

December 2018

MAGA

MARTIN WAY ALLOTMENT NEWS

Christmas 2018 - Putting our plots to bed



Another year has passed and once again we are back putting our plots to bed, looking at seed catalogues and waiting for some better weather. I'd like to welcome all new plot holders who have joined us since the last newsletter and wish them every success in their new project.

We sadly say goodbye to John Gorden, one of our long term allotmenters. Paul has written a lovely piece about him. Pippa on plot 52A has written an interesting article about her rescue chickens. Please read it, it is very informative.

A new venture this year has been the regular working parties organised by Sue Tickner.

We have included a few dates for your diaries for 2019.

Please don't forget to attend at least one of these to keep our allotments running well. I hope you all have a good Christmas and look forward to seeing you in the New Year and at the AGM in April.



Best Wishes

Jadzia (MAGA Chair)

MY HENS - Chickens on the Allotment

I just wanted to say a huge 'Thank you' for letting me keep chickens here on the allotment. I've always wanted to keep chickens and when it became clear that we were not going to make that...."move to the country"....I thought I would never have them.



My hens are ex-caged birds from the hen industry. At 18 months they finish their lives as commercial birds and are due to be destroyed. Mine come from a charity called **British Hen Welfare Trust**. The charity does superb work in trying to promote high standards for hens, although caged birds still only have the space of an A4 sheet of paper cubed to live in. They also re-home about 50,000 birds each year. They also promote environmentally friendly practices such as feeding the hens on crops from British sustainable sources, which they supply and deliver at a very competitive price. They





also provide good back up and educational services.

When the chickens arrive they have very few feathers and they really look overready, pale, thin, they are scared and nervous. However, within a very short time they learn to trust, they learn where the food is and the layout of the plot, finding their way to favourite foods such as chard and especially strawberries! The hens also learn that forks mean digging and digging means.....worms! I have 3 hens left from the original 6 that arrived,

these still lay eggs almost daily. The next batch of 4 arrived in much worse condition and only lay the very occasional egg - this is a shame as I wanted to give away a few eggs to other people.

However, they are now in great condition and I am hopeful they might surprise me next spring. If they don't, never mind its just so rewarding to see them so happy, healthy and contented. Thank you all for the help, support and encouragement you have given me.

Please try to support the work of this charity if you can and try to eat free range eggs as opposed to those from caged birds.



Pippa (Plot 52A)

PERSEPHONE DAYS - Winter in an unheated greenhouse

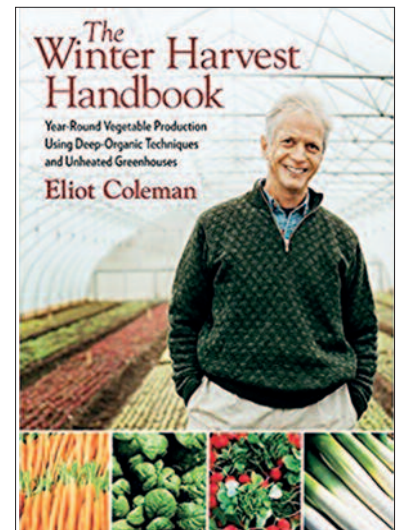


In Greek mythology, the beautiful Persephone, daughter of Zeus and Demeter was kidnapped by Hades and taken to the underworld. Demeter, goddess of the harvest, was despondent and in her grief caused all green things to die. The concept of winter began. However, a deal was finally brokered whereby Persephone would spend four months of the year in the underworld and Demeter's joy at Persephone's arrival from the underworld saw the return of green things growing.

The term "**Persephone Days**", was coined by **Eliot Coleman**, an agricultural researcher and educator, proponent of organic farming, who runs Four Season Farm in Harborside, Maine USA. After years of experimentation, Coleman concluded that most plants stop growing

when the day length drops below 10 hours. After this time, even if you protect your vegetables from the cold, they are merely existing in a semi-hibernatory state. But, by adapting old-world techniques to contemporary farming methods, he created a successful, year-round organic farm.

The trick to a long winter harvest is to plant the crops at just the right stage of the late summer and autumn so that they are just shy of maturity when the Persephone Days begin. There is also the need to pay close attention to succession planting, so that there will be a continuous harvest throughout the winter, rather than a mass of lettuce one week and then no more for the rest of the year. In effect, the growing season is not extended, but the harvest season is.



The extract above from <https://hattiesgarden.com/persephone-days/> in Elliot Coleman's book "**The Winter Harvest Handbook**" describes in some detail how he manages, albeit on a commercial scale, to keep producing vegetables throughout the winter – in unheated greenhouses. He uses the usual techniques of raised beds and deep mulching in addition to fleece and cloches.

The “**Persephone Period**”, on the latitude of our allotment site, is approximately from 17th November until 31st January. During this period an unheated greenhouse is principally a store cupboard. By keeping the soil from freezing, the plants will hibernate rather than grow – but will be ready for harvest when required. This requires advance planning, as the plants will need to be sown early August to be able to reach their harvest size by this time. He suggests Beet Leaves, Carrot, Chard, Leek, Pak Choi, Radish, Rouge D’hiver, Spinach and Turnips as being a good start. Succession sowing is crucial as space will be limited. His book suggests particular varieties which he has found successful, but they are US varieties which may not be suitable for our climate.

We have just rescued a second hand greenhouse but unfortunately too late for this winter as it is still in pieces. However, we will report on our successes and failures next season. In the meanwhile Eliot Coleman’s book is an informative and interesting read.

It is **ISBN 978-1-60358-081-6** and is available on Amazon.

Good growing

Robert & Madeleine



We allotmenters are inveterate freecyclers and recyclers. Generally that’s a good thing, but sometimes it’s worth thinking twice.



Take the humble carpet, which finds its way onto many plots to cover beds and paths. A number of chemicals are used in the manufacture of carpets including organotins, permethrin and BDE-209, which a Greenpeace report noted are potentially hazardous to human health and the environment. Added to which carpets are very good at soaking up toxins brought into the house on our feet and through paints etc - studies of old carpets identify high levels of pesticides, cancer-causing polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, heavy metals such as lead, cadmium and mercury, and polychlorinated biphenols.....**so if you are a believer in organic practices, you might want to steer well clear of carpets!**

Even if you are of a more pragmatic turn of mind and your eyes glaze over when confronted by the names of complex chemicals, carpets can still be a bit of a menace. Clearing overgrown plots before reletting them frequently involves dealing with a web of half disintegrated carpets buried under six inches of soil, which makes for very hard work.

Given that wood chip is generally a sufficient weed suppressant on paths, without needing carpet or weed fabric underneath, wouldn’t it be great if we could all restrict carpet use to covering beds in winter and keeping our compost heaps cosy - and ensure that any carpets we do use are regularly lifted and tidied.

CARPETS & TYRES

ON TO TYRES



These were popular on allotments in the past for use as planters. If you do have them, please be aware that you must remove them when you leave your allotment. UK Councils classify them as hazardous waste, so under no circumstances can they be put in the waste bays - and LBM's own facilities (such as Garth Road) will refuse to handle them. Instead they must be taken to a private contractor, who will make a charge to handle them (of the order of £5 a tyre). Easier not to bring them onto the plot in the first place!



On a more cheerful note, were you aware that allotment soils are typically in much better condition than arable soils, which have been depleted by years of intense cultivation!

PUMPKIN FEST 2018

This last event of the year is always a popular one and this year's was no different. Thanks goes to all the helpers who through their hard work made this a success.

Turnout was good, about 80 people, despite the start of the day having been quite miserable with heavy rain but luckily it had subsided by the time of lighting the bonfire. There was an initial concern that there would be a lack of wood, so thanks go to all those plot holders who cleared their plot as in the end there was enough wood to have had several bonfires. There must be a lot of very tidy plots around the allotment now! There was delicious home-made soup on offer which went down very well as it was bitterly cold, as well as sausages, burgers and drinks.

The turnout for the carved pumpkin competition was rather disappointing this year but this could have been due to the fact that Morden Hall Park had held a carved pumpkin competition the previous evening. However, those that did participate and who won were:

Highly Commended: **Guy**



Highly Commended goes to Guy to acknowledge his effort in nurturing and growing such a giant pumpkin and to transport it to the judging area.

Jane Nicanovich

Children's Category: **Rafi**



Adult: **Esme**



R.I.P. Gordon John Willian Belbin



Gordon, or John Gordon as we knew him, one of the old-school of allotmenters, passed away on October 28th, aged 82.

Born and raised locally, he had held several 'indoor jobs' as he called them before becoming a groundsman for the local authority that eventually became Merton Borough and finding his true vocation as a gardener. He cultivated plots 114 and 115 for many years and was a good friend and mentor to many plot-holders on the West side. Once he knew you were serious about your plot and not 'one of them time-wasters' JG's friendship and advice were secure - particularly about the 'proper time' to plant any given crop [this was generally 2 or 3 weeks before anyone else was even considering it].

A firm traditionalist JG had no time for "that organic stuff" and was often seen with a large sprayer with which he waged war on the horsetails that plagued the top part of the site. His deadly mixture of paraffin and paraquat might not be allowed nowadays but it certainly worked! "John's Truck" was also a regular sight. This was an enormous 4-wheeled barrow that he would allow anyone to borrow once he had divulged the secret of where he kept one of the wheels hidden. Having fitted the wheel you then had to pull the thing - even empty it weighed a ton but JG was often seen at a trot with it, fully laden.

Not many people knew about his love of opera but we all knew about his love of cats and the many that he adopted from local orphanages and later from Battersea. John Gordon died peacefully at home in Wimbledon Chase. He leaves a widow, Barbara and Felix, the last of his cats.

Thank you

Normally as we go into the winter months it starts to become a quieter time for allotment holders apart from those of us getting our plots ready for the ravages of the colder weather with a view to setting up their plots for the forthcoming new planting year. However as October comes to an end as well as November this is a busy period for your Treasurer as the first of the rents start to flow in initially in dribs and drabs and then to use a weather expression, some of which we have seen of late, a deluge. This year has been no exception but I do have to add that this has been one of the best years for both plot holders settling their bills early and for receipt of electronic payments, which does make my life a lot easier. I would therefore wish to say my personal thanks to all of you as well as on behalf of the Committee.

Thank you and I hope you all get off to a great start in 2019."

Peter Flintoff



MAGA - WORKING PARTIES

Launched at the 2018 AGM, MAGA Working Parties have proved a great success, with four being run during the year. Around 50 plotholders initially put their names down and all but a very few of these have turned out. Participants have remarked on how nice it is to meet other plotholders and work together on such worthwhile jobs.

The principle is simple: as a self-managed site, unless we want to see massive increases in rent, we plotholders all need to play our part in maintaining the site. The Working Parties have been kept busy with a wide range of tasks:

clearing the roadway by Merton Mansions, cutting and tying back the laurel and repairing the fence, reinstating paths, repairing compost bays, building up the level of a damaged plot, raising the floor of the marquee, pruning the grape vine near the marquee, clearing some badly-overgrown plots to make it easier to let them, and so on.

This year, a plotholder needed help propping up their shed, another had heavy debris from the collapsed perimeter fence, whilst another's broken arm had reduced her ability to keep the undergrowth under control.

These tasks are usually identified by the Committee, but sometimes by volunteers themselves. We are happy to consider requests from individual plotholders provided they come along to help and explain exactly what is required.



The Working Parties are coordinated by **Sue Tickner** of Plot 53/53A who holds the volunteer list, runs the sessions and provides the tea/coffee and brownies to keep everyone happy! It entails volunteering a few hours of your time once or twice a year, spending an enjoyable morning doing something worthwhile and getting to know other plotholders.

The Working Party dates for 2019 are as follows:

Saturdays: 6th April • 15th June • 17th August • 12th October

Additional dates may be introduced for specific tasks, but please get these dates in your diaries now. If you aren't already on the volunteer list, please email: sue_tickner@yahoo.co.uk. She will be in touch with all volunteers in the New Year to ask them to commit to one or two of next year's dates. At the moment, most people prefer a Saturday but if enough people come forward offering a Sunday, we're happy to change one of these dates to a Sunday.

Thank you to all this year's Working Party volunteers: I look forward to working with you again next year and hope we shall have a good influx of new volunteers to join you.

Sue Tickner





*Merry Christmas
& a Happy New Year
to all allotmenters*



ALLOTMENT

that morning

the pitiless rain



gave way to

the pitiless sun



which

gave way to

the pitiless wind



which

gave way to

the pitiless cold

hailstones - snow

and driving blizzard



at which point

he decided

reluctantly

to go

home



pmcmanus

s358