



GCAA NEWS

Newsletter of the Golf Course Allotments Association

Summer 2013

www.gcaa.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Annual Show

The Annual Show will take place on Sunday 1 September starting at 1pm. This is our opportunity to show off the best of what we have produced this year. And it's now only a few weeks away! On Show Day, our site will be full of people, not just looking over the exhibits but also enjoying a cup of tea, a bite to eat and meeting old friends. If you can, please contribute cakes, savoury items and plants for sale to our guests on the day. Entry to the Show is free to ploholders and their families. Others can come in as guests of the National Gardens Scheme (£3.50, children free).

Perfection is rarely achieved in our small show! But our crops are now thriving after a slow start and we all have something worth displaying – not just vegetables, flowers and fruit but also photographs, jams and other cooked items! So let's get ready! Full details of the competitions and the rules are in the Show Schedule



which has been sent by e-mail to ploholders. The judge for this year's Show is Stella Winskell-Moore from Whetstone who is competition secretary for Barnet allotments. She has wide experience of exhibiting in shows and, for many years, has acted as a local show judge and a steward at the Chelsea Flower Show. One tip: her CV suggests a great interest in roses, fuchsias and pelargoniums!

Finally, a few reminders. Those taking part in the 3 potato competition should put a marker to indicate

their location. Children's plots should be registered by July 31. Please buy a raffle ticket from the Trading Shed and, if you won a cup last year, drop it off there (very carefully).

Another open day

Last year, George and Serge's plots were featured in the Daily Telegraph as a successful example of "gardening against the odds". That resulted in an invitation to open their plots to the public under the National Gardens Scheme. Their big day was 23 June and nearly 150 people turned up to visit this intriguing offering. Like any other allotment, these plots grow vegetables, fruit and flowers though, in this case, closely interplanted to display a very large number of different varieties. There are over 120 different roses covering much of the history of the rose; these include Gallicas, Damasks, Albas and Portlands. There are 40 David Austin roses and many of other types. Interplanted among the roses are a wide range of

perennials, grasses, some rare exotic plants and 30 kinds of vegetables including red cabbages and colourful chards. And all this on an allotment! A stunning example is shown below.



Gertrude Jekyll rose

Congratulations to George and Serge for giving their visitors so much pleasure (and also raising over £800 for charities supported by the NGS).

YG News

Since the last Newsletter, the Young Gardeners have acquired more members and been very active. In May, their knowledge of gardening was tested in a quiz. How many readers know in which direction peas and beans climb up a cane or netting? Is it clockwise or anticlockwise? For the right answer, ask a Young Gardener!

But the highlight of the past few months was a visit by Edward Milner, a local

ecologist and author. He collected bugs from a hedge and put them into test tubes for the children to study. Impressively, no one showed any sign of being squeamish and the event was greatly enjoyed by both children and parents.



Collecting bugs from the hedge

The building of raised beds on the YG plot is now complete and the Young Gardeners worked hard to fill them. Their care and concentration in sowing, planting, watering, weeding and harvesting has been impressive. The tomatoes, cucumbers, courgettes, peppers and melons have thrived in the polytunnel and the children's level of interest went up after harvesting what they had sown. To date, the harvest has been potatoes, broad beans, lettuces, courgettes, radishes, carrots, cabbages, mizuna, Swiss chard and spinach.

School plot

We are used to seeing people of all ages gardening at Golf Course Allotments. But did you know that one of our plots is tended by pupils from the adjacent Alexandra Park School? Some of its year 10 and 11 pupils – and a few from nearby Heartlands School – have opted for gardening and are learning about it alongside the rest of us.



School pupils on a guided walk around our site, led by teacher Lisa Clarke

Their neatly kept plot has vegetables and flowers as well as nesting boxes for birds. Some areas of the plot have been left as a habitat for insects. The open air setting allows pupils to get physical exercise and to learn some important life skills: working in a team, healthy eating, understanding nature and – perhaps like the rest of us - patience!

Fire

On a recent Saturday afternoon, a plotholder's shed caught fire. It's not clear what caused this but the fire brigade was called. The flames were so fierce that the shed was totally destroyed and serious damage was caused to several tall trees in Bluebell Wood.

Plotholders should always be present when they are burning. This can only be done on a "fire day".



Remains of a shed

Nostalgia cards

Over 20 years ago, plot holder Jane May had the idea of painting scenes from Golf Course Allotments and printing them as greetings cards. These were on sale at the Trading Shed until supplies finally ran out a few years ago.

Thanks to modern technology, these vintage pieces are now available to today's plot holders. They

cost £3.50 for 4 different cards.



"Snoozing behind the shed"

Merlin's miraculous adventure

Back in April, while our resident cat Merlin was prowling near the stream, he impressed neighbouring plot holders by catching a woodcock! This is a wading bird with a long beak and a wingspan of nearly 2 feet (about 58cm).



Woodcock, rescued from Merlin. Photo: Maria Ojeda

Merlin was undeterred by

the long beak! Only intervention by a plucky plotholder allowed the bird to reach safety (photo above). It was taken to the RSPB for a checkup before being released. Incidentally, woodcocks pose no threat to your crops: their staple diet consists of earthworms, caterpillars, beetles and insects!

Your Allotment magazine

The latest edition of *Your Allotment* magazine is available in the Trading Shed (open Sunday mornings). This local allotment magazine was founded two years ago by Marcia MacLeod, a plot holder at Lawrence Street Allotments in Mill Hill. Her aim was to offer north London gardeners something they never had before: news about local allotments and those who work them, and advice on specific local issues (such as growing in London clay). "Every site is different," says Marcia. "So is every grower. You can learn so much from others if you are prepared to open your mind and think outside the box. New plot-holders often come up with some of the most interesting ideas because

they don't have any tradition or pre-conceived baggage to contend with."

In the June/July issue, you can find advice on organic gardening, reviews of new products, topical recipes, and news about what's happening at other local allotment sites in north London.



Cover photo: Child's Hill Allotments, Golders Green

Future issues will cover:

- the increasing pressure on allotments as councils run out of money and developers keep a beady eye on what they see as prime building sites;
- Suttons Seeds' trial grounds where they test new cultivars and even new products: this year's catalogue includes wasabi and Chilean guava ka-pow, a fruit that looks like blueberries and tastes like chilies;
- and the best grow-your-own advice from the

Chelsea Garden Show, for those who didn't get there themselves.

Why do readers put their faith in a local gardening magazine? Most likely it's because they feel that if something worked down the road, it could also work for them. Readers also respond with suggestions for articles such as wildlife on allotments, organic growing and site fundraising.

What's your suggestion? Which crops would you like to see covered in *Your Allotment*? And if you know a grower or a site that's worth exploring, Marcia would love to hear from you.

New plotholder

Plot 126, where our main roadway reaches the Golf Course, looked like a paddy field a few years ago. Things improved when a pipe was laid to drain the excess rainwater into the stream.

The new plotholder, Ufuk, has been very busy and has made an impressive start on getting this plot back into cultivation. The centrepiece of the plot is a beautiful large lily (photo below).



But Ufuk says that growing crops here is not as easy as back home in Anatolia, Turkey. There, the summer temperatures are similar to the UK but the soil is sandier, the land more fertile. It is ideal for growing crops such as apricots, figs, hazel nuts and tomatoes.

Pond arrives

Plot 119, near the bottom car park collects most of the water draining from higher up our site. It became vacant recently and the Committee decided that the best use for it was as a pond. The work is now complete thanks mainly to the efforts of Richard Payne. The pond is surrounded by a strong fence and suitable plants will be grown at the margins. Later, beehives might be established in the area to encourage wildlife.

Contributions etc to:
gcaanews@yahoo.com