



Allotment Times

Hill Rise Allotment Association



www.hraa.org.uk

Message from the Plot

Spring is well underway now, with all of the joy and anticipation that it brings for people such as us.

Both Maggie and I so enjoy the new-found freedom of expression and appreciation of all that goes on at the allotment. The nearby set-aside meadow and hedges has an abundance of wildlife.

The thrill of watching skylarks ascending into the blue from that meadow and listening to its unmistakeable tinkling joyful call. The abundance of fieldfares in the winter, the sound of woodpeckers and the cut and thrust of the sparrow hawks and other raptors so close by, has given me a fresh outlook on such things and how important they are.

Is it just me that thinks that the amount of blossom on the trees and bushes this year seems to be more abundant than earlier years? Perhaps this is mother nature's way of keeping us still interested and at the same time telling us that we cannot keep her down, no-matter what we do to her.

Many of you will not know that the early members of the association planted a native hedge of 1200 saplings over two weekends during the end of the previous winter over the entire western border of the site. This hedge is now well established and thriving, hopefully providing a natural and much needed windbreak for the plots and additional homes for wildlife.

For many of you, this will be the first season of allotmenting and probably the hard work associated with taking on a plot is becoming a reality and not to be underestimated.

The key message I have for you on this is – draw or sketch out a plan of how you would want to see the plot looking and growing when it is finished. Pick a starting point, then following the plan, tackle the project in bite sized chunks, finishing each chunk before moving on to the next.

Most people underestimate the work involved and many of them become daunted and eventually give up. It need not be this way if you have a plan and implement it in a way which you yourselves can control.

Do a little more at every visit to the plot, trying to walk away at the end of the day with the satisfaction that you have made another incremental improvement .

You will be pleasantly surprised at how effective this can be and the rewards are there to be enjoyed and will soon be evident to you.

Cemetery Extension

Many will have seen that the extension work to the cemetery has now commenced. The association has seen the overall plans for this work and has been given guidance on the effects that the effects that this work will have for our allotments. As far as we can tell, there are intentions to provide a vehicle park hard-standing at the south west corner of the site, as part of the improvements , with additional gated access to be provided from there.

This will go some way to improve on the track access issue. Some might say this may not be enough, others including myself, will argue that it has the potential to be an improvement.

There will be even more allotments opened up as part of the project, which again is good news, especially when there is a current waiting list of 80 or so plot applicants.

Full details on the extension work and associated allotment impacts can be obtained from the St. Ives Town Clerks office.



Wine in the making!

Membership of HRAA

For those of you who are not already HRAA members, why not join us? It does give us a collective voice and a credible one that is being listened to by the Town Council amenities committee. The need and demand for allotments is increasing and the authorities responding much more readily to an organised approach as compared to individual uncoordinated approaches.

There are other benefits to having membership and one is that having that membership will entitle you to a 10% discount at the Huntingdon Garden & Leisure Centre (conditions apply). We are actively seeking other local retailers to participate in this scheme. If any readers of this newsletter have a business whose products might be useful to the 100 or so (and growing) numbers of allotment holders and would like to participate in this scheme, then why not give me a call. Contact Details available on www.hraa.org.uk .

I am sure that there will be many interesting anecdotes to share via the newsletter in the future , so please share them with us.

I wish you a happy growing season with sods and clods to you all!

Weather data 2009

Some of you may be interested in how the weather so far this year has compared against the long term average. We don't have a set of long term met data for Hill Rise, St Ives, but you may find the following from the met station at Boxworth which is fairly close, of interest.

Firstly daily mean temperature (that is, the average of the min and max air temperature recorded each day):

After the New Year, there were six days when daily mean temperature was below zero - in other words on those days it never got above freezing, day or night. The coldest day was the 10th January 09, which recorded a mean temperature of -3.1 degC (the night time min dipped to -4.5). This is shown in the graph below.

Next, averaged over the months to date, and compared to the 40 year long term average (LTA) for each month, the air temperatures have been as follows:

Month	2009 monthly average (deg C)	LTA (deg C)
Jan	2.9	4.0
Feb	3.8	4.1
Mar	6.9	6.3
Apr	10.0	8.2
May	12.1	11.4

In other words, Jan and Feb were colder, and Mar to April warmer than average.

The main reason for the higher than average temperatures since March has probably been the lack of night frosts, with only three days since the beginning of March with a minimum temperature less than zero. Clearly we have been lucky so far with very good fruit set on apples, pears and plums, and no potatoes blackened by frost, but we can still have frosts into June so be vigilant for another couple of weeks !

Secondly, of interest to farmers is the rainfall between the beginning of March and the end of May, which affects nitrogen uptake (remember your soil science talk !) and amongst other things, affects grain protein in milling wheat. This year (from 1st March up until 28th May on writing these notes) we have had 64 mm of rain in total. This compares to the LTA of 133 mm for the same period, so approximately half the normal rainfall. April in particular - which is of course normally known for its showers - had only 17 mm (37% of the LTA of 45 mm for that month) and rained on only 9 days of the month. Probably the main thing that will suffer from the dry conditions in the next few weeks will be apples which will start dropping fruit in June.

Happy watering !

Tips & Hints

Keep Your Plot Producing

We take an awful lot out of our plots and you don't get something for nothing in life. Eventually we exhaust the soil and the yield plummets. The better your soil, the better your crops will be so a few tips to maintain fertility.

Firstly, add fertiliser. You can add a balanced fertiliser like Growmore or better still in my book; fish, blood and bone. The reason I think FBB is better is that it releases more slowly as well as being organic.

Secondly, add manure and or compost each year to a third or quarter of the plot. Not only does this add nutrients it adds organic matter to improve the soil structure. Be careful to check with manure though, there's still aminopyralid contaminated manure about.

Thirdly, lime a section of the plot each year. As the soil becomes more acid, the plants find it harder to access the nutrients. Regular liming will keep the pH high and ensure good results.

Finally, Green manures. These add organic matter to help soil structure and help retain the nutrients that would otherwise be washed out of the soil.

Information courtesy of John Harrison Allotment Newsletter.



Dougie's 'flags' by Martin Phillips



Anyone know what this is? John McKinney needs to know!

All contributions including 'hints & tips' gratefully received and will appear in the next newsletter.

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