Food Technologist.

## To grow or not to grow - Is it worth growing potatoes?

As we know, we have some great expertise in the society including those who are able to scrutinize specific topics. **Rick Seccombe** asks - **Is it worth growing potatoes?**

Well – If you are thinking about the taste of your allotment grown potatoes then the answer is definitely yes. If you just want potatoes then possibly not.

I was buying Wilja potatoes last winter when we had eaten our own crop. A 12.5kg bag cost £2.50p! (that is 20p per kg). This year I decided to plant 7 different varieties and weigh each crop. I chose the following varieties, planted 8 potatoes of each in one row and these are the results:

Red Duke of York	First Early	3.7 kg
Arran Pilot	First Early	6.8 kg
Charlotte	Second Early	5.0 kg
Maris Peer	Second Early	6.7 kg
Belle de Fontenay	Second Early	1.2 kg
Kestral	Second Early	8.0 kg
Nicola	Early Maincrop	7.0 kg
Total weight of the crop		38.4 kg

(5 out of the 8 Belle de Fontenay plants failed so the 1.2 kg was the weight from just 3 plants.)



8 potatoes weigh around 0.4 - 0.6 kg. I purchase the seed potatoes each year from the Marple Potato Day. (Check [www.marpleallotments.org.uk](http://www.marpleallotments.org.uk) for the date in February 2016.) Each variety is sold in a 1kg bag and all the above cost £2 per bag (some specialist varieties are £2.50 or £3 per 1kg bag). So if the total cost of the seed potatoes planted above was around £9 then the crop cost 23p per kg (more expensive than buying bags of Wilja potatoes at 20p per kg). We love eating early potatoes from mid-July onwards (when the price of potatoes is much higher than 20p per kg). The above crop fed the two adults in our household until early October. The potato crop is an important element of the crop rotation on my plot. So, yes, it has been worth it.

Next year I will definitely be planting Arran Pilot, Charlotte, Maris Peer and Nicola and I will try another couple of varieties that I have not grown before (any suggestions from members very welcome).

**Recipe Corner** - Thanks once again for two more recipes researched by **Stephen Evans**. Here Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall advises on a variety of jams – very helpful if you still have green tomatoes, pumpkins or carrot to deal with at the end of harvest season.




**CARROT JAM**

Delicious on hot toast or crumpets. Makes about three 450g jars.

**1kg carrots, peeled and grated**

**Finely grated rind and strained juice of 2 lemons**

**Finely grated rind and strained juice of 1 orange**

**900g granulated sugar**

**2-3 cinnamon sticks**

**6 cloves**

**1 tsp grated nutmeg**

Put the carrots, juices, zest and sugar into a preserving pan, and stir. Tie the cinnamon and cloves into a small circle of muslin, tie with kitchen string and place in the middle of the carrots. Leave overnight to macerate.

Pour over about 900ml water, add the nutmeg, warm and stir until any sugar crystals have dissolved. Bring to the boil. Boil until it reaches its setting point, about 30-40 minutes; test to see if it's ready using a chilled saucer (see above). Carefully fish out the spice bag. Cool for 10 minutes, then pour into warm, sterilised jars and cover with lids or waxed paper discs and cellophane covers while still hot. Store in a cool, dry place and use within one year.

**GREEN TOMATO MARMALADE**

Add chopped crystallised ginger to this if you like, though it's good just as it is. Makes about four 450g jars.

**5 lemons**

**1.5kg green tomatoes, cored and cut into 5mm dice**

**1.7kg granulated sugar**

Use a sharp peeler to remove lemon zest in long, thin strips, being careful not to remove any pith, then cut zest into thin strips. Fill a small pan with about 250ml water, bring

to the boil, add zest and simmer for two minutes. Drain, rinse under cold water and reserve.

Peel the pith from the lemons, removing as much as you can, then roughly chop the flesh, reserving the pips. Wrap them in a little circle of muslin and tie with kitchen string.

Put the tomatoes into a preserving pan with the lemon zest and flesh, and sugar. Give it a good stir and leave to macerate overnight, then add the bag of pips and 700ml water. Stir over a low heat until any remaining sugar crystals have dissolved. Raise the heat, bring to a rolling boil and boil until the setting point is reached - about 30-40 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes, then pour into jars and store as in previous recipe.

**PUMPKIN AND GINGER JAM**

The sweetness of the pumpkin goes beautifully with the gentle heat of the ginger. Makes four 280g jars.

**1kg pumpkin or butternut squash, weight when peeled and seeds removed, cut into 5mm cubes**

**150g crystallised ginger, roughly chopped**

**1 tsp ground ginger**

**900g granulated sugar**

**Juice and finely grated zest of a lemon**

**Juice and finely grated zest of a small orange**

Put the pumpkin or squash in a preserving pan with both gingers, the sugar, lemon and orange zest; stir well and leave overnight to macerate. When you're ready to cook it, add 100ml water, give everything a good stir and place the pan over a low heat. Cook gently, stirring, until any remaining sugar crystals have dissolved. Add the lemon and orange juice, bring to

The Guardian Weekend | 3 September 2011 53

## Losing the plot – I hope not! (Sally Clegg reflects on a challenging year at Hague Bar).

What a year! Apparently no two years are the same in allotmenting but never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined such a disparity between 2014 and 2015. There we were happily bumbling along gradually improving our plot then 2015 came along. The soil is not good down on plot 12 at Hague Bar. Our plot has a lot of heavy clay which is murder to dig but great for making thumb

pots of which I have a collection. The drainage is poor and despite our attempts to improve it we still get waterlogged patches, but we soldier on. Over time we have adjusted what we want to grow to what will actually thrive with some modest success.

Way back when Hague Bar site was a field we adopted a 4 year crop rotation system which came round full circle at the end of 2014. We were keen to continue to improve the soil further so we decided to rest 50 per cent of the plot over winter. We mapped out a sensible plan to weed, mulch and cover areas that were the most problematic and to make certain landscaping changes. Then we found out about the rail line improvement works and decided to cover the whole plot but erect a greenhouse and re-organise the raised beds.

We knew that access was going to be impossible for barrowing manure and heavy mulch particularly as the path at the bottom end of the plot is boggy and treacherous after heavy rain so in terms of winter planting and general maintenance we were resigned and in the hands of the weather gods who were angry - but not as angry as the plot standards committee!

We failed the first inspection miserably but in fairness we had heard a rumour that there weren't going to be any this year due to the very difficult circumstances and we also thought we were being very sensible gardeners. Soil improvement has to be the basis of successful crops and we were becoming more aware of the need for certain wild areas in allotments, although not quite as wild as ours was to become. So, we changed our plans. Our planting was late, but then the weather was not conducive to early planting. Everybody planted late this year. We put in onions, garlic, tomatoes, peppers and potatoes. My chilli plants came miraculously back to life. Cauliflowers, courgettes, peas, spring onions, carrots and random tomato plants appeared to flourish. We had the best year for soft fruit and so much rhubarb we had to give a ton away.

Sadly, personal circumstances took us away from the allotment and despite this neglect our fruit and veggies did us proud. The nasturtiums took care of the black fly, the bees came to the nettles in a myriad of varieties (I shall definitely keep some nettles on my plot next year). Did I mention the heavy clay? Well the cauliflowers loved it and there are still some in the ground in October. Once again we failed the plot inspection despite the fact that our freezer is full of produce and today I ate a sandwich with my home grown rocket and tomatoes, with more ripening at home and in the greenhouse.

I do understand that there are standards but for me I just love watching the delight on my grand children's faces as they dig up potatoes, see a frog or toad creeping away from detection, and watch the butterflies and bees busy around the flowers. I love tending and picking my own crops to turn into delicious suppers and snacks. I love sitting in the quiet times just listening and feeling part of something much greater than me.

So, I sincerely hope I am not about to lose my plot- I think my standards are pretty spot on.

## **Seasonal jobs – November and December: (The editor lines up some seasonal tasks).**

November is a good time for giving soil some attention before things become too saturated. Removing old plant debris and weeds and turning over the soil whilst working in as much compost as possible will help nutrients structure;

Old plants can be composted provided they are not pernicious weeds, seed heads or carrying signs of disease. This can also be a time to dig in lime but this should not be done simultaneously with manure as they chemically react with one another;

Laying black polythene or the like over the soil will reduce the worst impact of rain and suppress weeds;

Leaves abound of course and it's a good time to make leaf mould, pack leaves into black bin liners with small holes for maximum effect;

Late season crops such as salads can be protected with cloches;

It's a good idea to weed around fruit trees and bushes and to spread mulches around the bases of plants;

Once fruit bushes and fruit trees have entered dormancy it's a good time to think about pruning them back so look for expert guidance on the practicalities of pruning. Fortunately there is plenty of advice out there. One of the best bets may be to visit the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) web site <https://www.rhs.org.uk/> and search pruning. Of course though we have our own experts in the society too so make use of those contacts.

## **November's here and it's off to a ----- Scorcher!!**

Hmmm weirder and weirder. As climate change accelerates it throws new peculiarities at us every year it seems and the latest trend is toward Halloween heat waves. Well, not quite, but it's 16 degrees out there (higher than for a lot of the summer) and I'm no

expert but I suspect bugs, pests, weeds and disease will love the warmth. So with that in mind a few more seasonal tasks to think about:

Pick any rotten fruit left hanging on your trees as leaving them in place may enable the spread of disease;

Remove yellowing leaves from Brussel Sprouts and look out for cabbage whitefly on the likes of kale, broccoli and cabbage. You are unlikely to miss them as they may fly up in clouds. They are best controlled by being picked off physically as use of pesticides could also impact on their predators. It's also a good idea to squash and remove cabbage aphid as these can continue to infest brassicas throughout the winter in mild years;

If your first potato clearance was not thorough enough you may need to dig over the potato patch again to ensure you have them all removed otherwise they could spread diseases;

Continue to wage war on slugs and caterpillars through your normal techniques and remember the in-depth advice on both the RHS <https://www.rhs.org.uk/> and National Allotment Society (NAS) websites <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/>.

## **December tasks.**

December can still be profitable on site with the chance to harvest the likes sprouts, cabbages, parsnips and winter salad and there may be decisions to make on what to leave in the ground and what to lift and store.

The likes of cabbage, leeks, broccoli, and kale can stay in the ground but the advice is to lift root crops such as beetroot before year's end. There is a need to take account of year to year variability and try to make a judgement remembering that very wet mild weather can be as bad for crops as a severe freeze up.

## **Top Tips for Crop Storage.**

Most of you will know more than me but it is always helpful to be reminded of a few key principles of storage:

Most crops store best in cool, dry and dark conditions – ventilation prevents damaging humidity;

Check each plant closely for disease and ruthlessly discard damaged or diseased produce to safeguard the rest of your produce;

Check on your stored crops regularly to ensure deteriorating ones are being removed;

If it is a risk, have a regular look to ensure there have not been any hungry visitors (and I don't mean your relatives);

Remember to check out the storage advice for each separate crop available through books and reliable web sites, for example [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk) has in depth advice on storing root veg and fruit.

## **December Planting**

Apparently, if you can get down there while it's light, December can be a good month for lifting the crown of your rhubarb. Use a spade to divide the crown into sections each retaining a portion of the rhizome (thickened root) and at least one growing point. Sections from the outer part are better than the centres of old plants. Discard any old or decayed parts of the crown. Replant straight away or wrap in damp sacking until ready to plant.

Also early winter can be a good time to plant new bare root trees and fruit bushes. Clear, weed and dig in well-rotted manure or compost before you plant.

Sorry folks - you are not allowed to completely hibernate just yet.

## **A pain in the back and how to avoid one** (The editor takes a look at this sore point)

Previous editions of this newsletter have listed the benefits of our allotmenting and gardening habits but we also know it can be easy to slip up (literally) and suddenly replace the benefits with a debilitating long-term injury. Sometimes we are guilty of risking 6 months for the sake of gaining 10 minutes (it's human nature). For example, around 300,000 individuals in the UK attended Accident and Emergency departments after having an accident in the garden in 2004. Some 87,000 people were actually injured while gardening. Whilst we may not be surprised that the lawnmower was the most dangerous piece of equipment that year – guess what was second?

That's right, of course, misuse of the humble flowerpot causing falls, trips and lifting injuries.



## Why so many injuries?

**Taking shortcuts** – most of us do it, especially when it comes to time consuming hard labour, digging, moving materials around, weeding etc. Perhaps we were in a rush on our last visit and left a spade lying around, never quite got time to lay the loose paving stone flat or just wanted to make one more wheelbarrow trip instead of two on a cold day – **I stand guilty as charged!**

## Save yourself a pain and long road back from injury.

A few simple steps and adopting the principles of good manual handling might just save you a whole world of pain and possibly 6 months or more of time

### 1). Loosen up.



Yes - don't bend it like Beckham (the back that is) but do get your blood flowing and your muscles loose before hitting the dirt. A 10 to 15 minute walk before starting can really help.

### 2). Don't twist and shout!



Try not to twist when digging and moving materials. It feels almost silly and time consuming but use those feet so that all of you turns and not your poor spine. Keep the shovel close to you, don't over-reach or move too heavy a load. If weeding, get up and stretch every 5 mins or so and consider using a padded kneeler – **YOUR SUCKING EGGS NOW I KNOW!**

### 3). Manual Handling:



- Warm first, lift later – unless you've walked to the plot start off with light tasks to warm the muscles;
- Be it bags of compost, manure or flower pots think about the easiest way of moving them. Is it one for the wheelbarrow, could it be rolled or dragged or do you need a friendly neighbour to help, if you think you might you probably do!
- Two person moving really helps to share the load, but make sure you co-ordinate well or one of you will end up taking all the strain;
- Carrying loads– try not to be lopsided, and don't overfill you're trugs or wheelbarrows;
- When lifting an object take a good look at it, get hold carefully and then lift up your head to look ahead as you lift, carry it close to you. If getting off the ground is a strain, it's too heavy – stop!!
- If you have to lift, then 'Love your load' -get it close to the middle of your body;
- Move your feet rather than twisting your back, especially when shovelling. Twisting and top heavy bending are bad enough on their own, it's such bad news for your back if you combine the two;
- Use your legs not your back and upper body strength – this is what the powerful legs and bum muscles are designed for, and engage your core too;
- If you are carrying a load and can't see where you are placing your feet, you are more likely to slip or fall so make sure the route is clear beforehand.

Remember if your feeling tweaks or pain the job can wait a day or so or it might need to wait 6 months!

#### **4). Change may be as good as a rest.**

Don't dig for 45 minutes all at once, take a walk to the manure heap, do some weeding, drink the flask or have a chat with a neighbour. Variety is the spice of health.

#### **5) Think little and often.**

Plan what realistically you can achieve today and set a timer to remind you to change /break. Not always practical I know but if you can avoid long stints of hard physical work at the plot it is better, especially if it has been a while since the last visit – even finely tuned machines can get rusty!

So our allotment and gardening sessions will obviously be all bliss like this!



#### **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 and allotmenting to you all!