



New Mills  
**Allotment &  
Gardening**  
Society

## *NewMAGS*

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# Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society July 2016

## **Your News**

### **Restoration of Hague Bar site – 2015/16**

The work carried out by Murphy was completed during November 2015. The footpath boundary was reinstated with rabbit proof fencing and after completion of work on plots 1-7 each plot now has a rabbit proof gate also. The manure and wood chip bays were replaced and a wider reversing area for deliveries also created.

### **Allotment Society Meetings**

Meetings continue to be poorly attended overall and Stephen Evans has asked in his capacity as Chair for feedback on why this is the case, please let him know if you have any positive suggestions/ideas to increase attendance.

The meetings are now held in the more comfortable surroundings upstairs at the Beehive and it is certainly true that they often result in lively discussions. If the meeting is inquorate due to attendance of less than 15 members, decisions have to be postponed which potentially means delays to valuable projects. The next meeting is due on **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September at 7:30pm**. Please make it if you can.

### **Diamond Back Moth Alert**

Reports are in from around the country and especially the east and south of England of the arrival of large numbers of Diamond Back Moths as evidenced by moth trap surveys in affected areas. The National Allotment Society web site states that the adult moths are greyish brown in colour and have diamond markings on their back although they are nocturnal. Adults pose no risk but emerging green caterpillars do and are partial to munching the soft leaves and tissue of brassicas leaving just stalks behind.

In the first instance we should keep an eye out for the moth or caterpillars (pictured below) and let others know if you see them.

I have not found any useful guidance in how to manage them physically or biologically except perhaps the usual inspect, identify and squash. The good news is they don't like heavy rain so we definitely have the elements on our side☺!



↑Diamond back moth



↑Caterpillars to look out for. Not to scale, they are very small.

### **Potato Blight at Ollersett**

Unfortunately this year blight has occurred and spread through Ollersett damaging the foliage on some plots and in our own case some of the crop too. More can be found out about potato blight under the Crop Monitoring - Pests and Diseases part of this edition.

### **Incredible Edible New Mills.**

Allotment Society members provided seeds that helped Transition New Mills create an edible science garden in a joint project with New Mills Primary School. Any volunteers looking to help with this or similar projects should contact Transition New Mills at [transition.newmills@gmail.com](mailto:transition.newmills@gmail.com)

### **Facebook**

Remember the society has an active Facebook account for you to find and post updates as you wish. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/newmillsallotments> .

### **Plot Inspections**

Plot inspections were carried out as is normal in early summer. Here is a sample of the congratulatory letter sent to high scoring members (you know who you are) and an entertaining reflection from Bob Auld on the congratulation note and the correspondence he had become accustomed to in the past.

### **Letter of congratulation**

Hello Sally and Bob

New Mills Allotment and Gardening Society carried out its first plot inspections for 2016 on 21st May. I am pleased to tell you that your plot achieved a very high score, reflecting your high standards and hard work. On behalf of the Society, I would like to congratulate you on your achievement and thank you for helping to keep the site an attractive looking place. Your efforts from year to year are much appreciated.

Best wishes

Steve Evans NMAGS Chair

### **Bob's Entertaining Reply**

Dear Steve, we were touched and heartened to receive your kind e-mail re our plot. We do try. Never have we had such a missive. Looking back through forty years of correspondence with allotment principals the score is as follows. Three warnings for bonfires; London Borough of Camden. Two for unauthorised chickens; London Borough of Sutton. One for encroachment on to a communal area, Hackney, ditto for unauthorised bees. and, prior to the New Mills Society's creation half a dozen reject letters from all over High Peak. Oh yes and a vile correspondence with the Cheadle Heath Allotment Society for failing to control a primary school class I'd been allowed to take on their hallowed ground. The little blighters succumbed to temptation, and helped themselves

to a few raspberries. All in all your email was a refreshing surprise, albeit I suffered the usual trepidation as I opened it, I shall defer the construction of the pigsty till further notice.

Regards Bob Auld.

## Monitoring Crops Through the Growing Season – Pests and Diseases

The most ironic thing about allotmenters (and I speak for myself really) is that a lot of us love nature and then spend all summer cursing it. Here are just a few of our key challengers and some tips to bear in mind for next year if not this (yep, there's always next year). Spraying the lot with Glyphosphate is not an option!

### Potato Blight - What is it and can it be mitigated?

*Phytophthora infestans* is a fungus like microorganism which acts as a disease pathogen and can attack both potatoes and tomatoes including those which live in the greenhouse. Potato blight is more likely to occur in wet summers and its consequences can be most severe at the end of the growing season.

#### *Symptoms*

Blight is most likely to appear between July and September, particularly when the weather is warm and humid. Allotmenters should look out for dark brown or blackish patches or lesions on the top of the leaves often surrounded by a pale yellow halo. These lesions may also be found on the stems.



Under humid conditions, there may be a downy white coating that looks like fine cotton wool developing on the underside of the leaves, or again on the stems. Blight spores released from this white coating can spread disease from the foliage to other plants, or down in to the soil, where they can infect the tubers, causing sunken areas on the potato surface, and a chestnut-coloured rot under the skin.



### Prevention - Top Tips from the Irish Potato Council

Always buy your seed potatoes from a reliable source. Do not bring seed potatoes from another country, or save your own as they may be infected:

- Buy resistant main crop varieties;
- Always remove all potential sources of blight at the end of the season. Harvest even the tiniest potatoes, and remove any that begin to grow by themselves;

- Never abandon old tubers around the garden or allotment, or try to compost them;
- Remove blighted tubers before storing, and always store your potatoes under dark, cool conditions;
- Avoid planting in sheltered parts of the plot and plant in rows into the wind if possible;
- If watering is required apply to the base of the plants, soil improvement and mulching will reduce the amount of watering required;
- Blight spores on foliage are washed down through the soil to infect tubers. Earthing up potatoes, or mulching the soil with hay or straw can reduce levels of infection;

### Dealing with an Outbreak - (Advice from the Potato Council)

First of all, all is not lost. If you discover what looks like potato blight you should snip off the leaflets, or even whole stems to stop the disease spreading and remove them from the crop. You may help slow the spread to a point where the crop is unharmed, and you will have done your bit to help reduce the spread of blight.

Keep a close eye on the crop, if leaflets or compound leaves or even stems have been removed, there is a strong possibility that other lesions will show shortly afterwards, as it can take a few days for signs of the disease to show. Treat these in the same way by cutting them off and discarding

If the blight has been stopped the potatoes can still be harvested after two to three weeks but make sure you remove all the potatoes from the ground, and do not leave any in the soil or around the plot.

When the tops have been dead for three weeks the risk of tuber infection at harvest is reduced because most sporangia in the soil will have died

Infected material should be either buried, burnt or composted in a hot compost pile. Cool composting may leave the haulm (Tops) exposed, which will allow blight spores to spread until the green material dies and does run a small risk of re-introduction next season.

### Future Years

There is no problem using the soil for next year for other crops, but the potatoes should be moved to another part of the allotment or garden. This is just part of the good practice for crop rotation. The same area of plot should not be used to grow potatoes for another 3 years.

### **Crimping Cabbage Whites**

#### Warning signs

Before an attack you may notice large numbers of white butterflies around your plants, as they lay eggs. These hatch into larvae which make small holes in the leaves as they start to feed on them, becoming much larger as the caterpillars start to feed more vigorously. Caterpillars also produce small brown or dark green granular deposits as they feed.



←Cabbage white caterpillar, beautiful (when dead?)

## Prevention

Inspect susceptible plants on a daily basis during the growing season and remove any eggs or caterpillars that are found. The appearance of white butterflies hovering around susceptible plants almost certainly means that eggs have been laid.

- Cover plants with insect-proof mesh or fleece,
- Transfer any parasitised caterpillars to plants where new caterpillar infestations are expected.
- Avoid planting colourful, high nectar plants near the cabbage patch as these will encourage adult butterflies into the garden.

## Organic Treatment Methods

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

## **Peeving Pea Moths**

### Warning signs

The Pea Moth is a small (15mm wingspan), grey-brown moth whose larvae (caterpillars) feed in the pods of garden peas

When pea pods are opened for shelling, one or more creamy white caterpillars, up to 14 mm long, with dark dots on the body may be found eating into the peas.

### Prevention

Peas can be grown under horticultural fleece or insect-proof mesh such as Enviromesh, to prevent female moths laying eggs on the plants.

### Treatment

- In small outbreaks remove affected Pods by hand and burn.
- Try to sow peas before or after pea moths have become active and are breeding.
- Remove any other plants or weeds nearby that are host plants for pea moths.

### Future Prevention

- Plant peas within netting or under fleece to keep adults out.
- Try using pheromone traps to dispatch of adults.

## **Suppressing Slugs**

The wet weather started in December (not saying which year) and continued ever since except that dry week in May and that snowy one in March. Perfect for slugs so here are a few reminder tips on waging war with them. Nothing personal slugs honest, it's just that you seem to eat more of my produce than I do.

Here is an article on battling slugs first used in a Newsletter a couple of years ago – many thanks to Wendy Willoughby again

They creep out at night. Not just a few but in their hundreds, all over the allotments. Can we catch them at it? Not likely!



Fresh green shoots disappear before them and they seem not to be too choosy about their diet but certainly have a preference for courgette plants. The downpours have helped them multiply and grow to mammoth sizes, so this year the numbers are legion. So, are we prepared for battle?

They have already made pre-emptive strikes, tackled some early plantings to the horror of some of us yes, no doubt you have guessed, I'm talking about the dreaded slugs! I have already strategically placed jam jars containing beer to attract them away from my plants- although three out of the four young courgette plants may not recover- and I'm avidly collecting eggs shells to crush and scatter around other plants.

So how are you all going to tackle the beasties? All ideas of how to rid ourselves of them gratefully considered, after all, it's about slime!

### **Here's a starter for 10 from the editor...**

We often need coffee after a few beers and funnily enough coffee also has a good reputation for deterring slugs. Apparently coffee grounds can be picked up for free from Starbucks stores. So the company has a purpose after all. It doesn't quite make up for their tax strategies but it's a start!

<http://romancingthebee.com/2012/03/27/another-reason-to-love-starbucks/>

### **Other Slug Fighting Tactics (From the Royal Horticultural Society)**

**Nemaslugs** are a biological control specific to molluscs, with no adverse effect on other types of animal, available in the form of a microscopic nematode or eelworm that is watered into the soil. The nematodes enter slugs' bodies and infect them with bacteria that cause a fatal disease. A moist warm soil (temperatures of 5-20°C (41-68°F)) is required, therefore control is most effective during spring to early autumn. Best results are achieved by applying in the evening to moist but well-drained. The nematode is available from refrigerated cabinets in some garden centres or by mail order from suppliers of biological controls

**Place barriers**, such as copper tapes around pots or stand containers on matting impregnated with copper salts. Moisture-absorbent minerals can be placed around plants to create slug barriers. Gel repellents can also be used to create barriers around plants. These products are widely available from garden centres and mail order suppliers

### **Fighting Flies**

Green flies, sawflies, blackflies and whiteflies are amongst 500 other species of other aphids who are always delighted to suck sap and spread disease amongst our plants, especially gooseberries and other currant at this time of year. There is not a great deal that can be done to prevent if we want to manage them organically so regular inspection and crushing by hand is recommended. Remember we do have helpful friends in the allotment which predate on aphids, these include ladybirds, hoverfly larvae and parasitic wasps.

### **Crop Monitoring - The Other Seasonal Jobs**

Watering to prevent bolting - Some vegetables such as lettuces, rocket and spinach flower and run to seed as summer gets going, regular watering can help delay or even prevent this (fortunately we have had a lot of help from the sky).

Mulch to conserve moisture - Mulches such as garden compost, well-rotted manure and even grass cuttings can be spread around beds to retain moisture and boost crops.

Pinch out tomato shoots - Nip off side shoots on tomato plants on the V that appears between leaf stems and the main stems of vine tomatoes, also pinch out the growing tip at the top of the plant because if there are too many this will prevent ripening. Also trim back leaves to allow light in and air to circulate. Remember in maturing tomatoes may need to be fed up to twice a week.

I found this you tube video quite interesting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4IAeytPsZA>

*Pinch out tops of climbing beans* - To avoid climbing beans becoming top heavy and tangled pinch them out when they reach the top of the cane.

*Earthing Up Brassicas* - Brassicas can be given a boost by pushing earth up around their stalks, give them plenty and remember to make sure the soil is adequately limed and well drained, and do not plant cabbages in the same place the following year.

*Strawberries the aftermath* - Once the fruit has finished cut off and discard any runners or use them to grow new plants.

*Prune raspberries* - Once fruiting for this year is over select the longer remaining canes and tie them up (ideally about 5 or 6 stronger growing ones will all be tied to one side of wire. Shorter growing stems should be pruned right back to the ground. Explanatory you tube video at <https://youtube.com/watch?v+=FY3URQKOLMG>

*Harvest summer squashes regularly* - In a good year courgettes and squash plants can grow so readily they'll need harvesting every few days. I presume you have all **made chocolate courgette cake** (counts as one of your five a day in my book). Try the [bbcgoodfood.com](http://bbcgoodfood.com) recipe. At 716 kcal per serving that happens to be equivalent to the energy we use during an afternoon's work at the allotment (afraid you need to walk there and back to achieve balance though). Now, where's that doughnut . . . .

## Events Forward Look

### *Artisan Fair – Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September*

The New Mills Artisan Food Fair has been an excellent event in recent years and generally our society has shown off produce at the event. This year the event is planned for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September in the Spring Bank Arts Centre between 10:00am and 2:00pm.

### *National Allotments Week -8-14<sup>th</sup> August 2016*

This week is coordinated by the National Allotment Society and seeks to draw attention to the inclusive nature of allotment gardening and its ability to draw people together. There is a list of events to mark the week on the National Allotment Society web site [www.nsalq.org.uk](http://www.nsalq.org.uk) . One event of note is the Marple and District Allotments Association Open Day on Saturday August 6<sup>th</sup> between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm, all welcome. The event will be held at the Rose Hill Allotments, off Railway Rd – talk about local!

### *Next Allotment Society Meeting*

Please come along – after all it's at the pub!

The next meeting is due on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September at 7:30 at the Beehive.

### *Met Office Forward Look*

For what it was worth, we may have had the hottest week of the summer with more changeable conditions on offer for the early part of August. Personally, I'm looking forward to the now traditional heat wave just before Christmas. <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/forecast>

## 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!