

HOTWELLS & DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

May 2020

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Introduction

Welcome to the Spring 2020 HwDAA Newsletter. During these strange times, I'm thankful that we are allowed to tend to our allotments. We are envied by many and as an example of this, applications for a plot has gone up hugely – we've received 79 applications in the past 6 weeks despite the fact that we explain during the application process that the waiting time for a plot could be up to 2 years in length.

The committee is made up of volunteers who run the association on your behalf. Some of us are getting a bit long in the tooth. That doesn't mean we want to pack up the job and spend more time on our plot but we do need to find additions and replacements for the committee and/or the shop from time to time which is why Jenny is appealing, in her piece below, for people to come forward and volunteer their services to the association.

Bob Corfield
Editor

From the Chair

Keeping the Allotments open.

Speaking personally, my allotment has been a haven in difficult times. The skies are bluer, birdsong louder and the weather, so far, has been wonderful, even the well timed rain. Thank you to all tenants who have observed the HwDAA guidance and helped us keep the allotments open and safe.

When we cancelled plot inspections it was because we didn't want people to worry about the state of their plots if they were unable to tend them. What we didn't realise was that the extra time and lack of alternative activities would lead to plots and sites looking their absolute best. This year's crops could be impressive.

Volunteers

Helping allotment neighbours. I'd like to say an extra thank you to everyone who has offered help on the plots of people who, for whatever reason, are unable to be on site at present. Preventing plots becoming overgrown now saves a lot of future work. Each site rep has responded to tenants who have contacted them and asked for help. **If you cannot tend your plot please contact your site rep.**

Alderman Moore's is by far the biggest of our allotment sites and we are looking for assistant site reps to spread the work load. Please contact me on chair@hwdaa.co.uk if you can offer some time and would like to discuss what is involved.

Shop. The shop provides a useful, much valued service to tenants. It was extremely busy in the days before the lockdown and on the last day people queued and distanced outside and were served at the door. When the shop re-opens (when national guidance allows) some of these measures might still be needed.

The shop is entirely dependent on the work and time of volunteers who manage it, stock it and serve in it. We are anticipating that some of our current volunteers (many over 70) might not feel able to continue serving when the lock down is eased and we re-open. If you are able to offer a couple of hours a month it would be greatly appreciated. Please contact angietonge@yahoo.co.uk

Volunteers have also put time and effort into a couple of on-line experiments in order to continue limited sales to tenants during the restrictions. A big thank you for all the work.

Finally, enjoy a great, productive year on your plots.

Jenny Hendy
Chair

SEED SOWING – Some Tips (Lesley Woodward)

A question we are sometimes asked in the Shop is why haven't my seeds germinated? Often the seeds are assumed to be at fault. This is VERY rarely the case, especially if ALL the seeds have failed. Kings, like all seed companies, are governed by strict regulations. Which, if you are interested, are laid out in detail on the Defra Website:

<http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/plants/seeds/seedCertification/>

All seed which Kings sell is sampled at intervals and if it does not germinate to statutory standards it is discarded and not sold on. Assuming then that the seed is of high quality, what else is going wrong if we are having problems getting them to germinate/ grow on?

1. Are your seeds from a reputable source? Have packets saved from previous years been stored in a cool and dry place. Are they very out of date? Although it is surprising how long you can keep some seed – Charles Dowding says 5 years for lettuce and tomatoes, 6 years for beans, 2 for onions, brassicas, carrots.
2. Do not be tempted to sow too early, especially if you are sowing outside direct in the soil. The night soil temperature MUST be above 7C for 7 days running. Seed sown early will take longer to germinate. Sow a few weeks later and they soon catch up. Seed from plants from warm countries like tomatoes, peppers and aubergine, need about 12 C to germinate, indoors in a heated propagator.
3. Avoid temperature fluctuations, keeping seeds somewhere where the temperature is even and above 12C. This might rule out many windowsills. Even greenhouse growing can be a problem as night temperatures fall sharply, even as the day temperatures rise.
4. When sowing seeds use clean seed trays; use a good quality seed compost. If you use a general multi purpose add a few handfuls of sharp sand or vermiculite per bucketful. Always

use **clean tap water** NOT from a water butt. The water from a butt is described as 'bacterial soup' (includes bird muck, algae etc)

5. Once seeds get going be careful not to let them dry out or drown. Put newspaper under the trays to suck up excess water.

Hope this helps, keep sowing, still plenty of time to get seeds in and lots of varieties in the Stores.

Lesley Woodward

7th March 2020

Note by Editor: Sorry this is a bit late in the year, but I thought it would still be a useful piece in the newsletter

A Whirlwind event on KL1 (Paul Finch)

A warm afternoon on 07th April on KL1 with slight breeze and sunny/cloudy sky was interrupted suddenly at approx 13:45 by a "Dust Devil" (Whirlwind). From the corner plot (at the junction of Clamage Road and Kennel Lodge Road) a strong wind raced diagonally across the site to the opposite corner deep in The Annex, then carried up across the Ashton Estate towards the Abbots Leigh entrance.

With fairly intense ferocity it picked up compost bin lids and sacks. They appeared way up in the sky some 20-50 metres and sailed away into the distance. A very large sheet of black ground cover on plot 39A was elevated, then unfolded and was hovering at least 30 metres into the air like a magic carpet then came crashing down as fast as it went up. A hard plastic frame was tossed across the hauling way onto plot 65. The next victim was a plastic wheelbarrow on plot 35 which was dumped to the adjacent plot.

You could then follow the whirlwind's path as it swept through the foliage and across the fields. Anyone on the receiving end of any flying debris would, without a doubt, would have been injured. All quite spectacular, frightening and finally entertaining once it had disappeared!

Another chapter in Gone with the Wind on KL1 (following last May's Oak Tree gale disaster on the 28th ...the day before RoyalOakDay).

Avon Wildlife Trust and My Wild Bedminster (Bob Corfield)

Both of the above organisations encourage interest in the green spaces and wildlife in BS3. To this end, I will, from time to time, be receiving invitations for wild life surveys to be carried out on our sites. I know many of you are interested in the birds and other wild life to be found within our allotment sites, and we've carried out surveys on butterflies in recent years. If you have any interesting information you would like to share about wildlife activity (not the rats please) just email me (hwdaa@hwdaa.co.uk) at any time so I can produce a composite picture for future publication in one or both of the newsletters of the 2 groups above. I will also be putting a copy of their latest newsletters on our website. Talking of rats, see the next article.

Dealing with Rats (Bob Corfield)

This article is a precis of the words on the website. However, since this newsletter also goes to those who are not on the internet/email, it's worth repeating.



Accepted that rats are unpleasant and can be a nuisance on allotment sites, evidence provided by a national pest control operator, indicates that the use of poison in 'open' situations is often totally ineffective. We are also concerned that rodent poison may have an adverse effect on other wildlife, pets and even humans. With this in mind, we have decided back in 2017 that we will no longer use, or to allow the use of, any form of rodent poison on our six allotment sites.

Instead, we offer the following advice and support to our tenants.

Dealing with rats

Where there is evidence of rat activity on, or in the immediate vicinity of, an allotment plot, tenants are advised to take the following action:

1. Remove covering from places where rats nest or feed – such as compost bins and under sheds. Disturb or turn rotting compost with a digging fork or similar tool on a regular basis to deter rats. Poke a long cane or rake into the void beneath a shed to disturb or destroy a rats' nest.
2. Avoid leaving food lying about. Dairy and cooked foods should never be put into compost bins. If you have a bird feeder on your plot, hang a tray under it to prevent seed dropping on the ground below. If you keep hens, ensure that their food is kept in sealed containers and hand feeders where they cannot be reached by a rodent.
3. Block holes used by rats in sheds, fences etc

If you are especially concerned about rat activity on your plot, please discuss the problem with your Site Rep who may be able to offer advice including setting a trap.

4. Set traps. Several models of metal or plastic 'snap trap' are readily available, including from our shop on Alderman Moore's. Set the trap according the maker's instruction and place it inside a strong box with a hole of similar diameter to a tennis ball in either end. The box should be positioned along a known rat run or places where rats are nesting but out of the way of other wildlife, little fingers (children), paws (dogs, feral cats). Rats are attracted to peanut butter and chocolate but other bait may prove just as effective. Either the trap itself or the whole box should be fixed to the ground, a post etc.

Don't expect instant results: traps need to be checked and reset on a regular basis. Please note that tenants are responsible for removing dead rats from their allotment plot.

A further point.

Since this article was written, where the rat population has got totally out of hand (as was the case on KL2 last year), we will get in a professional team of rodent operatives to deal with it. But this can be expensive so self help should be the first line of approach.

Development of Stonemason's yard/Railway sidings near White City (Bob Corfield)

The old stonmason's yard/railway sidings area next to White City is the subject of a planning application. This is intended to be a large residential development that has the potential to change the whole area. The planning application can be found on the Bristol City website – search for planning application 20/01655/F

