

DECEMBER 2024

MAGA

MARTIN WAY ALLOTMENT NEWS

News from the Chair



Today I'm writing this with 45-50 mph wind and continuous rain! Not unlike Spring this year when many of us were delayed in the preparation and sowing in March and April. As Chair you do have to walk around both of the sites and later in the year it was good to see that many, but not all, had been rewarded with some good crops particularly of runner beans !!!

At this time last year tenants were reminded that the upkeep of the pathways was their responsibility. It was rewarding to see that the majority of tenants are tending the pathways and it is so much safer walking around..... thank you.

So what has been achieved in 2024 ?

- * Thanks to the Working Parties the roads are in a better condition and the boundaries have been cleared which has allowed new fencing to be installed on the Whatley Avenue boundary . The boundary with David Lloyd is slowly being cleared and it is anticipated that new fencing will be installed in March/ April 2025
- * The Nature Reserve pond has been installed and already attracting wildlife. Wildflower seed and bulbs have been planted.
- * The plant sale held in May raised a record amount of money
- * The Produce Show held in September was surprisingly well supported with entries despite the poor growing conditions this year
- * Pumpkinfest was blessed with better weather this year and record numbers attended and there were far more entries
- * The shop is blessed to have so many volunteers . Our manager has negotiated a 50% discount with Sutton seeds....a good saving

Finally a big thankyou on your behalf to the Committee and to the many volunteers and a special thankyou to Jane Nicanovich(Plant Sale) Philippa Tribler (Produce Show) and Miranda Waller (Pumpkinfest) who take the responsibility of the organisation of these events

Thank you all and on behalf of the committee
Have a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year





As I write this the weather has suddenly become much colder so our bees have gone from bringing in late pollen to huddling up inside their hives in their winter cluster around the Queen to keep her warm. As soon as any slightly warmer weather comes they will break this cluster in order to allow specialised “mortuary” bees to bring out any dead bees as bees are very hygienic in their behaviour.

We will by now have put on mouseguards over hive entrances in order to keep out any mouse with ideas of taking up residence in our nice warm honey filled hives! We also put wire netting around the hives to protect from Green Woodpeckers who can easily peck/drill through wooden hives in order to eat larvae or honey stores, not good for the bees.

This time of the year seems quite strange as we go from action filled weeks of inspecting hives, monitoring our

bees and honey stores to a much quieter time of not opening hives over winter but trying to assess how the bees are faring simply by watching any activity at the entrance on warmer days.

We also monitor the honey stores available to each hive during the winter months by “hefting” each hive and if very heavy that means there is plenty of honey (their carbohydrate) left but if the hive feels much lighter we may need to do an emergency feed of fondant. We always aim to leave plenty of stores for them but the weather can catch us out!

The main winter job is...cleaning the previously used hive parts, a necessary but mundane task. Then we are ready to do a complete hive equipment exchange in Spring.

Wishing you all a good winter!

Best wishes



Alison (Apiary-Warden)



Emergency feed of fondant



Nature Reserve

Ponds are vital for hydration spots for frogs and we have regular visitors



Why Plastic Grass is Harmful on Allotments



1. Damages Soil Health

Plastic grass blocks water and air from reaching the soil, harming plant growth and making your soil less fertile.

2. Chemical Leaching

Plastic grass can release harmful chemicals (like phthalates) into the soil, contaminating crops and affecting your health.

3. Encourages Mold & Fungal Growth

It traps moisture, creating a damp environment where mould and fungus thrive—harmful to plants and your health.

4. Microplastics in the Soil

Over time, plastic breaks down into microplastics, which contaminate the soil and can enter the food chain.

5. Promotes Flooding & Affects Neighbouring Plots

Astroturf prevents rainwater from soaking into the soil, causing water to pool on the surface. It increases the risk of flooding, which can damage your plot and impact neighbouring allotments during heavy rain.

Better Alternatives for Weed Control

- **Mulch:** Use straw, leaves, or wood chips to block weeds naturally and improve soil.

Ground Covers for Flood-Prone Vegetable Gardens: Clover (e.g., White Clover, Crimson Clover, Red Clover), Creeping Thyme (e.g., Elfin Thyme, Creeping Red Thyme), Creeping Jenny, Sweet Alyssum, Phacelia

- **Cardboard/Newspaper:** A biodegradable option that helps control weeds without harming the environment.

PROTECT OUR ALLOTMENT
AND HEALTH :
SAY NO TO PLASTIC GRASS

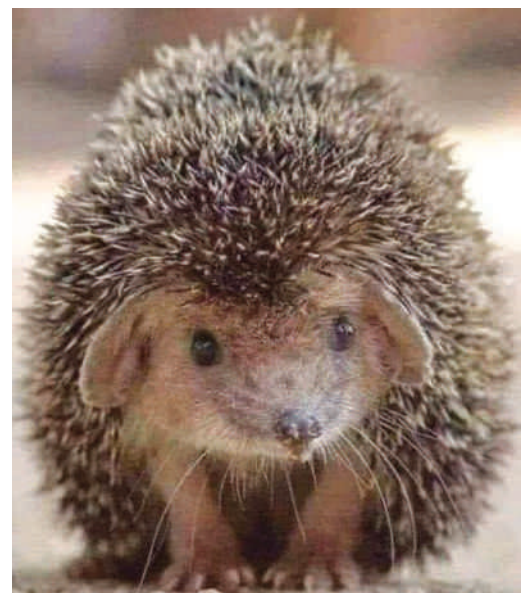
Update on Hedgehogs

Two big hedgehogs were found dead within the past month.

A little one who was found by the shop died in rescue this summer. A healthy hedgehog was spotted on Pippa's plot. Henrick found an injured hedgehog who is currently with a rescue for a broken foot.

A healthy family of hedgehogs have been spotted on Bill's plot. On my plot a few young hedgehogs have appeared (one also has a damaged foot).

So they are around we just need to provide them with a good habitat.



ALLOTMENTS WORK During the Winter Months

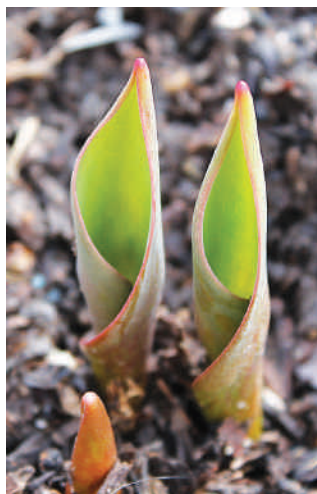


It is very tempting for most plot holders to believe that no work is required to plots during the winter months. This is far from the truth and we advise on our website that plot holders should attend their plots at least once per week during winter.

Digging and preparing the soil ready for spring planting and seed sowing will save you time when spring arrives and when there are always many tasks to do and not enough time to do everything required. In addition a well dug plot will drain well and less likely to flood during the heavy rains that are experienced during the winter months. This will also reduce the weeds - yes they do also grow during the winter!

You will have noticed that the long time, experienced plot holders have already dug many areas of their plots and spread manure and self-made compost to enrich the soil and/or covered up the dug areas with eco friendly membrane to help keep the weeds at bay. Some have already in the

autumn sowed broad beans, peas, planted out onion sets and garlic etc. to fully utilise the dug soil areas. This will give crops earlier in the spring or early summer, 1-2 months before those traditionally planted in the spring.



Hence, on the mild winter days when it is not raining please make every effort to get to your plot and dig over the soil as much as possible. You will be thankful for the time saved enabling you to take on those many tasks in the spring.



Andrew Preece



PUMPKINFEST 2024

A GREAT EVENING



Many thanks for all those who attended the Pumpkinfest and those who helped with the arrangements. It was a great success and we believe we had 80-90 attendees which is a record and the weather was also kind to us.

We also had a record number of carved pumpkin entries this year so thanks for a wonderful effort to everyone, including two giant beautifully carved pumpkins, see photo above.

Particular thanks go to Miranda and Martin Waller for organising and providing soup, burgers, sausages, beer, prizes etc. Andy & Mike for building the bonfire, erecting the lights and putting out the tables. Alan for running a great barbecue. Anne Marie for providing and serving the vegan soup. Anil and Gerald for providing some wonderful bread and everyone else not mentioned for helping.

We would welcome any suggestions/comments to help further improve next year's Pumpkinfest - just reply to this email.

We look forward to another successful event next year.

*A big thank you for organising Pumpkinfest.
I brought 3 children with me, 6, 8 and 10. They
loved it and said it was even better than last year.
Steph Wyatt 68A*

*Thank you..... It was great!!!
Christine Waller*

*Thanks for all the hard work that went into
the pumpkin fest. It was a great evening,
enjoyed by all of my family and so many
others.*

Pippa Lindsay



The PRODUCE SHOW



The Produce Show brings the competitive element to the front and it was rewarding to see so many entries particularly as the weather had been so unpredictable during the growing season.

There are always winners and losers but just taking part is so important. This year small prizes were introduced in the form of a token to spend in our shop.

Here is a selection of some of the winners including the best in show won by Bill Eaton on plot 61.



Many thanks to Philippa Tribler for organising this show and to her many helpers and thank you to everyone that entered and congratulations to our winners.

PLANT SALE 17th May 2025

The plant sale is the only event in our calendar where we are raising money to boost our income and carry out tasks such as replacing fences to ensure the tenants security.

But we need you to think ahead as there are ways you help this event be a success. For example you can be taking hardwood cuttings, sowing sweet peas, broad beans and cabbages, various herbs including dill and winter lettuces.

This month sees seed catalogues arriving and remember that Suttons seeds are offering a 50% discount. To make this event a success, just sow a few extra seeds and put them to one side for the 2025 Plant Sale. Trays and pots will be available in the shop when it re-opens in February

For 2025 the Plant Sale needs a NEW ORGANISER as Jane has decided to take a rest !!

So who amongst our tenants is going to volunteer to take over?? You get the support of the Committee and Jane will be on hand to offer guidance.

Please contact the Chairman: ivorstocker@sky.com



TOFFEE APPLE CAKE

Hello there...I'm the Housekeeper at Tillingford Hall and I would like to share with you Mrs Powell's recipe for a Toffee Apple Cake.



First, you'll need to line a 20cm (8-inch) square cake tin. If you don't have one, use a 20cm round tin or a loaf tin. Anything with a bigger surface area will come out too thin and end up like the base of a Jaffa Cake – not the effect we're looking for. And you'll need to grease and line it with baking paper – the toffee could make this stick to the tin so don't stint on this stage. I use gluten-free flour, but it's much dearer than normal flour so you can use normal white self-raising flour if you prefer.



For the toffee

200g apple puree – you should get this much from 2 good Bramleys. 75g brown sugar, 75g butter (or vegan butter if you're unfortunate enough to be dairy intolerant, God help you).

For the cake

4 eggs. Weigh them and note down the weight, unless you've got a better memory than me. Caster sugar, Stork baking margarine and Self Raising flour, each the same weight as the eggs. If you're using gluten-free flour, add a teaspoon of xanthan gum to improve the grain. Gluten free doesn't need sifting, normal does. If you insist on weights, it's probably about 250g of each if you're using medium sized eggs.

What to do

First, make the apple puree. Core, peel and slice your apples and cut them into 1-inch(ish) chunks (no need to be precise here), pop them in a microwaveable plastic bowl with a couple of tablespoons of water (might as well use hot if you've just boiled the kettle) and do on full power for a minute or two. They should turn into fluff if they're Bramleys. Eating apples will take much longer.

Meanwhile, you can make the toffee. Weigh out your butter and sugar and put them in a pan on medium heat. When it starts to sizzle, keep a good eye on it and stir it frequently – you want the sugar and butter well melded together, turning caramelly, but it mustn't go hard because (a) it'll be hell's delight to clean the pan and (b) you won't be able to stir it into the cake mixture. When it's caramelly but still good and runny, add in the apples and stir it all around. No need to mix it too thoroughly – this cake's going to be marbled so we don't want it to be too consistent. Take it off the heat and leave it to cool. Ideally, you'd do this ages before so it's completely cool but it's not that important so just do what you can.

Now it's time for the cake

Make sure you've greased and lined your tin. And now you can turn on the oven to 180 °C / GM4 – or use the bottom right baking oven if you're using an Aga (but you'd better check yours in case it's different to ours). Cream the margarine and caster sugar together to make a fluffy cream – you can tell it's ready when it starts to go paler. I do this with an electric whisk, but you can do it by hand. If you're going to do this, I'd wait a few minutes before turning the oven on because it's going to take you a lot longer and you'll just be wasting that heat, unless you're using an Aga, of course.

Now whisk your eggs (break them first, obviously) in a jug and start to add them gradually, beating all the time. Add a spoonful of flour with the last one. When that's all nicely mixed, use a metal spoon to fold in the flour, keeping as much air in as you can.



Lastly, gently swirl the toffee mixture into the cake mix. Don't mix it too much or you'll lose the marbled effect, but don't leave big areas of toffee apple or the cake might collapse.

Tip it into the tin, put the tin on a baking tray in case of leakage (you don't want to be cleaning burnt toffee off the bottom of your oven, believe me) and pop the lot in the oven for 35-40 minutes. Usual thing – when it's ready it will look a nice brown colour (darker than a normal sponge) and a skewer should come out clean – but try several areas, if it's not clean, you might just have hit a seam of toffee apple.

It is very important to leave it to cool completely before you try to take it out of the tin. You need to let the toffee set. This cake is very good with a cup of tea but also lovely as a dessert with warm apple puree and ice cream. This makes 16 decent pieces. If you are going to take more than two days to eat it I suggest you pop it in the fridge. It's very moist and could go mouldy quite quickly, especially if you've used windfalls.

Primavera Moretti

GARDENING TIPS

A couple of tips to pass on

1) Do you find peat free compost a bit claggy ? I have solved this by mixing it around 3 to 1 with vermiculite, which has the dual result of making it much easier to handle, and adding the additional benefits of vermiculite re water retention, etc.

2) If you're planting into a big pot, put a smaller pot in the base to reduce the amount of compost required. It doesn't seem to cause any problems with growth or waterlogging and seems to work really well.



Recipe for Spicy Pumpkin Soup

This is based on my sister's Australian version and can be used with any pumpkin/squash-like vegetable and adapted as required. I always find this sort of vegetable somewhat too sweet for my taste – the addition of curry power and finishing with coconut milk makes a lovely spicy, rich antidote to cold, wintery days.

1 Pumpkin, squash or similar

2 Cooking Apples

3 Leeks

1 lge Onion

1 tbsp Curry Powder

2 Chicken Stock Cubes

2 Pints Water

Cream or can coconut milk to finish

Chives to garnish

Fry onion, leeks, apple and curry powder until soft
Add pumpkin (peeled and diced). Stir a little
Make up stock with cubes and water and pour in
Bring to boil, then simmer until pumpkin is very soft
Liquidise, adjust liquid to taste (I bottle or freeze, then adjust liquid when it is time to eat)
Re-heat, drizzle with cream/coconut milk

Yum!

Sue Tickner



DISASTER

She said

All teary

All upset

Her celebration

Was spoilt

was wrecked

was ruined

for



On the twelfth day of Christmas,
my true love gave to me
only

5 drummers drumming,

7 pipers piping,

2 lords a-leaping,

5 ladies dancing,

2 maids a-milking,

3 swans a-swimming,

2 geese a-laying,

4 golden rings,

3 calling birds,

2 French hens,

1 turtle dove,

And then even



No partridge
in a pear tree!

pmcmanus

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