

Witney Allotments Newsletter

April 2024

In this issue

Welcome to the April issue.

This month I explore the more recent history of allotments, following on from last month's review of the early history of allotments.

Is your rhubarb ready to pick? I've had a few pickings so far. I've included two of my favourite rhubarb recipes – one for savoury dishes and one for sweet.

*Julie Charlesworth
Hailey Road*



Source: [Allotmentitis: How Britain Dug for Victory – The Historic England Blog \(heritagecalling.com\)](https://www.heritagecalling.com)



Source: [London's Gardens: Allotments for the People : NPR](https://www.npr.org)

Committee news

A reminder that Rents were due 1st April.

The Special General Meeting on 29th April has been cancelled. Please keep an eye on the WAA website for further information.

Site News

Hailey Road tenants had their first social get-together on Saturday 13 April. Please bring food and drink to share. It was lovely to see new tenants and hear their plans for their plots!

Forthcoming Events

Plant Sale, 25-27 April, 10.00-13.00, Bridewell Gardens.
Open Day, Bridewell Gardens, 12 May, 11.00-16.00.

Advance notice of Open Gardens in Witney, 8 and 9 June. The organisers have asked if anyone has any spare plants or produce for their sale to drop them off in the morning at St Mary's Church on the 8 June.

Contact details

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

History of Allotments Part 2

The Local Government Act of 1894 created elected district and parish councils and gave them power to obtain land for allotments. Then the Allotment Acts of 1907 and 1908 extended their powers, particularly in being able to borrow money to provide allotments. Local authority allotments had more secure tenure, fewer restrictions and became more popular than the many private allotment sites. Plot-holders were encouraged to attend horticultural education classes. Birmingham was the largest local authority provider at this time with 4000 plots in 1912, rising to 20,000 plots during World War I.

With war, the allotment movement spread, and all spare land was allocated for growing, accompanied by propaganda/promotional campaigns to spur people on. The U-boat blockades of 1917 led to food shortages and rationing and increasing numbers of plot-holders. Overall, the number of plots rose by 500,000 during the war. The 1919 Land Settlement Act aimed to provide allotments for veterans. However, many landowners wanted their land back after the war. The 1922 Allotments Act provided for more security of tenure. Waiting lists remained substantial. During the 1930s, The Society of Friends set up the Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed scheme, seeking to aid unemployed people by providing grants to help them set up their plots and buy seeds. They were also permitted to sell small amounts of produce.

The importance of growing food during the Second World War is common knowledge, especially the Dig for Victory campaign; 500,000 more allotments were provided and it is estimated that domestic agriculture (from allotments and gardens) formed 10% of all food grown in Britain. Reduced price seeds and plants were available, as well as information on growing. It was not all plain sailing for growers though – some sites were destroyed and many contaminated by bombs.

In the post-war period, food shortages were worse and there was a conflict between providing land for growing food and rebuilding Britain. The National Allotments Society campaigned on rents, land retention and so on. The 1950 Allotments Act is still largely in force. During the 1960s, demand for plots fell and many sites were taken back for building or abandoned. The Committee of Inquiry into Allotments published its report in 1969 (The Thorpe Report). The report made 44 recommendations for upgrading sites and repealing previous allotment legislation. Sadly, none of the recommendations were acted upon. During the 1970s, the loss of sites continued yet demand rose again as food prices increased and more people became interested in gardening in general and food growing. There have been ebbs and flows in demand since then. As people have become keen to avoid food miles and pesticides and to use allotments for alleviating mental and physical health problems, demand has increased, particularly since the pandemic. If you are in London, you can wait 15 years for a plot! The lack of local authority sites has seen some innovative private sites set up, although they tend to be considerably more expensive.

I have referred to these two books in the writing of this article: Lesley Acton (2015) *Growing Space: A History of the Allotment Movement*; Twigs Way (2012) *Allotments*. Also, the website www.littletoller.co.uk/the-clearing/banal-utopia-by-jc-niala

What's cooking?

Rhubarb-marinated tofu steaks

(Serves 4)

550g firm tofu

For the marinade:

1 tbsp olive oil

1 small onion, chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced

3 large rhubarb stalks, chopped

4 tbsp tomato ketchup

2 tbsp water

1 tbsp maple syrup

2 tsp wholegrain mustard

1 tbsp soy sauce

1 tsp cumin

Cut the tofu into 8 chunky slices. Set aside. For the marinade, warm the olive oil in a frying pan, add the onion and cook for 3 mins over a medium heat until softened. Add the garlic and cook for 1 min. add the rhubarb along with the rest of the marinade ingredients. Bring the mixture to the boil, then simmer for 15 minutes. After the rhubarb has softened, allow the mixture to cool slightly, then blend to the consistency of a sauce and cool.

Coat the tofu steaks with the sauce and marinate for at least 30 minutes. Gently warm the steaks in the marinade until heated through. Alternatively griddle the steaks for a minute or two on each side. Gently warm the remaining sauce and then pour it over the steaks.

Recipe from *The Mindful Kitchen: Vegetarian Cooking to Relate to Nature* by Heather Thomas.

If you don't like tofu, you can use this marinade for another vegetable such as cauliflower 'steaks' or chicken or fish.



Rhubarb and Ginger Muffins

(Makes 12 muffins)

280g self-raising flour

170g light brown sugar

1 tsp ground ginger

1 tsp ground mixed spice

Pinch of salt

300g chopped rhubarb

2 pieces of stem ginger, finely chopped

80ml vegetable oil

240ml plant-based milk

1 tsp vanilla

1 tsp apple cider vinegar

2 tbsp demerara sugar for topping

Preheat oven to 180C / 350F and line a muffin tin with 12 paper muffin cases. In a large bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, spices and salt.

In a separate bowl, add the chopped rhubarb, ginger, oil, almond milk, vanilla and apple cider vinegar. Stir the wet mixture into the dry. Spoon the mixture equally between the muffin cases and sprinkle some demerara sugar on the tops of the muffins.

Bake for 25 minutes until well risen and golden brown.

From:

wallflowerkitchen.com/rhubarb-ginger-muffins-vegan

What's in the next issue?

I will cover the next instalment on the history of allotments. I'd love to hear from you about what you'll be growing this year and if you're brand new to your plot, why not introduce yourself and talk about your plans!