



Newsletter

December 2009

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FLOODING.

The installation of the rain water storage tanks have complimented the soak ways dug last year and alleviated the problem of some plots becoming water logged. During the winter months the intention is to let the water out of the tanks, during dry spells, as a means of managing the problem. Throughout the spring and summer as many plot holders as possible are encourage to use this collected rainwater to keep down our water bill which has become expensive.



WHAT AN AMAZING ACHIEVEMENT!



We gained third place this year, and two years ago we came thirteenth! The judges where impress by the high standard of cultivation and the general tidiness of almost all the plots. Additions made since last year of the tea room, water storage tanks and the bee enclosure impressed them too. The competition provides us with an opportunity to work together, take stock of our site, clear away accumulated rubbish and generally to improve the appearance of our allotments. Next year it will probably be harder to either retain our position or even improve it. Our flower beds and containers always create a good impression and next year we could improve on this by buying plug plants and volunteers, with greenhouse space, growing them on.

New arrivals at the allotment

One aspect of beekeeping is to manage a colony so it does not swarm and this is not an easy thing to do. Another aspect is to put out a bait hive should a colony from elsewhere swarm and be looking for a home; something all bees will do because it is nature's way for a colony to increase. We had an empty 'bait' hive in our apiary and on the 30th May a large swarm



appeared over the allotment and entered the hive, although frightening to observe it was relatively harmless because they had no hive to protect. This was a vibrant colony that began building comb, collecting nectar and pollen. They were very industrious and by the middle of September had stored more than the 40lb of honey they needed to take them through the winter with a surplus of 12lb which we were able to harvest. More honey could have been taken but it was considered better to leave it for the bees.

Two small starter colonies where also purchased and these arrived in June with the hope that they would grow during the summer storing sufficient honey for the winter. In the autumn we supplemented their nectar collection with sugar syrup which they stored too to achieve the 40lb of stores they need. During the winter months the bees huddle together to preserve warmth which they generate by consuming honey. Paradoxically smaller colonies consume more honey to maintain optimum temperature and we will not know until around March if a colony has survived the winter. We hope it will have been cold and dry which the bees prefer rather than cold and damp.

This year has been a steep learning curve for Julie and Tony our beekeepers. They have opened hives, one of which probably had 40,000 bees at its peak but have not been able to identify the queen and still need assistance with this task. The docile bees of June and July do not seem to mind their hives being looked into but can get very annoyed in August and September when they have honey to protect. The increase in productivity of plants that depend on bees for pollination such as blackberries, raspberries and beans has, we believe been a consequence of having bees on site. Hopefully we will have an abundance of honey next year as long as the bees survive the winter, are not killed by either the vaorra mite or the numerous other pests and diseases that afflict them.

SHED ROOFS

Euro-Polmers, as a community project sealed the roofs on the tool shed and meeting room free of charge. It was a new process they were testing and at the time where dubious that it would work because the existing corrugated asbestos roofs were in such a poor state with many broken pieces that let in water. Unfortunately this assessment proved to be correct and the asbestos panel had to be removed and replaced with boards which Euro-Polymers then sealed, including the small shed [ex ladies loo], generously free of charge with a 15 year guarantee.

We have applied for a community grant of £400 to cover the cost of the boards, strengthening the roof etc. Once again we are grateful to Harvey Dickenson who removed the asbestos sheets, strengthen and re-boarded the roofs.

We were then left with the problem of removing the asbestos sheets but fortunately after seeking the advice of the Allotment Section at the Local Authority they arranged to remove them. Overall an excellent result with our sheds being upgraded and made watertight

SCHOOL VISIT

We were asked in July by the teacher of a class of six year olds from Austhorpe Primary School if they could visit our allotments. Julie Fletcher, Tom Mulholland and Tony Ryan showed the children around their plots and explained about the different vegetables growing there. The children enjoyed eating peas

and strawberries, watching potatoes being harvested and looking at 'Jack and the Beanstalk' beans [runner beans] They also planted a runner bean seed in a pot and took this away with them. Overall a successful and enjoyable visit with all the children coming together at the end to sing a song of appreciation for their visit.



SEEDS OR PLANTS?

This year several potholders' bought cabbage, cauliflower and sprout plants from Swillington Nursery these grew very well and cost £1.10 for ten plants. It raises the question. Is it worth the trouble of buying seed, sowing and raising seedlings when it is cheaper to buy plants ready for going in the ground? Realistically, as most cabbages/ cauliflowers from the same sowing mature together, five plants should be sufficient. Further planting could be staggered to obtain a supply through the summer and autumn.

Next season I propose to liaise with Swillington Nursery to find out what vegetable plants are ready. This information will then be sent out by e-mail. It also makes sense for people to share plants in order to have a succession rather than a glut.

JOINT TENANCY

The current advice from the Allotment Association is that where two people are working a plot then the second person should be named in the tenancy agreement. This ensures that the tenancy continues should the first tenant be unable to carry on. It will be necessary for the second named tenant to pay a membership subscription to the Allotment Association and the third party insurance premium too; about £7 a year or thirteen pence a week. Next year where two people are named tenants the additional charge will be included in the rent bill. All those who want a second person named on their tenancy should let Tony Ryan know. Anyone who wants to be prudent can, of course pay these additional costs this year.

BEWARE THIEVES AND VANDALS ABOUT!

Sowing broad beans in the autumn should result in an early crop providing the winter is not too harsh and the plants come through. Another serious problem is theft and vandalism. When the seeds have germinated and have started to grow the tops are pulled out and the, now plump and juicy seed is removed leaving the top discarded. Who is the culprit of this dastardly deed? The field mouse. See the photographic evidence of a mouse caught in the act!



SOCIAL EVENTS.

Once again we thwarted by the weather from having a summer barbeque, perhaps next year we should set a date and just work around the weather. Incidentally Colton and Whitkirk Garden Association have a series of interesting talks ,on an evening, during the winter. Membership is £2.00 and you can pay on the night. I will e-mail details of the meetings once I have them.

AMINOPYRALID CONTAMINATED MANURE.

During this year's growing season, many must have witness the devastation wrought by a mystery affliction on some of our produce, particularly potatoes whose leaves where distorted and had the appearance of newly developed fern. The effect could be seen on beans, peas, courgettes and tomatoes too. The reason for this affliction has now being attributed to the chemical herbicide Aminopyralid whose production has been suspended. However due to its long term effect the contaminated manure problem could be around until 2012 and as its use has only been suspended so the problem could return!

It is worth noting that the pernicious presence in the manure does not necessary imply that your 'muck provider' has been directly responsible for applying it to their grazing land, as it can be present in the hay and straw imported to either the farm or stables for use as feed and bedding. The innocent 'muck man' is probably unaware of the presence of Aminopyralid in the manure delivered.

What can one do in order to avoid a repetition of this year's disaster? According to two articles which I have read, it is advisable to test the manure before applying to the plot. The test is quite simple and consists of filling some pots with a 50/50 mixture of multipurpose compost and manure and some with multipurpose alone. Sow broad beans into each pot and observe over a four week period. If there are obvious differences between the batches, including distorted leaves, do not use the manure on sensitive crops. [To have the manure tested costs £200]

What can be done with the contaminated manure? According to an article in Allotment Growing Diary Plus [www.allotment.org.uk/garden-diary/273/aminopyralid] it is suggested that it is spread a few inches thick over a selected patch of ground and rotovated well into the soil. Do not sow anything. After a month rotovate again and again and again. After six months or so it is probably ok and worth testing potatoes or tomatoes. Do not just test the soil from one place but from a number. Ensure that there are no lumps of contaminated manure remaining and that the microbes in the soil have had a chance to do their job thoroughly.

If the foregoing succeeds then you have not necessarily won the war and therefore you need to remain vigilant for at least the next four years when buying and applying the 'muck' necessary for successful production in our plots.

I am sure that Capability Brown faced greater problems in his search for gardening perfection so Dig [or rotovate] for Victory in order to beat the scientific scourge of the twenty first century allotmenteer.

Mike Clarke.