

the digger



www.linksallotments.org.uk
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1st edition / Spring 2011

Welcome...

... to the first Links Allotment newsletter. Produced as a quarterly newsletter, we'll aim to bring you a wealth of useful information and interesting hints and tips.

Did you know the Links Allotment was set up during WW1 as part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign when men working at Cowley for the war effort came down and marked out the plots. Each plot is 10 poles (an ancient measurement, 5.5 yards or the 'length from the back of the plough to the nose of an ox), which was considered enough to feed a family of four. Annual rent then was almost a weeks wages! The allotments now consist of three fields, A, B and C. The Bartlemas Road site is owned by Oriel College and the Barracks Lane fields by the Council, though we all pay our rent to the Coun-

cil. To have an allotment really is a privilege in so many ways, I give you the words of Mike Kent who was on the Committee for over 30 years, and has had a plot for would you believe an incredible 37 years, 'a lifelong joy, that keeps me sane and fit'.

This newsletter is for all of us so if you would like to contribute please do! The e-mail address is at the end of page 4.

La Befana

- a fireside 12th night celebration



Photos from the La Befana evening showing masks bought along by Linda and some of the revellers warming themselves by the fire.

On Thursday 6th January Cumberland Road allotment-holders gathered to celebrate La Befana. Traditionally an Italian folklore festival, Befana is an old woman who delivers gifts to children throughout Italy on Epiphany Eve. She is usually portrayed as an old lady riding on a broomstick through the air wearing a black shawl and is covered in soot because she enters the children's houses through the chimney. She is often

smiling and carries a bag or hamper filled with candy, gifts, or both.

Slightly adapted however for the UK (!), those who came were encouraged to bring something to throw onto the fire that symbolised their woes of 2010. People also shared mulled wine and hot chocolate and brought lovely food to share.

"It was a chilly but very enjoyable evening," said James Styring. "It was

great to see familiar faces so soon after Christmas and meet some new people too. Being sociable is an important part of being an allotment holder to me."

The committee are planning lots more social events for 2011 – see pg 4 for details. Equally if you have ideas, please email us here at 'the digger' – thedigger@linksallotments.org.uk.

La Befana

... a fireside 12th night celebration

Thursday 6th Jan 2011
Cumberland Rd Allotments, 6-8pm

Please bring:

- a cup for mulled wine or hot chocolate
- a little food to share
- something that symbolises your woes of 2010 to burn on the fire.

Recipe share

Got a recipe you'd like to share? Send in your recipe (and photo of the finished dish if you can to thedigger@linksallotments.org.uk

Root Vegetable Dauphinoise

Preparation time: 30 mins; Cooking time: 45 mins

Ingredients

2 x potatoes
1 x med-lge beetroot
1 x lge carrot
1 x lge parsnip
1 x turnip
3 x garlic cloves
0.5 pint of milk
0.5 pint of cream
200g grated parmesan
Butter for greasing

Method

- Grease a large, deep-sided baking dish well with butter.
- Slice all the root vegetables as thinly as possible, about 0.5mm thick.
- Layer the vegetables alternately, sprinkling small amounts of the chopped garlic and small knobs of butter in between layers. Stop your layers 1–2cm before the top.
- Mix together the cream and milk. Add salt & pepper for seasoning. Pour the mixture evenly over the whole dish.
- Put into a hot oven at 160°C (150°C fan) and cook for 30 mins.



- Remove from oven and add the grated parmesan. Return to the oven for a further 10–15 mins. The dish is ready when you can easily put a sharp knife through the layers.

Aunty Jane

Got a vegetable problem that won't go away? Can't tell your raspberries from your radishes? Jane's here to help...

Q: What can I plant now?

A: Aquadulce broad beans, garlic, Japanese artichokes and it's a good time to plant your rhubarb. Plant salad/herb crops on warm windowsills in trays/pots, eg. parsley. Plant onions in black trays, somewhere dry and not damp.

Q: How do I keep weeds down?

A: Dig in as many weeds at the end of the growing season as possible as it benefits and improves the soil. Cover the ground with black plastic or mypex and leave for a few weeks, then remove the plastic, allow the remaining weeds to dry out and then dig in. Sow green manure eg. mustard or field beans. Make sure you dig them in before flowering. This will give a good supply of nitrogen to your soil.

Q: Jane how do you manage to grow such enormous onions? Go on, share your secret!

A: Plant onions before Xmas and add more if necessary later. The soil must be well dug in the autumn, with as many weeds removed as possible. Regular weeding is important to stop weeds competing with the onions for water. It's a good idea to throw some organic chicken pellets around the plantings to feed those greedy bulbs, whilst watering regularly, every day in dry weather! I think that is the key to whopping onions.

Q: When is it best to start the war on slugs and snails?

A: About now! Top tips include, beer traps, keeping all your pots and trays

clean to remove any eggs and use organic slug pellets. Just cultivating soil can help keep the little critters at bay. Slug damage varies, but the general rule is: big black ones, put them on the compost as they prefer dead and decaying matter, whereas the brown/grey slugs are your worst enemy and need to be discouraged at all costs.

Have you got a question you'd like to ask Jane? Email us at thedigger@linksallotments.org.uk and your troubles could be over.



Housekeeping

Plot maintenance

The Committee does site/plot inspections three times a year, in spring, summer and autumn.

70% of your plot must be under fruit or vegetable cultivation, kept tidy and as free from weeds as possible.

Trees cannot be planted without the Committee's permission and self-seeding trees must be removed.

Sheds and shelters must be positioned at the backs of plots next to the fence line only, and again the permission of the Committee must be sought before erecting.

Health & Safety Notice

The Committee is now obliged to carry out a risk assessment for all fields for our public liability insurance. Hazardous materials left on or around your plot which have not been assessed or dealt with could lead to **YOU** being personally liable in the event of injury to others.

We would appreciate where possible that you remove items from the site and dispose of them responsibly. Materials that can be hazardous include metal, glass, plastic, wood and rubble.

Material that cannot be removed from the site, eg metals & plastics, can be placed in the designated areas – Bartlemas plot: please leave items by the gate (shortly to be signposted); Cumberland Road plots: please leave items carefully bagged by the gate next to the sign.

Please try and bag up small items and take special care with broken glass or any hazardous material, eg, old chemicals, creosote. Hazardous material must be removed from the site yourself. The Committee cannot be responsible for such matter.

We would like the site cleared by **THE END OF MARCH** so please begin ASAP.

Mypex

There is nothing better to get rid of weeds with very little work than Mypex, the large black permeable sheeting. It costs £3.50 per meter and needs to be paid for on purchase by cash or cheque. Mypex can be bought from any of the Committee Members (see page 4 for details).

Site Security

Before Christmas a number of electrical tools were stolen from people's sheds. We advise you not to leave any valuable tools or equipment on the site. Be aware, a locked shed can be even more of a target as thieves will assume there is something of worth in it.

Please also refrain from letting people onto the plot if they do not have a key, especially if you do not recognise them. Equally, do not expect people to let you on if you have forgotten your key.

Badgers

We do have a problem with badgers – you may have noticed the state of the central path recently where they have taken to digging holes to find food in the form of worms and grubs. If you do notice where they are coming into the site, please alert one of the committee members and we can try to block their passage.

News

Future Plans

Open Day – we're planning on having an Open Day this year on **Sunday 17 July**. If you'd like to have a stall, or have ideas for fun and games/events, please contact us here at *the digger*.

Competition for best veg/plot – entries submitted in time for the Open Day and winners announced on the day with photos in the autumn edition of *the digger*.

The digger – this is our first edition of this newsletter – we hope you like it. If you have ideas of further articles/ columns or would just like to contribute to this newsletter, please do contact us at the email address below.

Plot-number painting session – if you'd be interested in taking part in a plot-number painting session, please let us know.

Any other ideas of what you'd like to see here welcome. Just email us at thedigger@linksallotments.org.uk.

Dates for your diary

Here we will try to keep you informed of all allotment upcoming events to include social and working parties. Note that working parties are always from 10–12pm usually followed by a social. We would encourage as many people as possible to volunteer, it is good fun. Honest!

Sunday 13 March

Working party – 10–12pm
All welcome
Social lunch, BBQ

Sunday 17 July

Summer Open Day
Details TBC

Sunday 17 April

Easter Fun Day
10–12pm

Sunday 11 Sept

Working party – 10–12pm
Veg swap
Bring & Share lunch/BBQ

Sunday 10 July

Working Party – 10–12pm
Picnic lunch

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings are held approximately every two months. If you have any agenda items you would like discussed, please contact Claire White on clairevwhite@hotmail.com.

The Committee for Cumberland Road Allotments

Just in case you wondered who we all are, here's are some identifying photos of the Committee:



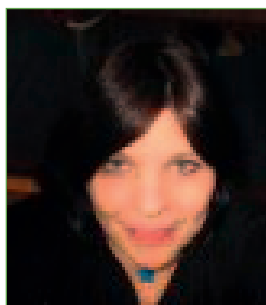
Claire White
Allotment Secretary



Sarah Spackman
Lettings Secretary



Jane Baker
Field Secretary



Hannah Chandler
Newsletter Editor



Georgia Styring
Newsletter Designer

Sarah Wilkes (Site Maintenance) & Kathy Eley (Social Secretary) are also committee members but photos were unavailable at the time of going to press.