Prizewinners 2009

The AGM was held on a wet and windy November evening, which probably accounted for the low attendance, but here are some of the happy faces of plot holders who were successful in impressing the judges to win prizes. The cup winner 2009 was Peter Caughey, plot 40, who was unable to attend on the night. Congratulations to all the winners.

Clockwise from main picture, above: David and Julie Lainchbury, plot 132b, First Prize for Best Half Plot, presented with their certificate by Councillor Jonathan Cardy; Carol Ager, who along with Bill Royce, plot 4, won the First Prize for the Best New Tenant for a Full Plot; Len Cowking, plot 15f, 2nd Prize for the Best Half Plot; Chris Nix, plot 12f, First prize for Best New Tenant for a Half Plot; Gray Rigge, plot 83, who with his wife Liz won 2nd Prize for Best Full Plot. The other winners were: 3rd Prize Best Full Plot, Ian Hopkins, plot 30; 3rd Prize Best Half Plot, Caroline Dick, plot 194f.

Aminopyralid is back

Aminopyralid is back on the market. Dow’s grassland herbicide was withdrawn from the market in July 2008 after numerous reports of aminopyralid-contaminated manure either preventing or stunting the growth of crops including potatoes, tomatoes, beans, peas, carrots and lettuce.

The product has been allowed back with stricter labelling - aminopyralid herbicides should only be applied to land that will be grazed by cattle or sheep and not land where forage will be conserved - and an expanded training programme for product users. In theory this should ensure that manure contaminated with aminopyralid does not leave the farm. The product is not approved for use on land grazed by horses.

If the labelling and restrictions are followed, manure for allotments should be free of aminopyralid. However, this cannot be guaranteed and it is recommended that you check the provenance of manure and ensure the supplier is aware of the situation.

More information can be found on:

- the notice on the shed by the gate
- the Chemicals Regulation Directorate website (http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/safe_use.asp?id=2799)
- and the excellent Green Lane Allotments website (www.glallotments.btik.com - follow the link to Contaminated Manure half-way down the home page).

Plotholders’ Committee, January 2010

Submit items for the next newsletter - contact jenbourne@btinternet.com
New Faces on the Committee

Welcome to the new volunteers to the committee, who have been persuaded to share their manifestos and their interests -

**Martin Scotton:** I have been a plot holder for almost 15 years, and am particularly interested in growing unusual and heritage crop varieties. Recent successes include rat's tail radishes, Mexican mouse melons, and achocha (superfood of the Incas). I work as a writer and photographer. My most recent books include 'Allotment Month by Month' and 'Grow Vegetables'. My new book 'Grow Fruit' will be published in April.

**Flora Souper:** I suppose that having a name like Flora it was inevitable that I would love growing all kinds of plants. I try to grow all my plants organically (so not always successfully!) but really enjoy watching and encouraging wildlife to help me deal with the various pests. My reason for joining the committee is that I feel very strongly that I am very privileged in being able to have my allotment and when, last year our cafe and store shed were burnt down and sheds were broken into, very few people turned up to help. I therefore want to encourage more people to get involved and assist those who are committed to maintaining our wonderful allotments.

**Chris Nix:** As a new arrival to the Royal Paddocks I've found it to have a friendly and supportive atmosphere and a charming character. I know that this doesn't happen by accident and when there were vacancies on the committee I wanted to help the good work to continue. I am one of the new tenants on the former bramble patch. Since arriving I seem to have developed a shed building fixation and grown too many potatoes.

SEED SWAP SUNDAY

Get those spare seeds at the ready! We will be having our first seed swap on Sunday 28th February from 11am to 1pm outside the café. The idea is simple – just put a small amount of seed into an envelope or we can provide envelopes at the event for a small cost. Label the envelope with the variety and sowing details. You will then be able to swap seeds with your allotment neighbours. This simple and free event will hopefully mean the growing season will bring a rich variety of crops for us all.

CAFÉ NEWS!

Everyone at the café Winter Warmer enjoyed the festive fare, including mulled wine – ‘an old family recipe passed down through the generations’, mince pies in competition and a chocolate torte – special thanks to Sue Croft who brought it the day before flying off on a family holiday! Sarah Colclough’s Christmas decorations looked beautiful, ‘like a little snow lodge – it could have been in Aspen’! The café stayed open during the week and was surprisingly busy – a perfect escape from the winter blues and cabin fever!

Open Sundays, 11.00 to 13.00
Another day of sun for the Autumn Social and Produce Show – a high standard of entries including celeriac, kohlrabi, crimson popcorn, perfect apples, space gardens and veggie monsters meant the judges had a hard time! All the usual events were enjoyed: pumpkin competition, raffle, bbq, home produce stall, kids’ crafts, drinks stall and café all went smoothly, thanks to the work of the Social Committee: Sue Croft, Joanie Fulton, Sarah Colclough, Kristina Collins, Ann Wingrove and all the committee members and plotholders who helped to make this such a successful event.

Photographs by Stanley Colclough and Jenny Bourne.

Episode One

The rain lashed down that night, as Tarragon slipped into the packed meeting room of the small church hall, her hair dripping wet. She paused at the door, as she scanned the crowded room for a seat, and wrung out some of the rain water from her tumble of titian hair.

“You are here for the Bramble Park allotment AGM?”, said a gravelly male voice, softly. She turned, looking into a pair of toffee brown eyes, looking quizically at her. She nodded, silently, taking in his gently tanned skin, quietly aged by many hours in the sun and the rain.

“You got one?” she said, touched by his kindness.

“I always keep a small one handy in my rucksack, just to be on the safe side. I’ll dig it out for you. Before that, I need you to sign in. Are you an allotment holder? I haven’t seen you before.”

“Yes, I got my e-mail through last week. I’ve got plot 384b. My name’s Tarragon Virtue.

His brows shot up, but he said nothing for a moment as he passed her and the agenda and minutes of the last AGM. As his tanned, calloused fingers touched her delicate pale ones, Tarragon felt a jolt of electricity pass between them, she’d never have expected.

He smiled, looking deep into her eyes. “I’m M only. There’s a seat at the front. They are just coming onto agenda item 17. I’ll bring you the towel in a sec.”

As she took her seat on the front row, the chairman spoke. “Now then, one of the trickier items of business this. As you know, it is virtually impossible to grow a tomato on this allotment because of the blight. M only has been doing some work on this – and is going to present this item. M only?”

M only walked to the front table, dropping the towel on Tarragon’s lap, winking at her as he did so. “Thanks Basil.” He ran his hand through his long dark hair, before he started to speak. The audience shuffled in their seats, expectantly. “Tomato blight is a nasty disease, and it’s airborne. It dies quite quickly when it hits the ground. So the key to this is picking a variety that is resilient, like Firline or Legend, and protecting them from the blight spores. You can do that by building a simple transparent tent roof construction with this kind of design.”

And he turned to a flipchart, and quickly sketched out a design which looked suspiciously like one of the more ambitious Grand Designs. As he did so, Tarragon took in his slight but athletic frame. Monty turned back to the audience, putting the flip chart marker down with a flourish. “So, that’s my recommendation to the AGM. An organic response to the blight, dictated by how the blight itself operates. Any questions?”

There was a lot of excited muttering amongst the plotholders, and a lone hand went up into the air.

“Yes, miss. Could you give your name and plot number before you respond,” asked the chair.

“Yes certainly. My name’s Tarragon, plot 384b, and I don’t agree with M only. My grandad successfully reared generations of lush tomatoes in a blight plagued area. Yes he chose resilient varieties, but he didn’t build all these plastic cloche things. He just regularly sprayed his plants with recommended dithane. I feel that it is right to use the best that modern technology has to offer against the blight. And that’s the approach I’ll be taking on my plot.”

The room hushed. The chair drew breath, before turning to M only. “M only, would you like to respond?”

M only nodded, and turned to Tarragon with grave authority. “Tarragon, of course you could do that, and I wouldn’t judge you for it if you did. We all take our own path when we’re gardening. But I for one choose to work with the earth than against it when I’m trying to grow things. I can only recommend that when you start with your plot, you’ll choose to do the same.”

The chair nodded. “Always difficult decisions to make, handling pests on your plot. Any other points to be made on this item? No? Well then, thanks to M only for all his hard work on this.

Tarragon felt hot as her cheeks flushed red. “Who the heck does he think he is, to patronise me like that in front of all these people? I hate him!” she muttered furiously to herself. She looked up and saw M only standing above her.

“I’m sorry, I should have introduced myself more fully when we met. I’m M only Greenwood, head of the allotment organic sub-committee, and plotholder of 385b.”

“385b?”

“Yes, I’m your neighbour on the allotment. Tell me, are you finished with my towel?”
Winter Pruning by Alan Buckingham

Everyone’s a bit scared of pruning, aren’t they? To most of us, it’s a dark art - complex and mystifying. But in fact it’s nowhere near as difficult as you think. Here are a few rules that should help.

What to prune
Most fruit trees and bushes should be pruned in winter, when they are dormant. Apples, pears, gooseberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, blueberries, blackberries, autumn-fruited raspberries and grape vines are all best pruned between about November and February. The exceptions are stone fruits such as plums, cherries, apricots, peaches, and nectarines. Don’t prune them now. Instead, wait until spring or summer, when they are actively growing. That way, you’ll reduce the risk of infections such as silver leaf and bacterial canker entering the trees via pruning cuts.

How to prune
The basic principles of pruning are simple. At the start of their lives, all young fruit trees and bushes need training into shape. Thereafter, the aim of pruning is to keep them growing healthily and to stimulate them into producing plenty of fruit.

Start with ‘the three Ds’. Cut out any stems or branches that are dead, damaged, or diseased.

Next, look for areas that are crowded and congested or where branches are touching or crossing. Thin those out so that air can circulate freely and so that sunlight can reach ripening fruit later in the year.

Cut back any branches that are hanging too low or touching the ground. Gooseberries in particular tend to sprawl if left unpruned.

Most apples and pears produce fruit on clusters of short little stubs called ‘spurs’. The more there are the more fruit you’re likely to get. So, don’t prune them - unless they become so overcrowded that they need thinning.

When pruning new shoots and stems, cut back to a healthy bud pointing in the direction you want the new growth to go, usually outwards from the tree or bush not into the centre. Make a sloping cut parallel with the bud so rainwater drains away from it.

In the case of established gooseberry and redcurrant bushes, cut out up to a quarter of the oldest stems each winter. This will make way for new growth. And cut back sideshoots hard, to just a few buds, in order to generate new fruiting spurs.

Prune blueberries and blackcurrants much more lightly. Remove just a few of the older stems if they no longer bear much fruit.

Autumn-fruited raspberries should be cut right down to ground in February. New fruiting canes will appear in the spring. Summer-fruited raspberries, blackberries, and hybrids such as tayberries and loganberries are slightly different. Cut out the canes that bore fruit last year, but keep the young canes that didn’t. They’re the ones that will bear fruit in the coming summer.

Finally, whatever the state of your fruit trees or bushes, don’t prune too much in one go. Although you’re unlikely to kill a plant if you overdo it, you’ll probably shock it into producing lots of new foliage and very little fruit. If you’ve got an old, neglected tree or bush that’s become overgrown, prune it back into shape gradually, over two or even three years.

A good cut is sloping and parallel with the bud so that rainwater drains away from it. Aim to cut close but not too close.

A bad cut is at the wrong angle. It leaves an unnecessary stub and water drains towards the bud instead of away.

Cut back new shoots growing from the main stems of gooseberries and redcurrants to just 1-4 buds.

Use a pruning saw to remove large branches neatly and cleanly. Current thinking is against applying wound paint to the cut surface.

A torn, ragged cut like this one will heal poorly and risks infection getting into the wound.

This apple tree has a disease called bacterial canker which will spread if it’s not removed. Cut out all affected branches and burn them.

How to contact us: You can leave mail for the Committee (but not money) in the postbox in the shed by the gate. Our website address is www.paddocks-allotments.org.uk