

Witney Allotments Newsletter

November 2023

In this issue

Welcome to the third issue of the WAA newsletter. I expect many of you are busy tidying up your plots and planning next year's growing season. You might get some ideas from a feature in this issue on growing unusual vegetables.

We've also got a quick overview on gardening for wildlife on your plots, with more detailed features on different aspects of this (such as ponds) to follow in later months. There's a pumpkin and squash focus in the recipes this month and we've also got a feature on the communal area at Hailey Road.

Julie Charlesworth
Hailey Road



Lakeside Community Orchard

Site news

Hailey Road 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

Newland Site Rep Rosie Trinder says she's amazed at what the plot holders at Newland have produced this year and she would also like to thank Newland tenants for making her feel welcome when she became site rep. Rosie also says: *I myself only took on my plot in January and have been amazed at what we have grown as a family.*

Lakeside Site Rep Mary Killick has an update on one of the projects at Lakeside last year which was the establishment of a mini orchard (with the aid of a grant from Witney Town Council): The fruit trees are columnar in shape so we could fit as many as we could in the space allowed. There are two dessert pears, *Beth* and *Beurre Hardy*, a cooking apple *Lord Derby* and a dessert apple, *James Grieve*. From research the trees should be in full production in about 4 years' time and then the netting (to try and deter deer) can be removed and the orchard can become part of the Community Garden.

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/

Growing unusual vegetables

John at Hailey Road likes to have a go at growing vegetables that aren't the standard things you'd normally find on people's plots. Here he tells us about some he's grown recently.

Mangels are an old cattle fodder food that's very easy to grow. I'm sure people used to eat them but it's a bit of a different taste - more akin to a beetroot. I grow it partly as a fodder crop for my chickens in winter. You can eat the leaves which are like a chard, same family, light green.

Information from Kings Seeds: Mangels are also popular with wine makers for mangel wine! Sow the seeds from February to March in shallow drills 2cm deep with 30-40cm between rows. Thin to 30cm spacings. Water regularly and keep weed free. The vegetables will be ready to harvest from September.

If you google how to cook mangels, it suggests boiling or roasting similar to beetroot.

Collards – this is another old vegetable from the 18th and 19th centuries and probably older than that. It produces cabbage leaves and you pick the younger leaves and it's very dark green when cooked. It's a stronger taste than a normal cabbage but not as strong as a kale.

Kings Seeds say sow April to June; plant out May to July; harvest August to March; Collard comes from the old word 'colewort', the wild cabbage.

Wheat – heritage variety. John has sown this but says it's not looking very good [at the moment] as I haven't got a seed drill so using a broadcasting method means it's come up thicker in some places than others so we'll have to see how that goes over the winter. Planted it September and October. I'm growing it for the chickens or you could use it for compost.

Sainfoin – this is another old crop coming back into agricultural use. It's got lovely pink flowers and it's very attractive particularly to solitary bees. I believe it's a good animal food but I haven't tried it on my chickens yet.

Information from the Soil Association: sainfoin is a UK native perennial and grows well in the Cotswolds and South Downs as it likes chalky, limestone and stony soils. Tolerant of drought as it is deep-rooted. It is a nitrogen fixer for the soil. Bees feeding on it produce a higher yield of honey. Sow April-May although can be sown as late as August.



Wildlife areas: Part 1

Rewilding, flowers for pollinators, beneficial planting, growing wildflowers and trees, no-mow lawns and so on are all popular topics nowadays. Much of the discussion is about what we can do in our gardens or in public spaces to help wildlife and insects but what about our allotments? Many vegetable and fruit growers know about the benefits of attracting pollinators and good predators such as ladybirds, but at the same time we also try to protect our crops from hungry birds and cabbage white caterpillars! We also need to keep our plots relatively tidy and not swamped with grass and wildflowers which self-seed a little too easily. It's important to get a good balance. The National Allotment Society has some top tips for a wildlife friendly plot:

- Reduce or eliminate use of chemicals, use companion planting and physical removal to combat pests such as aphids, slugs and sawfly.
- Create habitats for wildlife; bee-boxes, hedgehog homes, log and stone piles for invertebrates, toads and slow worms who will also inhabit a compost heap.
- Plant late, mid-season and early blooming nectar rich flowers to attract pollinators and beneficial insects all year round.
- Make a pond, keep it ice free in winter by floating a ball on the top and ensure that it is safe for other plot-holders' children.
- Feed birds through the winter and supply nesting boxes.

We'll return to some of these tips over the next few months starting with ponds next month. Windrush and Newland sites have ponds and are successful in attracting frogs. If you've got a pond on your plot, please send ideas and photos and we can feature them.

Hailey Road Communal Shed

Some years ago, Geoff (former WAA chair) and Brian (former HR warden) worked very hard to build a communal shed and seating area. After lockdown the area began to feel a bit neglected and had become a dumping ground. Last year a small group of us decided to get it back into working order and organise monthly get-togethers.

For the past 2 weeks, Sue, Jim, Rachel, John and Julie have cleared the rubbish and done a revamp to make the area more open and welcoming. There's more to be done in the spring with roof repairs, paving, seeding grass, painting the shed, sorting out the sink plumbing, and creating a sharing area for plants. We hope HR tenants will feel it's a



nice space again to relax, shelter from the rain, and make a cuppa. Can we request though that no food or anything else is left in the shed and nothing is left in the outside area: we don't want it to become a dumping ground again! If you have anything of use to other tenants, please ask around or advertise it on our WhatsApp group.
Thank you!

Jim, Sue and Rachel in action

Want to see your site's communal area featured next time? Let me know on WAAnewsletter@outlook.com

What's cooking?

Squashes and pumpkins store well and here are two hearty meals which involve roasted squash or you could use leftover squash from another recipe.

Pumpkin curry (Serves 2)

1 pumpkin (eg Crown Prince)
1 tbsp oil
½ tbsp maple syrup
Half a can coconut milk
Half an onion
Juice of a lime
Fresh coriander
For the Red curry paste:
1 tbsp oil
2 garlic cloves, chopped
2 spring onions, chopped
Chillies – to your own taste, chopped
1.5 cm ginger, chopped
1 tsp paprika
½ tsp ground coriander
½ tsp ground cumin
2 dried lime leaves, crumbled
Water if required for paste

Chop the pumpkin and roast for 30-40 mins with the oil and maple syrup. Make the curry paste by blending all the ingredients. Fry the onion and then add the curry paste and let it cook down. Add the coconut milk and cook down. Add the cooked pumpkin and warm through. Add the lime juice and fresh coriander leaves to serve.

Serve with a side dish of lentils, rice, or potatoes.



Pumpkin risotto (Serves 4)

1 pumpkin/squash
60g macadamia nuts
1 medium red onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
3 tbsp mixed fresh herbs
900ml vegetable stock
2 tbsp olive oil
225g risotto rice
125ml dry white wine (can be omitted)
3 tbsp nutritional yeast or parmesan
1½ tbsp margarine or butter

Chop the pumpkin into small pieces and roast with 1 tbsp oil for 30-40 mins until soft.

Spread macadamia nuts over a small baking tray and toast for 5-8 minutes. Leave to cool and then chop.

Pour the stock into a small saucepan and keep on a low heat.

Add the olive oil to a saucepan. Add chopped onions until they soften. Add garlic and stir another minute. Pour in the rice and toast for a further minute.

Add the white wine and simmer until the liquid has almost evaporated, stirring frequently. Now start adding the stock a ladleful at a time, stirring continuously. Allow stock to be absorbed before adding the next ladleful. Keep going until the stock is used up and the rice is soft. Add the pumpkin and heat through.

Remove pan from the heat, stir in the chopped herbs, nutritional yeast or parmesan, nuts and butter. Season and serve.

Adapted from Firth & Theasby (2018) *Bosh!*

What's in the next issue?

If you're thinking about Christmas or New Year cooking, we'll have some seasonal ideas in the next issue: please send in your favourite Christmas recipes using your allotment produce. We'll also have a quiz for you next month about your allotment personality! All will be revealed by John at Hailey Road, who is an expert on psychology and personality.