

HOTWELLS & DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

April 2018

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of what I intend will be a new series of fairly regular newsletters for the tenants of the HwDAA. One of the purposes of these newsletters will be to inform those tenants who are not on the internet and don't see the website what's going on and what's planned for the future. Internet users may therefore see some repeats of what you may have seen on the website.

We will not be publishing the newsletters quarterly as in the past but as and when suitable items have accumulated or the need to inform tenants about things as they arise.

Finally my thanks to Stephanie Beaven who previously edited the newsletters. It was sometimes a difficult task getting suitable items submitted on time and the whole printing and production process concluded. They always did get published on the agreed deadline thanks to Stephanie's efforts.

Bob Corfield
Electronic Editor

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We are all champing at the bit to get onto our allotments but the weather has been against us - just require a plague of locusts to complete the set!!

As the ground is still too cold to sow it is a good time to start potting up seeds in our greenhouses and kitchens - since the Kings Seeds talk (see next article) many of us have a bit more confidence of success now we know how we should have been doing it!

Our programme of repairs and replacements of sheds has begun so you should begin to see activity. Thank you John Nolan (KL145A.) for taking this work on - sterling work.

We are looking to provide a new set of standard plot numbers for all 6 sites so you should see these appearing over the next few months.

The replacement compost loo at White City (original destroyed by arson) is now up and running and there is an official opening on Sunday 22 April (proposed opening on 18/3 was cancelled due to the bad weather)

A new compost loo and extra carpark is proposed for Bower Ashton - we are currently getting quotes for this work.

Events - Kings Seeds talk on 7 March was a huge success. We have a No Dig workshop run by Tim Foster on 28 April and a New Tenant Workshop set for 12 May. Further details to follow.

Plot inspections will commence at the end of this month with the main work in April/May.

I hope we all get a chance to start to plant crops soon as I reckon it could be a good growing season this year. Good luck to everyone.

Roger Coffin
Chairman

NOTES ON SOWING SEEDS FROM THE KINGS TALK

BY LESLIE WOODWARD (SEEDS REP)

First part of the talk was by Les Day on Kings and the Seed Industry. I did not take detailed Notes on this. Here's some sundry points : Kings have very high standards. In house; testing with 2 scientists. Very high testing and germination criteria. Choose seed breeders with great care. Their motto from the formation of the company back in the 19th Century was and is best seed at best prices . Because they sell so much commercial seed Kings are Defra tested. No sales gimmicks. Very proud of independence and refuse to do deals with large chains. Customer satisfaction very important – 3 ring rule on incoming telephone enquiries. Happy to answer customer queries. Very proud of staff loyalty .

Which Type of Seed?

F1: Seeds developed from 1940's. F1 are bred for the global commercial market. Long period of development, poss 10 years. Kings new Sweet Peas take 7 years to develop before ready for sale.

F1 seeds are developed for the commercial grower with the aim of uniformity in shape, size and cropping time. Get them in / crop together / get them out / get next crop in. So if you plant F1s they will tend to all crop at the same time.

Due to restrictions in pesticide use, new F1 seeds are bred for disease resistance as well as flavour.

The alternative to F1 is "open pollinated": They crop over much longer period. Can be inconsistent in performance. Probably not so disease resistant as F1. May well deteriorate in performance over the years but these open pollinated seeds are probably better for the private grower.

SEEDS AND SOWING

The second part of the talk was by Andrew Tokely who gave a very useful demonstration illustrating the right and wrong ways to store and sow seed successfully”

Storing your seed

Very important. Although Andrew remarked HwDAA seed is sold so cheaply there seems little sense in storing – just buy new each year!

He suggested storing packets in a wardrobe in a North facing room. Kept properly seeds will last for years. Never leave seed packets in warm moist conditions as they **will** deteriorate much faster.

AGAIN and AGAIN the message was given that it is the SOWER not the seed that is responsible for failure. (*Hard as that may be to stomach!*) First half of Andrew’s session was on seed growing indoors in pots.

COMPOST

Use proper **seed sowing compost** (not multi purpose). Seed compost has very little nutrient value. Buy a fresh and clean looking bag of compost. NEVER use multi purpose. The fertiliser in the latter is great for potting on young plants but can burn off young seed which have just started to germinate. Multi purpose can also contain twigs, chunks of wood etc. no good for seedlings.

Do not re-use seed compost. Sprinkle it on your soil after use. Don’t try to make your own seed compost as it is difficult to get the necessary purity.

SOW into 3” POTS

Andrew recommends using 3” pots for sowing seed. He finds trays are too shallow and the seed compost dries out fast and patchy. Square pots are easier to line up. Round are fine.

Best to keep the compost in a warm place before using it. Empty the compost into the pot. Shake to settle it. Use a ‘tamper’ to gently press the compost firm and level. Use a wooden tamper made to fit for square pots. A Jam jar lid with a wooden stem attached is great for round pots. (I made one in 5 minutes – Ed)

WATERING

Always water the compost in the pot before sowing. Water thoroughly so the pot is fully charged and then leave to drain before sowing.

Always use tap water NEVER butt water which can contain plant debris / bird poo etc.

A neat tool is to use a plastic water bottle with a little screw on watering head. (code 45183 from Kings)

SOWING

Sprinkle the seed on top of the watered and drained seed compost. Andrew was VERY liberal with the amount he sprinkled into a 3” pot. He was relaxed about this

after years and years sowing 1000's of seeds as he is very good at pricking out the many baby seedlings.

Mix tiny seed in the foil pack with a sprinkle of dry fine silver seed before sprinkling on compost. Then you can see where you have sprinkled.

IF you can see the seeds on the compost cover them over lightly. If the seeds are so tiny that you can't see them, do NOT cover.

He recommends covering with FINE GRADE vermiculite as this lets in light. A sprinkling by hand to cover all the compost is sufficient.

GERMINATION and first growth

After sowing move your pot into a heated propagator or onto a heated mat set at 21C. Remove the lid from the propagator IN THE DAY as soon as the seeds germinate and come through. Make sure light levels are good. Protect the seedlings overnight as it can still get very cold.

Put **lettuce** seeds in a fridge first before sowing (they hate heat); **brassicas** prefer the open topped heated mat; **tomatoes** prefer being in a propagator. Sow 5 **sweet peas** to a 3" pot in Oct / Nov. Leave in a cold polytunnel. Give a 2nd thorough watering after 10 days and then no more until they germinate. Prick out the top leaves after 3 pairs form. Sow large seeds like **courgettes & beans** on their EDGE. They suck up water and rot if laid flat on their sides

How to get sturdy courgette; marrows; cucumbers: ½ fill your 3" pot. Shake compost. Water. Put your seed on it's edge into the compost. When the seed germinates and the growth reaches the top of the pot, back fill the top half with compost and let it grow on.

Les's tip for **cucumbers**: Dampen and fold a kitchen towel in half. Place seeds inside centre fold. Put this into a sealable plastic sandwich bag. Put in airing cupboard. Takes circa 48 hours to germinate. Watch carefully. Then after germination transfer into pots.

PRICKING OUT

Andrew recommends doing this when the first leaves show (NOT as is usually said the first true leaves) and the stem is no more than 2.5 cm / 1" long. Before pricking out, move the pot off the heated mat / propagator into the cooler area where the seedlings will grow on (greenhouse etc.). Let the tiny seedlings accustom themselves to the cooler temperature before the shock of pricking out.

Prepare the new pot ready to receive the seedling. Can use modules. Water the new pot/module before pricking out. Use a dibber to gently tease out the roots. Lift the young seedling by the leaves only. Work carefully from one side of the pot to the other. Bury the stems deeper because by the next day the seedling will have lifted. This is especially useful for tomatoes as they will produce more good roots from the buried stem.

SOWING OUTSIDE

It is VITAL to wait until the soil warms up. The biggest mistake gardeners make is to rush the sowing and do it too soon. Seeds sown a bit later will soon catch up when conditions are right.

Use the 7:7 rule. Soil must be above 7C for 7 consecutive days and nights.

Watch out that your drill is LEVEL and of a consistent depth. If not you will get patchy germination.

Water the drill / line before sowing.

You can test the soil temp by planting a few radish – if they come up ok, off you go.

TOP TIPS

Carrots – sow in a 3” (8Cm) deep V shape trench filled with compost. Cover with an Enviromesh tunnel to keep out carrot fly.

Never sow Runner Beans until every chance of frost has gone. END of May.

Sow Parsnip late May as well. Parsnip is **notoriously difficult** to grow. So much so that it is not included in EU germination standards.

ROTATION and testing of soil Ph balance highly recommended.

Q & A SESSION

Some of the points raised have been included in the appropriate sections above. A few here:

Q: Why are my seedlings long and spindly? I am growing in a heated propagator on a windowsill.

A: Lack of light. Propagator lid left on too long. Light levels on windowsill poor / erratic as sun moves round. Cloud / gloomy spring skies mean poor light levels.

Q: How can I grow nice tight button sprouts?

A: Best to choose F1 seeds. Open pollinated are more difficult. Start off at the end of March. For Xmas eating use ‘Brodie’; after Xmas ‘Brendon’. Make sure you firm the ground really well before planting out. Trample it. Start them off at the end of March.

Q: can you recommend a good peat free compost?

A: Difficult. Help from floor – Dalesfoot wool (<http://www.dalefootcomposts.co.uk/our-products.aspx>). Andrew agrees this is the best but beware can become waterlogged and rot seeds

Q: What is going wrong with my peppers? Leaves and pods are crinkly.

A: Possibly aphids? Check under the leaves.

Might be due to a check in growth. They need steady HEAT. Sow peppers right now. They grow slowly, looks like nothing happens for ages because seedling is putting energy into root growth. Might be a virus.

Q: Help, I can't grow Swedes and Turnips – my neighbour is doing fine

A: Always grow your swedes in pots / modules like any brassica.

By Ed: Thanks to Lesley Woodward for this summary and thanks to Anneke van Eijkern and Lesley for organising the Kings talk. It was very thought provoking and well worth attending.

RECOMMENDED SEED VARIETIES FROM THE KINGS TALK

During the Kings talk, the two presenters gave us their favourite seed varieties. Apart from the Chili Peppers at the time of publication we have them in the shop. These are:

Brussel Sprout Brodie (early)
Brussel Sprout Brendan (after Xmas)
Cabbage Caraflex (better than Hispi as will stand longer)
Carrot Eskimo
Cauliflower Cendis (available from 2018)
Chili Pepper Thor, Cabista (not in stock)
Lettuce Analena (great little Butterhead)
Parsnip imperial Crown
Tomato Mountain Magic (outdoor growing / blight resistant)
Turnip Sweet Bell

SHOP OPENING OVER EASTER

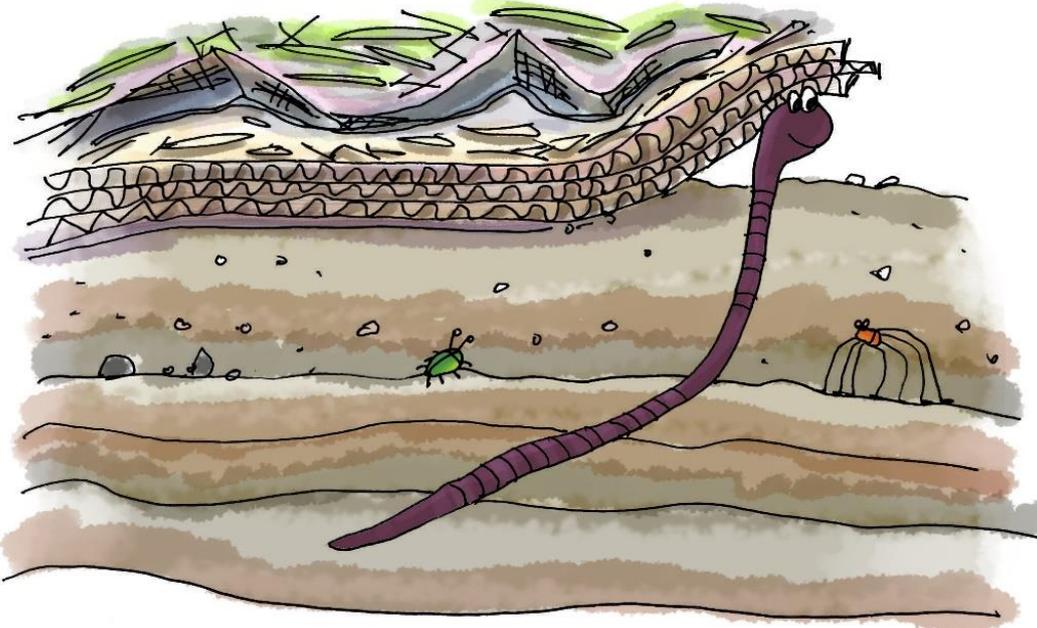
As well as the normal Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday opening, over Easter the Shop will be open on Good Friday and Easter Monday as well.

FUTURE EVENTS

Roger mentioned in his notes about future HwDAA events. Here's some more details of the No-dig event.

HWDAA April 2018 Event
No Dig Allotment Gardening

Join us for a No Dig workshop with Tim Foster and learn how the No Dig approach can improve soil fertility, increase crop yields, save time and reduce backache!



When: Saturday, 28th April
Time: 2pm to 4pm
Where: Alderman Moore Allotment

Tickets are £2.50 per person.
Tickets on sale from Alderman Moore shop during shop opening hours.

All Plot Holders are Welcome.
Learn about:
Getting started with No Dig
Green manures and composting

Thanks to HwDAA tenant Kara de los Reyes for her fantastic illustrations