

Compton Allotment News – April 2018

Welcome to the April edition of the Compton Allotment News.

Articles, pictures, photographs, open days, recipes, news, advice on growing, etc.....
Please send to: Colin and Val Venton at colin.venton@gmail.com

The committee are pleased to announce that Pippa Chapman has agreed to serve on the committee and has attended her first committee meeting on 8th March. As well as being young (compared to the rest of the committee!), Pippa is a Compton resident which strengthens our village representation. Consequently, Margaret Quinlan has resigned. Margaret very kindly stayed on until we could find a replacement. We are deeply indebted to her for all her years of service to the committee and serving as Treasurer.

This means that we keep our gender balance on the Committee but it is still overbalanced towards male members. We would love for more female members to join us – whatever your age – so that we can have more equal representation.



Compton Fete – Saturday 19th May

A message from Ben, our chairman:

Each year the Compton Allotments has a stall at the annual Compton Fete, This year the fete will be held on **Saturday May 19th**. Over previous years the income from the fete has met any shortfall in rental income against expenditure and built up a buffer fund. We would very much appreciate any input you can make to delivering a successful stall for us at the fete. We sell both preserves and plants. Flowers sell really well, especially if the plants are in flower or are well known. Could you grow/bring on some old favourites like sweet peas or some summer bedding; do you have some leftover from your own garden plants? Vegetable plants do sell although not so well and again the well known ones will sell best, - tomatoes, ridge cucumbers, salad plants ready to plant out, courgettes, squashes.....you get the idea.

Six weeks to go, could you part a few seeds for the stall, everything will help!

We always appreciate help on the day, we take turns selling on the stall so the more of us that volunteer the more we can rotate selling. Please let, one of the committee, or Val, know if you are able to help. Thanks, and have the best growing season ever!

Loseley Spring Garden Show

Another reminder that the **Loseley Spring Garden Show** is taking place from Friday 20th April to Sunday 22nd April. Admission is £3.50 for adults, £3.00 for concessions and children under 16 go free. Please see www.loseleypark.co.uk for more details.

More News

Guildford in Bloom

Keith and Sue Day have reminded me that the Guildford in Bloom competition is now open. The competition is free to enter for borough residents, schools, community groups and businesses who love to garden. There are eight categories to choose from, one of them being best allotment and vegetable/kitchen garden. Please see the Guildford in Bloom website for more details.

Closure of New Pond Road

On 23rd April work will start on replacing the railway bridge in New Pond Road. The road at the Peasmarsch end will be closed until the bridge is finished in July which, is the estimated finish time. Access to the allotments via the A3 or from Farncombe will not be affected.

The Weather

Firstly, we have had unseasonal amounts of snow at the end of February and then in the middle of March.



Photos courtesy of Pippa Chapman.

The Weather

Secondly, we have had quite a wet and miserable winter which combined with the snow melt and heavy rain in the last two weeks has meant that we have had some substantial flooding.



Please be very wary of driving your vehicles over the wet ground as getting stuck causes you problems but also cuts up the grass very badly, which then needs repair. Please stick to the hard areas of the car parks. The area of the Withies Lane car park in front of the pig compound and chicken run has been cut up badly in places and I would advise not parking there at the moment.

On Wednesday someone drove up the centre aisle and damaged the grass!!

While on the subject of the centre aisle, the posts are put at either end in the winter by the committee to protect it for reasons already stated. It has come to our notice that on both ends, posts were removed to gain vehicular access. **Please do not do this!**

Deer Fencing

Last summer we had evidence that badgers were gaining access to the site and in recent months deer and deer tracks had also been seen. Unfortunately, the deer fencing was never completed around the site and these animals were invading from the western side of the Polsted Lane gate. From my own experience, deer will eat practically everything in sight and it was imperative that this gap was plugged. Over three days Ben, Jonathan and I put in fencing to make our site secure. The work involved cutting back the hedge in places to get a straight run and to accommodate the fencing.



Jonathan checked that Ben was doing it correctly!

Ben bravely let Jonathan use a hammer near his hand!



Colin was chief wire strainer.



A job well done!

Spring Working Party Day



More Spring Working Party Day

Much hard work was achieved.



However, it wasn't all work! There was very tasty sausages in buns, cake, biscuits and hot drinks to keep us all going.



Happily provided by our excellent catering team!



The Result

From this:



To this:



Continuing The Spring Working Party Day

I apologise for the fact that we don't have pictures for the other working party group that worked so hard down in the south-west corner of the site. We will have to make sure that all areas of hard work are recorded in future!

Much clearing and barrowing of bramble was achieved in this area!

Another message from Ben:

I have two big thank yous to make on behalf of all of us who have a plot on the Compton Allotment site.

Firstly, to Colin and Jonathan for the time and energy they gave to ensure we had the deer fence installed on the final unfenced stretch of the allotment. It was essential the fence was installed before we started growing produce as deer will clean a site once they have discovered a way in. A great job was completed over three days and a big saving was made by doing the work ourselves.

Secondly, a big thank you to all of you, 25 in number, who gave the allotment your time and not inconsiderate effort on the Spring Work Day. Another unmanageable area between a plot and the hedge has been reclaimed and will be grassed in due course. This improvement of the allotment infrastructure delivers huge benefits as we can mow right up to the hedge, keeping the area clean and tidy and providing an alternative access route to plots. It will also reduce the time and effort we have to expend each Autumn Work Day, cutting the internal face of the boundary hedge. There was also a fantastic bonus with a spare plot being cleared and covered and I hope we will soon let the plot, this should be easier thanks to your hard work. A special thank you to Val and Pippa for delivering the half-time refreshments and to those who added sweet fare to finish off the sausages - scrummy!

Thanks

Ben

As Ben mentioned the plot has now been covered to protect it from weeds and to preserve our hard work

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On a completely different matter, convex mirrors have now been put up at the Polsted Lane entrance to help our exiting.



The Pigs

Seven new piglets arrived on Saturday 10th March and after having their injections, happily settled into their new home. It was their first time on grass but they quickly started rooting and foraging. They are a mixed breed. Their mother was a Large Black and their father was a cross between an Oxford Sandy and a black Mangalitza. Mangalitza pigs apparently have the best flavoured meat of all. Four more pigs are meant to be coming soon.



Having lined up for their photo-shoot they quickly set off eating and exploring.



Having completely eaten all the vegetation in their starter compound they have now been moved into their intermediate one.



Pippa Chapman answers questions

How did you hear of the allotment?

I went to a Compton Village meeting and at the end there was an announcement that there were plots available - so as I had often walked past and thought it would be a great challenge I applied and got my plot.

How long have you been on the allotment?

Since May 2016

What do you enjoy about visiting the allotment?

Lots of things – the excitement of seeing things grow and produce fruit, flowers and vegetables, the quiet stillness when no one else is around, the buzz and friendliness when there are lots of ‘allotmenters’ there. Spotting the allotment cat. Seeing how my plot has developed and planning what to do next.....

What have you enjoyed growing?

I was fortunate to have blackcurrants, raspberries and rhubarb already on the plot so I have enjoyed bringing them on. I’ve tried to grow as many new things as possible each year.

What new crop are you hoping to grow in the future?

I had some success with sweet potato last year so I’m going to continue experimenting with different types. I’d like to try growing asparagus – but will have to see if I have space.

What have you learnt so far about growing crops?

Quite simply – planning and preparation is key - and anything you don’t know – which at the moment for me is almost everything – don’t be afraid to ask others on the allotment who have a wealth of experience to help you. I’ve also been given two books ‘Allotment, Month By Month’ by Alan Buckingham and ‘The Allotment Book’ by Andi Clevely, which have proved to be fantastic sources of information.

Anything you would like to grow but our climate is against us?

Not especially – although a few years ago I was visiting friends in Spain - one morning we had cantaloupe melon for breakfast picked fresh from their garden which was delicious.

What are your favourite fruit and vegetables?

I love lots of different fruit and veg so can’t say I have an ultimate favourite of either but strawberries probably are a favourite summer fruit and broad beans feature in the list of vegetables along with butternut squash, potatoes and parsnips.

Any particular event that sticks in your mind that happened on the allotment?

No one particular event but the help and kindness of fellow allotmenters including the offers of a cup of tea have all helped to make it a great place to be.

Like many allotmenters, Pippa has taken on another plot. Editor.



Bill and Heather's Page

Bill and Heather very kindly supplied a page for the March newsletter. I have taken the liberty of putting it in the April one, rather than get them to do another. Since the weather has delayed things significantly this year I guess much of this is still applicable.

It's March, and we will be spring cleaning in preparation for the coming growing season.

We'll start by giving the covering of the polytunnel a good wash down with a Jeyes fluid solution to remove the dirt and algae accumulated over the winter months so as to allow plenty of sunlight through to the interior. We also use this solution to clean our plastic plant pots to reduce the risk of transferring diseases.

Hopefully we will have a dry, sunny day this month so that we can give the shed a good tidy up, taking the opportunity to clean and sharpen our hand tools.

There's plenty of sowing to be done in March, starting with cabbages. Club root is a problem on our plot and it will take years to eradicate entirely, so we have a strategy that aims to ensure that our brassica plants are as healthy and vigorous as possible so that they grow strongly despite having the disease.

Last year we grew two varieties of mini-cabbage : 'Caserta' (a mini Savoy type) and 'Minicole' (a firm green ball head). These grew successfully, providing firm heads of a size just right for Sunday lunch for two ! We will be sowing these again this year, along with a red cabbage 'Red Rodeo'. Three seeds will be sown in a peat pot and the smaller seedlings removed to leave the strongest to grow on for planting out in June.



We will also be sowing tomatoes, cucumbers and courgettes this month. Sown in a heated propagator, they will be transferred to the greenhouse when the weather gets a bit warmer.

Drop us an email if you have any questions (bill.fordham@gmail.com) or come over to visit us on Plot 28D !

Growing, etc

“April is the cruellest month.” The problem is that everything starts growing and gardeners are encouraged to plant crops **but** we could still get frost and we won't be safe from them until after the second week in May. This works well for the Compton Fete as frost tender bought plants can be immediately planted out. Last year we had a late heavy frost in May which destroyed all the blossom on the fruit trees meaning that we had hardly any apples, pears, etc

Plants grown indoors need to be hardened off before planting out if they are frost hardy. Runner beans, french beans, other types of frost tender bean, pumpkins, courgettes and squashes should be started now but kept safe from frost.

First early potato tubers should be planted now even though this is later than usual. Closely followed by second earlies and main-crop ones.

A lot of vegetables like calabrese, kohlrabi, cauliflower, peas, carrot radish and swiss chard can be direct sown this month if your soil is not waterlogged! Onion sets, shallots and garlic (if Spring planting) can all be planted now- soil permitting.

A reminder that we have until the end of the month for bonfires. After that there can be no more until the Autumn.

The taps are now on permanently until late Autumn. Because the pigs came so early this year the water was switched on but had to be switched off at times for severely cold nights.

Sadly Mark and Beth Otway are giving up their plot so we only have two plots vacant at the moment.

Welcome to new plot-holders and we hope you enjoy looking after your plots at our wonderful site. I haven't met all of you yet but with your permission I would like to feature you in our May issue.

At the Spring Working Party day a presentation was made to John Benwell as a thank you for all the hard work John has put into servicing our machinery.

Wildlife Update

John Benwell reported that in driving down Withies Lane one evening he came across two deer, a bit further on a badger, and further on again a fox!

We have frogspawn in the pond and a toad was found when putting up the deer fencing. We know that there is a hedgehog or hedgehogs on site because one would not stay out of Ben's trap last year!

We have been attempting to decrease the number of moles as they caused quite a problem in Withies Lane car park. Please knock over/flatten any mole hills you come across as mowing will start fairly soon and the mole hills damage the blade of the ride on mower.

Threat of Xylellum Fastidiosa

The threat of the bacteria Xylellum Fastidiosa is little known amongst the general population in this country. It is one of those occasions when being an island is protecting us but we need to be aware of the **danger of purchasing plants or bringing back plants or cuttings from abroad, particularly from Europe**. In December the RHS said householders and garden centres **should not buy plants grown abroad**.

Xylella is considered one of the most dangerous plant diseases in the world. There is no known cure. It is spread by insects including leafhoppers and froghoppers which leave 'cuckoo spit' - white frothy blobs – on leaves. These insects bite into the xylem, the water bearing channels in plant tissues. The bacterium causes the tissues to gel, thereby obstructing the flow of water. The plants become deprived and so that the edges of the leaves turn brown or can be covered in brown 'scorch' marks, but this can easily be mistaken for drought or frost damage. At a recent conference delegates admitted that they were unable to identify a xylella infection.



A leafhopper

Cuckoo Spit (larvae of the froghopper)

A froghopper

The good news is that aphids and whitefly bite into the phloem, the food-conducting tissues, so they are not seen as carriers.

Xylella can kill over 350 species of plants including trees such as oak, elm, plane and sycamore as well as popular garden plants including lavender, rosemary and oleander. In Puglia, in southern Italy, which is the main olive oil producing area of Italy, it has killed over a million ancient olive trees, thus forcing a 20% rise in the cost of olive oil across the EU. It has also spread to Corsica, the south of France, Germany, the Balearic Islands and Spain. A million almond trees on Majorca are said to be infected.

The disease is thought to have arrived in Europe from the Americas, where it is endemic, periodically wiping out entire vineyards and orange groves.

If Xylella is found in the UK, all host plants within a 100 metre radius would be destroyed.

Discussions have been made for a public awareness campaign at airports and ports to warn holiday-makers not to bring back any kind of plant materials. The European Commission has already agreed to have more checks on high-risk plants as they are moved between countries.

It is difficult to quantify the size of the danger as we don't see large infestations of froghoppers or leafhoppers and the massive infestations of plants/trees seems to have occurred in warm to hot parts of the world. The warming of the planet is causing changes in patterns of wildlife so we would be wise to observe the advice given about plant sourcing.

What is worrying is the lack of, knowledge, advice and identification found in the general public.