

Witney Allotments Newsletter

August 2023

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Welcome! This is the first issue of the Witney Allotments Newsletter. I am Julie Charlesworth and I've been at Hailey Road for 10 years. I love all aspects of growing food and gardening and being nosy about how everyone else is getting on with their plots. Who's got a lovely full greenhouse? Who's growing the best pumpkins? What unusual vegetables are people growing? All those kinds of things! So, the aim for the monthly newsletter is for us to share news, thoughts, tips, recipes and all manner of information relating to allotment growing across all our sites: Lakeside, Windrush Place, Newlands and Hailey Road. There will be a range of topics that will be of interest to newbies as well as long-standing allotmenters.

For this first issue, I've collated some news items and top tips plus information and ideas relating to soil health, the 'no dig' approach to veg growing, and courgette recipes.

Happy growing!

Julie



Contact details

Do you have feedback, information or ideas for the next newsletter?
Email: WAAnewsletter@outlook.com

Need to contact your site rep? All their details are on the WAA website:
witneyallotments.co.uk/committee/

Site news

Newland have set up 'sharing shelves' for tenants to share spare plants and produce.

Hailey Road have monthly get-togethers where tenants share food and drink. See the noticeboard for details of the next one!

Interested in joining the Hailey Road WhatsApp group for sharing plants, produce, growing ideas, info on get-togethers? Only for HR tenants. Contact Julie at WAAnewsletter@outlook.com



Hailey Road communal area. Watercolour by Ronnie Hackston

Soil health

The National Allotment Society chose soil health as the theme for this year's National Allotment Week. As the Society states:

Good soil health is widely accepted as the way to improve yield when growing edibles but also contributes positively to biodiversity and the environment as the world faces more climate challenges. The NAS hope that this National Allotments Week will inform and educate gardeners old and new about the benefit of caring for the soil and the creatures that inhabit it.

How can we improve soil health on our plots? Whether you're an allotment newbie or been growing for years, here are a couple of things to think about:

Feed the soil not the plants is the new mantra. Covering your veg beds with well-rotted manure, compost you've made on your plot, bought compost, or leaf mould can all help to feed the soil (and the worms) and suppress weeds. This is best done in autumn so you're providing good protection for beds over winter. Another good option is growing green manure over winter or in spring before planting. Doing a mix of all these approaches works well too. We'll look at composting in more detail next issue.

Crop rotation: most vegetable growers have traditionally adopted some form of rotation as it is believed to avoid the build-up of pests and diseases of different groups of veg. It is based on farming practices and a 4 year plan yet some current thinking is that if you haven't got any known disease on your plot and you've been feeding the soil for a few years, not all crop rotation is necessary. Charles Dowding, the No-Dig guru, practises minimal rotation and on his trial beds has shown that he has successfully grown cabbage and potato in the same beds for 7 years.

No Dig

No dig has become increasingly popular in allotment growing. There are a lot of misconceptions around it though! No dig definitely does **not** mean 'no-work' or 'no-weeding'. People using this approach properly are not lazy, they are just doing things in a different way. If you are interested in finding out more about this approach, then Charles Dowding's books, courses and website are good starting points. Here are a couple of key points:

Don't dig for the sake of digging: the basic idea is that by not digging, you are not disturbing the soil structure. Adding garden compost and mulches to the surface of the soil leaves the ecosystem intact and worms, mycorrhizal fungi and other micro-organisms do their job as they do in nature. Carbon stays in the soil instead of being converted to CO₂. Plants find the nutrients they need in the soil.

Creating new beds: there is no need to dig or weed. You'll need to strim first if you have inherited a plot with tall weeds or grass. Cover beds with cardboard and then add a thick layer of compost. They can be planted the same day. Once one crop is finished and removed, you can plant another one the same day.

Weeding: there are always weeds on allotment sites! Use a hoe regularly to remove annual weeds and use a trowel or spade to remove deeper rooted weeds. Weeds can be composted (personally I don't compost bindweed). Over time, growers using 'no dig' report fewer weeds.

Other principles are the same as standard allotment practice – use fleece, insect and bird netting etc to protect crops; do intercropping and succession planting to keep the soil covered; use companion planting to bring in beneficial insects.

Further information:
charlesdowding.co.uk

Top tips

At this time of year many of us have wigwams for beans, squashes etc and we need cane toppers to avoid accidents with eyes! Those little yogurt bottles or other pots are very useful but often move about too much in the wind so Rachel from Hailey Rd suggests putting a ball of tin foil inside with an indent for the cane. Use old washed and squashed foil.

If you grow chard, you'll know that it wilts very quickly when picked. Try putting it in a vase of water like you would with cut flowers. It'll keep the chard going for a few days and there's no need to put it in the fridge either.

Got a glut of cucumbers? Cucumber can be frozen in slices but it tends to be a bit squashy when defrosted. How about making it into batches of gazpacho and then freezing that? Once defrosted it can be used as a cold soup or as a dip with crusty bread.

We all know that a hoe is a very useful garden tool but if you're struggling with weeding and feel the need to buy a new hoe then a good recommendation is a 'Swoe', which has a push and pull action. Wolf-Garten do one as part of their multi-change range (see picture below).



What's cooking?

Got a courgette glut? Here are two great recipes that can also be frozen.

Courgette puree

4 courgettes, peeled
Olive oil for frying



Cut the courgettes into thin slices. Heat the oil in a large frying pan, sweat the courgettes gently until most of the water has evaporated. Leave to cool slightly, then puree in a food processor until very smooth.

The puree will keep for up to 3 days in the fridge and for several months in the freezer. Add to pasta sauces or add a few spoonfuls to a risotto at the end of cooking.

Above recipe from The Guardian

Courgette and sweetcorn fritters

Makes 6-8 fritters

150g spiralised or grated courgettes
75g chickpea/gram flour
2 tsp curry powder
½ tsp salt
3 spring onions
50g tinned sweetcorn (or fresh)
Sunflower oil for frying

Tip the flour, curry powder and salt into a large bowl, and add water as you go, aiming for the consistency of cream.

Trim and thinly slice the spring onions and add to batter. Add the courgette followed by the sweetcorn. Mix it all together.

Cover the bottom of a large frying pan with 2-3 mm of oil and heat to medium-high. Drop in a tablespoon of batter and roughly shape into a circle. Repeat to cook 5 or 6 fritters at once. Cook until golden brown and crispy on each side (about 2-3 mins each side). Remove and drain on kitchen paper (keep warm in the oven if you are doing several batches).

The fritters can be frozen – defrost in the fridge and then cook in the oven for about 20 mins. *Recipe from Kate Ford 'Vegan in 15' or see her website www.thevegspace.co.uk*

Forthcoming interesting events

Dahlia Beach, Millets Farm from 19 August, PYO dahlias and also sunflowers and fruit.

Yarnton Home and Garden, various events in August and September. See their website www.yarntonhomegarden.co.uk

Ducklington Flower Show, Monday 28 August, Ducklington sports ground.

Cogges Manor Farm Harvest Fayre Weekend, 2-3 September 11-4.30.

Witney Horticultural Society Autumn Flower and Vegetable Show, Saturday 9 September, Methodist Church.

Bridewell Gardens Open Day Sunday 10 September 11-4.

Waterperry Gardens, Michaelmas Daisy Season, 1 – 30 September.



Cogges Manor Farm (photo by John, Hailey Road)

What's in the next issue?

We'll have an autumn focus next time so feel free to send in tips, recipes or questions relating to autumn veg and fruit. We'll feature composting too.

Are you a keen photographer or artist? We'd love to include photos of your work inspired by your plots in the newsletter. Or if you're a keen cook or baker, why not send in a recipe and photo of your creations.

Please email photos with your name, plot number and site to:
WAAnewsletter@outlook.com

Here's one to kick us off!



Watercolour of Plot 27A Hailey Road by Ronnie Hackston. See more of Ronnie's work at ronniehackston.com