

Compton Allotment News – August 2017

Welcome to the August edition of Compton Allotment News.

Articles, pictures, photographs, open days, recipes, news, advice on growing, etc...

Please send to – Sue Day at keithandsueday@virginmedia.com

Date for your diaries – Saturday 30th September.

The following is a note from the Committee:-

"This year we are planning to hold the Autumn work day in the morning on Saturday 30th September, we plan to follow the work with the AGM and a BBQ.

As you organize your diary for September it would be fantastic if you could plan to help at the work party, many hands make light work! Should the weather forecast indicate rain then we will postpone for a week to October 7th.

Please look out for an email with more detail from Val Venton."

I have been asked to remind you all about locking the gate. Not that you have forgotten, but plot holders are being locked in!

Not everyone drives a car to the allotment, a number are on foot and on bicycles. (Especially at the Polsted Lane end). Please do not assume that if there are no other cars in the carpark, you are the last. Please ring the triangles provided, they can be heard across the allotment.

Studio 12 Art Club (based in Wanborough) visited on Thursday 6th July. They probably chose the hottest day of the year and were all seeking shade! Artwork produced can be found on page 9. Thank you to Sheila Rudman for sending in.

If you happen to pass a Wyevale Garden Centre, it may be worth popping in.

All seeds at the moment are at half price.

Most of these will be viable for the next season or even the next. Please avoid Parsnips, these are best purchased when the new seeds come out next year.

Too many cucumbers, I am hearing you all cry. Perfect recipe sent in by Ann on Page 7.

Thank you to everyone who has sent in photographs and articles this month.

Himalayan balsam

Unfortunately this is now present on the allotment along side the stream. Committee members have been very active during the last couple of months strimming as much as possible to stop this enveloping the allotment. If you see this plant near or on your plot, please let the Committee know.

Each plant can produce up to 800 seeds. These are dispersed widely as the ripe seedpods shoot their seeds up to 7m (22ft) away.

The history of the plant as follows:-

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is a relative of the busy Lizzie, but reaches well over head height, and is a major weed problem, especially on riverbanks and waste land, but can also invade gardens and allotments. It grows rapidly and spreads quickly, smothering other vegetation as it goes.

Introduced to the UK in 1839, Himalayan balsam is now a naturalised plant, found especially on riverbanks and in waste places where it has become a problem weed.

Himalayan balsam tolerates low light levels and also shades out other vegetation, so gradually impoverishing habitats by killing off other plants.

Common name Himalayan balsam, Indian balsam, jumping jack, policeman's helmet.

Botanical name *Impatiens glandulifera*.

Areas affected Gardens and allotments, often those adjacent to infested riverbanks and waste places.

Main causes Fast-growing annual spreading by seed.

Timing Seen spring to autumn; treat in early summer.

Himalayan balsam is a tall growing annual, 2-3m (6-10ft) in height. Between June and October it produces clusters of purplish pink (or rarely white) helmet-shaped flowers.

The flowers are followed by seed pods that open explosively when ripe.

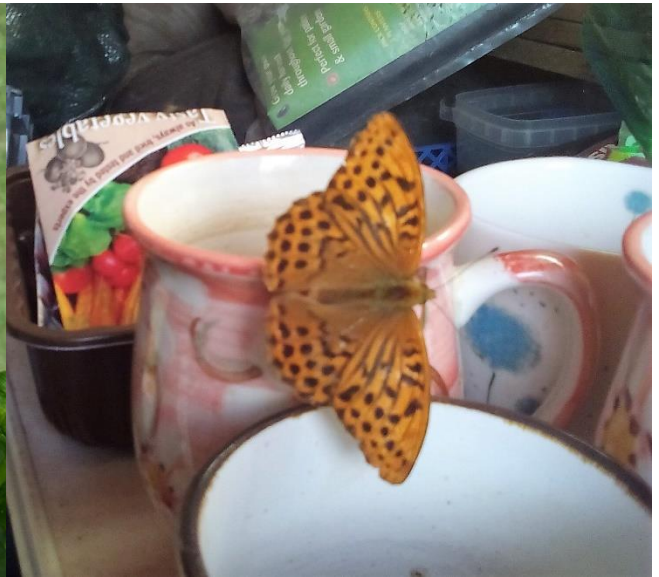
The plant is spread by two principal means:-

The most widespread distribution tends to be by human means where individuals pass on seed to friends.

Once established in the catchment of a stream the seeds, which can remain viable for two years, are transported further afield by water.

Information obtained from the RHS website.





Comma Butterfly on the left sent in by Ben.

Top picture of a "Silver Washed Fritillary butterfly that we found having a cup of tea in our shed" – sent in by Bill and Heather Fordham.



You may be wondering why you are looking at a dried up river bed. This is our stream which was non-existent on the 10th July, after all the hot weather and very little rain.

I am informed that this has not happened since the Summer of 1976.

Photographs sent in by Ben.

A swarm of bees have taking a liking to our allotment - *update*

The following article is by Susan Kimber

Can you see the queen?



NO – is the frequent answer especially at this time of year when the colonies are at their largest, with up to 60,000 bees in the hive. Do we need to see the queen when we inspect the hives? Again, the answer is no, although it is the ‘icing on the cake’ when the queen is seen.

Luckily there are many other signs that tell us that the colony is ‘queen right’ and all is well. By observing the entrance to the hive (something I probably do at least once a day) you can see the bees returning with pollen and nectar. Pollen is only collected when there are young larvae to be fed, so that tells us that the queen must have been laying eggs in the last six days. In July/August the pollen can be white, pale lime green, yellow or various shades of orange so we have a good idea where the bees have been foraging.



If the bees have been working the Himalayan balsam, which is a very good source of nectar at this time of year, the back of the bee's head and thorax is white as she is unable to reach these areas and remove the pollen.

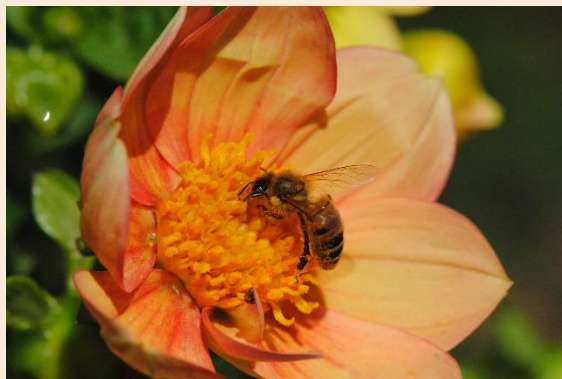
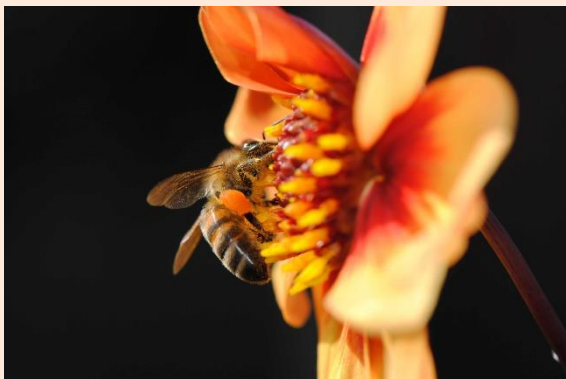
The vital sign that we look for when inspecting the colony itself is the presence of eggs as this indicates that the queen was laying in the last three days.

To increase the chances of finding the queen the back of her thorax is marked with a dot of colour according to a five year repeating mnemonic **W**ill (white) **Y**ou (yellow) **R**aise (red) **G**ood (green) **B**ees (blue). All queens, raised from eggs this year, will be marked yellow but, of course, this brings us back to the problem. Can you find the queen?

The allotment colony is doing very well and last week, as there was no space in the small 'nuc' box, it was transferred into a full size hive. But did we see the queen? No! Luckily, this week's inspection was more successful; the queen was found, caught and marked and has now joined the ranks of 2017 queens.



If anyone has any questions or would like more information on beekeeping then please contact me on gkimber@btinternet.com



Bill and Heather's Page

August, hot Summer days, but still time to make some late sowings.

Radishes can continue to be sown for Autumn harvests. Swiss chard can be sown for baby leaves in Autumn or to over-Winter for a Spring crop and pak choi is less prone to bolting if sown now. There is still time to sow a fast-maturing variety of carrot like 'Adelaide' or 'Paris Market'.

We will be sowing a variety of Winter radish called 'Black Spanish'.

These are such an easy crop. Growing to the size of a tennis ball, they will stand in the ground over-Winter and will be used as an alternative to swede or turnip in soups and stews... or grated and added to a coleslaw. They can be prone to slug damage, so you should keep the beds clear of weeds and dead vegetation where they hide away.

I grow lots of onions, as anyone who visits our plot might notice ! Most of our onions will be grown from sets planted in September. This year I will also be Sowing a cold-hardy variety in mid August.

Hopefully these will survive the winter outdoors. Admittedly, it is more of a gamble, but could give us an early crop of very large bulbs the next summer.

Suitable varieties are 'Augusta' from The Real Seed Catalogue and 'Toughball' from Simply Seed.

August is the time of the year that we order our seed catalogues so that we can plan for the growing year ahead. This is especially important if you are going to order seeds for September sowings or onion sets for Autumn planting.

Most people have their own favourite seed suppliers, but here are a few that we like to order from :

Kings Seeds

Good quality and reasonably priced. We will order most of our seeds from here. www.kingsseeds.com

The Real Seed Catalogue

Not the cheapest, but an excellent selection of heirloom and heritage seeds.

www.realseeds.co.uk

Simply Seed

Good for some of the hard to find varieties and offering some excellent bargains.

www.simplyseed.co.uk

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



Bread and Butter Pickles

Sent in by Ann Gooding

Weigh all ingredients after preparing. I am not too fussy about the cucumber / pepper / onion ratio, as long as the total weight is about right.

750 g cucumber/gherkins
625 g onion sliced 5 mm thick
375 g red or yellow pepper sliced 5 mm thick
3 tbsp. salt
1 litre spirit (or other pale) vinegar
500 g sugar
2 tsp. turmeric
1 tbsp. mustard seed
2 tsp. dill seed (or use more mustard seed)



(If you are not keen on peppers, just make up the extra weight with cucumber and onions).

Peel and slice the cucumber – if there is a big seedy middle, scrape this away too. Put the cucumber into a bowl and pour over boiling water, drain, refresh in cold water, drain and pat dry.

Put the cucumber, pepper and onion in a plastic bowl and sprinkle with salt. Cover with a tea towel and leave overnight (stirring occasionally). Next day drain, rinse in cold water and drain again (I also pat dry with a clean tea towel).

Put the vinegar, sugar and spices into a pan, bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes, add the vegetables, return to the boil and then remove from the heat. Pack into hot jars and seal.

You can eat this immediately, or it will keep (in theory!) for a year.

If we were running a competition for the strangest vegetable, then I think David Underdown would win.

Thank you for sending in.

“I tried a new sort of courgette this year that is claimed would climb and fruit hang down, like in greenhouse cucumbers. Unfortunately one of the fruits got caught into the climbing frame and became heavily distorted.

Photo attached together with a normal fruit.”



Colin Venton answers questions

How did you hear of the allotment?

Through swimming! My wife and I swim regularly at Godalming Leisure Centre and met Chris James there, who also swims. For many reasons I was becoming disenchanted with my allotment at my son's place, one being it was open to deer and another being it was on very heavy clay. Chris encouraged me to look at Compton and I fell in love with it!

How long have you been on the allotment?

This is my third year so I am a relative newbie.

What are your 3 favourite things to grow?

Runner beans, dahlias and tomatoes.

What has been your greatest growing success?

Really pleased that I managed to grow a single celeriac last year (they need plenty of water) and am managing to grow more this year – celeriac chips are fabulous!

What notable failure do you recall?

The most spectacular was some years ago when I was growing some concurbit plants (not sure if they were squashes, cucumbers, marrows or pumpkins) in a propagator with the lid on and I took them straight into the garden. They literally shrivelled up before my very eyes and in half an hour were dead!

What tips for growing would you give to others?

Give squashes and pumpkins lots of room – the trailing stems like to put down roots. I like to cover in winter with fabric which gives me a head start in the Spring. Don't grow too much of anything! Taking home vast quantities of produce has given my wife grounds for divorce!

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

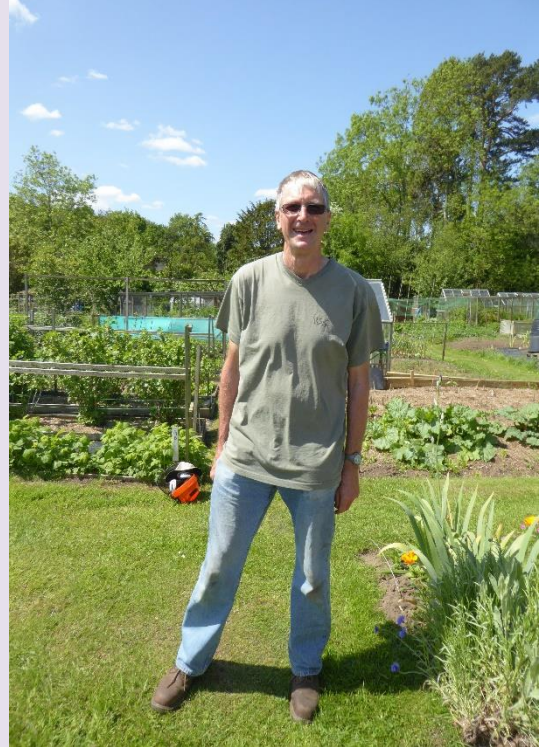
Oh lots! As an Italianophile I would love to grow melons – all kinds, citrus fruits, olives, nectarines-peaches and mangoes. Also Italian almonds which have a lovely creamy texture nothing like the dried up versions we buy in packets!

Your favourite fruit and vegetables?

Very hard to say as being vegetarian I love them all but strawberries, blueberries, a good nectarine (quality varies so much) and runner beans come to mind.

What are your earliest memories of being on an allotment?

I'm far too young to answer that!



Studio 12 Art Club



artwork from the 6th July



The allotment looked stunning during July, with so many vegetables, fruit and flowers.

