



New Mills
**Allotment &
Gardening**
Society



NewMAGS

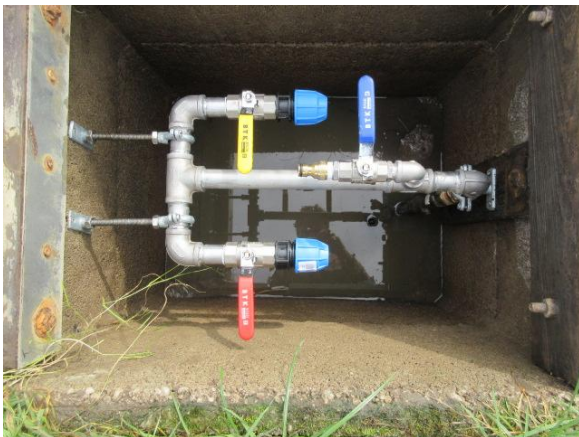
~

Newsletter of the New Mills Allotment & Gardening Society April 2019

News

Water System Repair Work at Ollersett.

Work is almost complete for the replacement of the hose pipe at Ollersett and the installation of 2 new Alkathene pipes which will run above ground and provide 2 separate connection points in the middle and at the bottom of the site. The supply chamber has been modified to provide 3 separate feeds. [See photo]. The connection of the Alkathene pipes will follow soon. We are very grateful to Tony Bartley from the Hague Bar site who is progressing the project which is of a very professional standard. The Society is extremely grateful to Bob Wood, MD of TecTies Ltd. who donated the 100 stainless steel staples for use in securing the alkathene piping. Part of this Newsletter relates to water saving methods allotment holders can use to help preserve this vital resource.



Plot Inspections.

Plot inspections will be carried out as normal in June 2019 and again in September. As normal, the criteria to assess plots will be area cultivated, amount of weeds both in the middle and at the sides of plots and general tidiness. There will also be health and safety inspections near this time. Plots were, in the main, found to be generally safe last year. The most frequently occurring issue that members should be aware of was sharp edges, corners and points near eye level. These are associated mainly with greenhouse frames, gutters edges and uncovered cane ends. In general, plot general standard and health and safety standards were up in 2018 with plenty of near perfect plots recorded – let us have even better results this year.

Hague Bar Track Improvement Efforts Pay Off.

A serious amount of volunteer effort and team work was required to lay the new track at Hague Bar during the heat of June 2018 – a very significant construction project!

Good news reported by our secretary is that the new track has made a world of difference this winter with members and visitors now able to walk through the site on much drier and safer ground. Please help retain the improvement by keeping weeds under control so that they don't invade and undermine the new path.



Some of the Hague Bar A - Team in Action.

Here's to good health.

According to the National Allotment Society, research by a graduate at Edge Hill University suggests that allotment owners might be among the healthiest people in the UK based on their diet. A student named Almudena Ines Archilla, originally from Spain but now based in Formby, investigated the subject as part of her dissertation for a Public Health Nutrition Postgraduate Course. Using mixed methods of research including an online survey disseminated by NAS, and interviews with allotment holders, Almudena was able to gain a deeper understanding of motivations, as well as food consumption habits.

National diet and nutrition data show a fruit intake of around 4.2 units of fruit and vegetable by the general population. The figures Almudena collected from allotment holders suggested a higher average fruit and veg consumption of over 6.5 units. The study also concluded that key factors motivating people to become allotment holders was concern for mental health and wellbeing, desire for high quality of food in the diet, socializing and sharing and enjoying activity outdoors.

Mowing Volunteers Requested for Summer.

Spring has sprung and the grass has risen. This means that mowing will need to start again both at Ollersett and Hague Bar. Last year, at Ollersett, mowing was needed about every 2-3 weeks but that was during a drought year. If you think you can spare any time for this relaxing (arguably 😊), activity, even if just a couple of hours every 1 or 2 months please let the Chair know in relation to the Ollersett site and inform the Secretary in relation to Hague Bar – many thanks in advance!

Event reflection – Ollersett Open Day – 14th July 2018

This was a very successful event thanks to the efforts of volunteers and especially chief organisers Ian and Caroline Mackenzie. Outcomes included an Attendance of about 60 people (not including Ollersett Members), promotion of the society, new member interest, information shared, team work, fun had, home-made wine sampled!



Ollersett Honey Sampling
Ian, Caroline, Rick and Helen



Young Allotmenters
Nell and Isobel



Refreshment Time
Jason at the helm

One World Festival – 7th July 2018.

Another successful attendance with the society promoted, new member interest generated, information shared, team work and World Cup largely avoided. Many thanks then to volunteers various.



David, Rick and Chris at the stand
So - any volunteers for 2019?

Events - Forward Look

New Mills One World Festival – July 6th 2019.

The Society has been asked to attend the One World Festival again this year. The event normally proves fruitful for raising our profile, attracting new member interest and promoting the environmental and community benefits of our allotment sites. We can only undertake the event 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. If you think you can help please let the Chair know and thank you.

Open Garden Events 2019.

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 the area by opening the web site link <http://www.opengardens.co.uk/index.php> . Enter a postcode and choose a search radius. We are quite lucky in this area as there are events to be had in all directions.

National Allotments Week.

This year National Allotments Week will be held between Monday 12th and Sunday 18th August <https://www.nsalg.org.uk/news-events-campaigns/national-allotments-week/>. The campaign theme is "Shared Harvest" which will celebrate the fact that plot-holders can share their crops with family, friends, colleagues and worthy causes, including food banks. Each plot in the UK can benefit up to 8 people!

We are considering holding the Hague Bar Allotment Open Day to coincide with the week which would give the event a boost and mean we can benefit from the national promotional materials too. This is one for discussion at the next General Meeting.

Date of Next General Meeting

It has been good to see attendance up at General Meetings recently. Please note date of the next one –

Wednesday 22st May 7.30pm – Beehive.

International Compost Awareness Week – Sunday 5th May – Saturday 11th May 2019.

International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW) is the largest and most comprehensive education initiative of the compost industry. Throughout the week of ICAW, community and business events are held across the world to encourage and celebrate composting. Events include tours of compost sites and allotment facilities, school talks and workshops, compost workshops on allotments, talks and lectures as well as publicity on local TV, radio and in the press. Follow this link for details of resources, associated activities and events <http://www.carryoncomposting.com/441149731> .

Water Conservation at Allotments.

After last year's extreme drought conditions we had a big spike in water consumption at the Ollersett Site and Hague Bar members went to great efforts to keep their crops alive. Amazingly, climate change projections suggest that the heat and drought experienced last year has already been made 30 times more likely as a result of climate change and that after 2050, the summer temperatures experienced in 2018 might be cooler than average. Who knows what 2019 holds but here are some water saving top tips for those drier spells.

Water Storage

Try to collect water run off from surfaces wherever practicable. Almost any robust container, drum or barrel can serve a useful purpose if placed correctly. It does not necessarily need to be a fully plumbed in water butt, if it catches and retains water you can access easily, it works. Under the society rules, water can only be taken from containers and water butts and then distributed through watering cans. It must never be used directly from plot hose pipes.

Watering techniques.

When you do need to water, use a watering can and do it in the cool of the morning where possible. Watering during the evening is second best but runs a small risk of encouraging fungi or mildew. Make sure that the water you give to your plants gets to where it is needed, at the roots rather than on leaves, shoots or surrounding areas where water will be evaporated

away or worse still, stolen by weeds. Oh yes and remember that mild ache you feel is because this is great exercise for your arms!

Watering little and often may not help, as the water does not penetrate deep into the ground and it encourages plants to develop roots near the soil's surface. One good soak every few days is generally better than a daily sprinkle but of course watering frequencies need to be crop specific

One useful technique, particularly on "thirsty" plants such as tomatoes and courgettes, is placing plants in a saucer-shaped dip of soil so the water pools around them. Alternatively, you can bury a plastic bottle, cap removed and opening down, in the earth next to plants. Cut the bottom off and you will be able to add water that will percolate down straight to the roots.



Adding a layer of mulch to your garden helps retain the moisture content of your soil. The mulch effectively insulates the soil and improves the quality of your soil. The mulch will eventually decompose and add to the organic content of the soil, making it richer and more able to support healthier plants as well as retain more moisture,

It's all in the soil

Soil is the foundation of the allotment garden. Manage soil well and it will reward you. Soils provide anchorage for roots, hold water and provide nutrients. Soils are home to a myriad of micro-organisms and armies of microscopic animals that help fix nitrogen, decompose organic matter and distribute nutrients. Good soil management is probably the most important ingredient to achieving a productive allotment. Garden practices can change soil conditions and the living organisms within but the relationship between definite practices and soil functions is less clear. There are certain guiding factors and key factors however which we have confidence in:

The pH Factor

A major soil property affecting the availability of nutrients (food) for your crops is pH which is a measure of soil acidity or alkalinity. The pH values of soil have a direct impact on the health and productivity of your crops, partially determining the availability of nutrients for plants and the rate at which key nutrients are leached from the soil. Each individual crop will have its own ideal pH range but fortunately we can generalise somewhat and say that most allotment crops benefit require a neutral to slightly acidic pH range between 6.0 and 7.0. In this range, nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous and a range of key micronutrients are readily available for your crops;

Determining the pH and pH drift

You can determine the pH of your plot using simple soil pH test kits available at garden centers however unless lime is added at intervals most allotment soils will become slightly too acidic with pH values lowering toward 5.5 as the addition of fertilisers, manures and the natural actions of microbes acidifies the soil. The availability of the 'big 3' nutrients: **N** – nitrogen, **P** – phosphorus, **K** – potassium or potash, is affected by the pH level. In an acid soil of pH 5.0 only 40% of the nitrogen is available, 35% of the phosphorus and 50% of the potassium. At the average plot pH of 5.5, 70% of the nitrogen and potassium is available but only 45% of soil phosphorus can be used by plants. When pH values of 6.0 -7.0 are achieved the big 3 nutrients are fully available to feed plants.

Leibeig's Law

Leibeig's Law states that only by increasing the availability of the most limited micronutrient can plant/crop growth be boosted. If your soil has a high nitrogen content your crops won't benefit from it, for example, potassium or some other key nutrient levels are too low. We need to ensure that our soils contain high levels of a wide range of nutrients and micronutrients and that the pH of our soils enables our crops to benefit fully from them. Here is a reminder of the good practices that can help us achieve this:

Feed your soil first – not the plants.

Regularly add plenty of organic matter using well-rotted manure, leaf mould and/or home compost to your soil. Autumn is a good time of year to do this but any time in the run-up to planting should be fine. You can also apply organic matter during the growing year in the form of mulch. Whether digging or using a no-dig system, these materials will help to improve the basic soil structure by opening it up, making it more moisture retentive, reducing need for watering and by adding much needed nutrients. Compost can also help to warm the soil quicker in spring and improve the speed at which seeds germinate. Over time, this organic matter will be broken down by soil organisms creating an even better growing media of dark humus. The addition of compost and well-rotted manure will mean that the nutrients are in place but to ensure our crops benefit from them, the soil pH must be correct;

Lime Addition.

Given the tendency of most allotment soils to become slightly too acidic there is the risk of underestimating the importance of liming. To raise the pH and 'sweeten' the soil, add lime. It's usually best to lime your soil in the autumn and allow it to work its way into the soil over the winter. Agricultural Lime or Garden Lime is made from pulverized limestone or chalk. As well as raising the pH it will provide calcium for the crops and trace nutrients.

How much lime to use will depend on your soil type and how far you have to raise your pH. The chart below will give you a rough guide for how much ground limestone to use. Don't mix lime with fertiliser as it can trigger unwanted chemical reactions, (including bad smells!).

Amounts of lime to use are indicated in the table below.

Soil Type	KG / M2	lb / yd2
Clay	0.9	1.66
Sand	0.7	1.29
Light	0.8	1.47
Organic	1.1	2.03
Peat	1.7	3.13

Amount of Lime to Raise Soil pH from 5.5 to 6.5

Remember the Basic/s

Avoiding walking on our soil, preventing weeds from stealing nutrients and maintaining adequate soil maintenance is a good start in our soil management. Improving our soils further by adding plenty of organic matter to our soils, considering soil pH and adjusting it by liming when necessary (to raise the pH and reduce acidity) can boost our crop productivity and reap dividends come harvest time. Here is a link showing pH preferences of crops

<http://www.gardenersnet.com/atoz/phlevel1.htm>

Measuring the Harvest

Measure Your Harvest (MYHarvest) is a research project based within University of Sheffield that will estimate the contribution people who grow their own fruit and vegetable crops make to UK national food production. See the website <https://myharvest.org.uk> for more details about the project and to register if you would like to participate in 2019. I decided to participate in the project at the start of 2018. This involved registering my details and then entering online the weight of a crop and the area from which it was harvested.

I had been interested in keeping approximate records of my harvests for some years to support my argument that growing fruit and vegetables was a worthwhile activity in itself, in addition to all the social and health reasons for working an allotment or garden. So it was not a great step to accurately measure the area for each crop on my plot and then weigh the crop when harvested.

I had already weighed my potato harvest from 2017 so I was also able to record that crop. For 2018 I decided to limit my records to 5 crops that occupied 58% of the cultivated area of my plot. New Mills allotments are nominally 100 square metres but when I take out the hawthorn hedge, the paths, compost heaps and storage area on my plot I am left with less than 70 square metres to cultivate. The 5 crops measured were potatoes, broad beans, beetroot, garlic and parsnips. Here are the results.

		kg/m ²	area m ²	weight kg
2017	Potatoes	2.68	16.80	45.00
2018	Potatoes	2.06	14.05	28.98
	Broad beans (early)	0.70	5.63	3.95
	Broad beans (late)	0.27	5.63	1.50
	Beetroot	3.01	3.36	10.11
	Garlic	1.00	7.00	7.01
	Parsnips	4.71	2.40	11.30
	2018 totals			
	Area Measured		38.07	62.85
	Area Not measured		27.56	
	Total cultivated area		65.63	

It was of interest that the 2018 potato crop showed a 23% lower yield than the 2017 crop. The effect of the drought in 2018 tallied with a national trend. The later broad bean crop showed a significantly lower yield than the early crop, again affected by the drought. Because the garlic crop had been planted in November 2017 the bulbs were near to maturity by the time the drought hit and were not stunted.

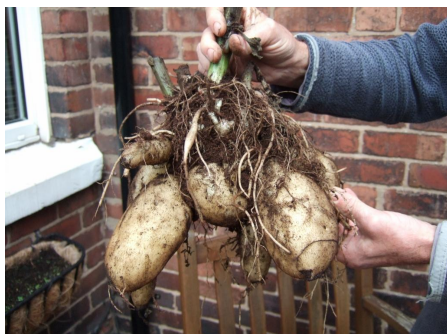
I was unable to measure the harvest from the remaining 42% of my plot for a variety of reasons. Onions and shallots were severely damaged by the drought and the cabbage crop was decimated by the cabbage white. I found it difficult to record crops that were harvested a small amount at a time over a long period. These crops included kale, swede, runner beans, French beans, courgettes and leeks and provided a useful food source in addition to the crops measured above.

(Note for readers outside New Mills. This plot on the Ollersett Avenue site is not well sheltered and is at an altitude of c160m.)

Rick Seccombe.

Yacon the wonder tuber

2018 was our first season with this South American tuber and it has gained a deserved place in our “successful crops” category. We were given a cutting by a friend in early 2018 and potted it up into an 18” pot. It grew into a 4 foot plant and had flowers like yellow daisies. It died down in October and the results are below:



Lots of information and recipes here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/dec/13/how-grow-and-cook-yacon>

It is lovely fresh and like a water chestnut in stir fries. Cooking doesn't make it soft; it stays crunchy. It keeps well in the 'fridge. The sweetness is from a sugar called inulin, which humans can't digest so it has a very low calorific value. A supplier for starter tubers here: <http://www.realseeds.co.uk/unusaltubers.html>

You can keep it going year on year by potting up a small tuber after harvesting; we have 3 plants now from last year's crop ready to be planted out late May.

Highly recommended!

Steve and Amanda Evans

Allium Leaf Miner

The allium leaf miner is a pest that has migrated here from Eastern Europe and was first identified in Britain in Wolverhampton in 2003. It has been spreading since then and has unfortunately reached New Mills. It attacks any plants in the allium family and is especially fond of leeks. Which is a great shame because leeks are one of my favourite vegetables and was a reliable crop for harvesting throughout the autumn and winter period (September through March). Whilst in 2018 my early leeks have been unaffected (leeks harvested in September and October), any leeks harvested later have been attacked by the leaf miner. Some of my leeks have been completely shredded, others have only had the outer layers of the plant attacked leaving a much smaller inner leek that is OK for eating. Have a look at these websites for much more information:

<https://gardening.which.co.uk/hc/en-gb/articles/214052285-Allium-leaf-miner>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=643>

<https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/leeks-growing/allium-leaf-miner/>

Most advice for control of the leaf miner has involved covering the crop with insect protective mesh or fleece from the end of August onwards.

Alys Fowler who writes a weekly gardening column in the Guardian has a different plan that involves successional sowing in situ from the third week of April into June and then harvesting the plants when they are a little fatter than her thumb (1.5 – 2cm). Have a look at her article for more details:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/mar/24/how-to-beat-allium-leaf-miner-leeks>

I think I will try both methods for 2019 and will report on the results in a future newsletter **Rick Seccombe**



Squirrel Menace at Hague Bar

The problem with squirrels destroying certain crops on our plots has been increasing over recent years. We think it began after the removal of many trees along the railway line, early in 2015, to allow access for the heavy plant to repair the railway line. We assume this upset the ecosystem and reduced the food available to them. We certainly didn't have any squirrel trouble before this. 2018 was the worst so far!

It started with the broad beans. We put bird scarers between them, dog hair on the ground [according to Google, they don't like the smell of dogs] and sprayed the growing pods with a chilli solution, in a determined effort to get some broad beans to eat this year. A couple of days later and every single pod had been destroyed! Annoyingly, they strip the pod from the plant, tear it open, eat a few, scatter the remains around and about and start on the next one. Messy little devils.

We planted a second crop of broad beans, in the hope that, later in the season there would be sufficient other food for the squirrels, but exactly the same happened again.

Don't even mention strawberries! We grew them in a raised bed and covered it in a nylon mesh. Arriving at the plot one day, we saw a cheeky face happily munching a strawberry in the middle of the bed. Squirrels, it seems, can easily bite a hole in nylon mesh! We grew sunflowers for the first time in 2018 and were very happy with them, until the squirrels decided it would be good fun to climb the stems and bite them through, just below the flower head. There was no evidence they did it for food; just for fun!

Although we don't grow sweetcorn, we believe the little devils delight in eating the cobs just a day or two before they are ready to crop!

Come the colder months, it is the brassicas they head for. They eat the younger leaves of kale and tear out the pith from the stalks of cabbage and sprouts, throwing discarded material all over the place.

So what is the answer? This year we are going to try a deterrent spray developed by a company called Grazers. www.grazers.co.uk. It claims to be good at protecting crops from pigeons and voles too. If this doesn't work, it will have to be a metal mesh cage, like a fruit cage. On a brighter note, squirrels don't bother much with runner beans; we only lost a few, and all the root crops are untouched.

The squash loved the long, hot summer and the garlic too of course, although we didn't have the H2O supplies to water them at all. Onwards and upwards!

Steve and Amanda Evans

Articles 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

Happy Gardening/Allotmenting to you all !