

Alsager Gardens Association

Newsletter 29 – Autumn 2020

Web:- <http://www.alsagergardensassociation.org.uk>

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Dear Member

. WHAT A YEAR - NEVER MIND COVID

On my allotment at Cedar Avenue it has been fantastic. As ever, the asparagus and purple sprouting Broccoli were great. Especially the asparagus which benefitted from a dressing of Fish, Blood and Bone.

We followed with fruit, strawberries first. Poor crop due to lack of Fertiliser and old plants. These are due to be replaced or gapped up as required.

Raspberries, second. They were exceptional with fresh Raspberries, Raspberry jam and even now frozen raspberries.

All the while the Sweet Peas were growing. Slowly at first and then they died. Was it shortage of food, too much food. Was it water shortage or too much water. This is second year of failure. Luckily David Spall had enough to give away.

By now Peas were abundant, then French beans and the best of all, carrots without carrot fly. Tomatoes thrived and then the potatoes came. I grow Desiree, good large crop of excellent flavour and the scabs do disappear with peeling.

Sweet corn, picked at six o'clock eaten by seven, were very, very nice.

Courgettes continued and then finally Romanesu, a broccoli, and then purple sprouting to follow next spring.

If we add Blackcurrants and Redcurrants then I am sure that you will agree with me, a fantastic year and that is without mentioning New Potatoes for Christmas

I have met many of you during the year and I know that you also had excellent years. Enjoy the season and see you next year.

Derek Hough – *President of the Gardens Association*

SECRETARY'S REPORT AUTUMN 2020

We hope this newsletter finds you safe and well as we approach Christmas and the New Year. At the time of writing the incidence of Covid 19 cases in our area has fallen and, as Alsager is in Cheshire East, we are designated as Tier 2 -High Alert. Our allotments remain open, but access will vary due depending on where you live and what "Tier" you are in and the localised restrictions under regional lockdown rules.

Looking Back

The last nine months have been difficult for us all and as an association we were unable to hold many of our usually events. We held a successful and "Socially Distanced" plant day in May which for many was the first time that they had taken the opportunity to go outdoors other than for walking. Many people told me that just seeing people they had not seen for many months, really lifted their spirits! For those that have been able to get out and tend their allotment plots, many have conveyed their appreciation of having a safe outdoor environment to go to and the opportunity to be active and productive in growing their much appreciated, fruit and vegetables! The pandemic has really raised people's awareness of the social, health and wellbeing benefits that our allotment offer as well as having access to fresh fruit and vegetables without having to face lengthy ques in supermarkets! This year has seen a significant increase in people requesting allotment plots with several requests being from various areas which are outside of the Alsager area which we serve, so we have not been able to accept these requests. As a result our allotments are full, and we expect the demand for allotment plots to increase as we move into spring and the better weather.

Going Forward

We hope to continue with our monthly "Bulletins", but these can only be sent to the members who have given us an email address. At present we do not have any email details for about 30-40 members. It is increasingly important for us to be able to communicate electronically - not only as this is COVID safe – but it gets information out to our members very quickly and easily at no cost.

This "Autumn Newsletter" is mostly hand delivered to over 150 members. It takes several of our volunteers and committee members many days to undertake these hand deliveries. If we can move to sending out key information by email it is a cost and time efficient method and importantly COVID safe.

If you have not given us details of your email please email your details to

alsagergardensassociationsecretary@outlook.com.

We plan to reopen our Trading Hut in March and will look to retain some of the good practices that we have adopted during COVID together with additional COVID safety measures aimed to protect both our hut volunteers and members. Your committee and I wish you a safe, happy, and enjoyable Christmas as we look forward to A Covid Free and Happy New Year!

Pauline Hubbard - *Secretary of the Gardens Association*

Ramblings from the chair winter 2020

Dear members,

Welcome to this edition of our newsletter, 2020 has turned out to be an interesting year. It began as many others, cold and frosty with events in the world that seemed so far away. Then Covid 19 arrived on our shores.

Furlough and shielding became the new norm, as did zoom committee meetings and bulletins from the AGA . We enjoyed a socially distanced open day and managed to reopen the trading hut open one Sunday a month. Unfortunately the Annual Gardens competition, and the show at the beginning of September became a casualty of the pandemic.

Thankfully Mr Gove said tending your allotment was a form of exercise. So a lot of us had no work to do and nowhere to go, hence some of our plots have enjoyed more attention than in other years. It might be worth pointing out though, if you have difficulty at any time visiting your plot then let your site manager know.




Good crops this year for us have been some varieties of potatoes but not others. Sweetcorn, parsnips and raspberries also did well. Our pea crop was a disaster for some reason. We tried our hand at growing celeriac and kohlrabi.

So, as the shortest day looms on the horizon we look forward to 2021 with optimism. The prospect of a Covid 19 vaccine and possibly the return to what we used to know as normality. Hopefully we can hold the open day, gardens competition and the show. Only time will tell. Until then keep safe.

Adrian Ford – *Chairman of the Gardens Association*

**More hut helpers needed, if you will help please contact
me Adrian Ford Chairman 01270 877363**

When sowing seeds and pricking out seedlings, please grow a few extra plants for the plant sales table at the Allotment Open Days present plans (8 -9 May) and at the Annual Show (6th September)

Vegetable Planting Schedule			
In warmer areas the sowing / planting dates may be 2-3 weeks earlier, and in cooler areas 2-3 weeks later.			
Month	What to sow / plant	To do on the plot	What's in season
December <i>The short days of early winter bring frost, snow and storms</i> 	Shallots (<i>"plant on the shortest day, harvest on the longest day"</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare ground for next year • Add manure or compost to beds • Force rhubarb • Sterilize greenhouse tomato soil if it is not being changed • Check stored crops for signs of damage 	Sprouts, winter cabbage, leeks, parsnips, onions, kale
January <i>Time to start planning</i> 	Rhubarb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete winter digging • Clean greenhouse • Order seed 	Sprouts, cabbage, leeks, parsnips, chicory, celery, kale
February  <i>The coldest month of the year</i>	Early lettuce, cabbages, salad onions, carrots (under cloches), cauliflowers (in a heated frame)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress beds with lime where cabbages, sprouts, cauliflowers and broccoli are to be sown • Order asparagus plants and prepare the bed • Chit potatoes • Protect Blossom on Apricots, nectarines & peaches 	Sprouts, cabbage, leeks, parsnips, chicory, celery, kale
March <i>Start of the gardening season</i> 	Outside: Broad beans, spinach, early peas, cabbage, sprouts, parsley, onions, carrots, shallots, salad leaves Under glass: Tomatoes, chillies, aubergines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dig soil as winter crops are lifted and dress with superphosphate and potash (leave for 2 weeks before next sowing) • Chit potatoes 	Late sprouts, spring greens, broccoli, chicory, kale, early salads (from frames)

Companion Planting – Pauline Hubbard

Lot of people have asked this year about companion planting and I found this handy free printable guide which is very informative. The only plant name I didn't recognise is *Cilantro*. So this is what I found with the help of *Wikipedia* which is interesting.

Cilantro also known as **Chinese parsley** or **dhani**. All parts of the plant are edible, but the fresh leaves and the dried seeds are the parts most traditionally used in cooking. **Cilantro** is also the Spanish word for coriander. In many Asian recipes cilantro might be referred to as a Chinese Parsley or coriander leaves.

In a survey, most people perceived the taste of coriander leaves as tart. Lemon/lime taste, but to nearly a quarter of those surveyed, the leaves taste like soap. This is likened to a gene which detects some specific aldehydes that are also used as a deodorant substances in many soaps and detergents.

Free Printable Companion Planting Guide for the Garden

Which plants work best together?

Companion Planting OneCreativeMommy.com

	Basil	Beans	Broccoli	Carrots	Cauliflower	Chives	Cilantro	Corn	Cucumbers	Dill	Garlic	Leeks	Lettuce	Marigold	Melon	Nasturtium	Onion	Oregano	Parsley	Peas	Peppers	Rosemary	Sage	Spinach	Squash	Strawberries	Sunflowers	Swiss Chard	Thyme	Tomatoes
Basil																														
Beans																														
Broccoli																														
Carrots																														
Cauliflower																														
Chives																														
Cilantro																														
Corn																														
Cucumber																														
Dill																														
Garlic																														
Leeks																														
Lettuce																														
Marigold																														
Melon																														
Nasturtium																														
Onion																														
Oregano																														
Parsley																														
Peas																														
Peppers																														
Rosemary																														
Sage																														
Spinach																														
Squash																														
Strawberry																														
Sunflower																														
Swiss Chard																														
Thyme																														
Tomatoes																														

● Plants grow well
 ● Don't plant together
 ● Beneficial to Garden in general

Potatoes 2020

Because of the pandemic, I had lots of spare seed potatoes, and ended up using a spare plot to grow potatoes of many different varieties. Most of the crop went to the Food Bank, who were grateful for some fresh produce, particularly potatoes during the period when new potatoes were still expensive in the shops. My partner, Chris, and I had all the damaged and green-tinged tubers.

I thought other members might be interested in my remarks on some of the varieties I grew. I like to grow a selection of varieties, in containers, in my back garden and this year on a plot at Cedar Avenue. Doubtless some of you will disagree with my opinions, but your growing conditions may be different. This year we had plenty of rain to swell the tubers. The soil I grew on, both at home and at Cedar Avenue, would be classed as sandy loam, and I added some poultry manure pellets when planting.

Late Blight arrived on 2nd August. I've signed up to the national Blightwatch warning system, so in future years I can pass on the warnings. It is possible for scientists to accurately forecast the dispersal of the blight spores by looking at the forecast humidity and temperature. It gives the grower an extra day or two to cut down and destroy the haulm. I'm hoping to try one of the modern blight-resistant Sarpo varieties next year.

I buy seed potatoes from our scheme (many thanks to David Spall) and also from the Potato Day which is normally held in Macclesfield Town Hall on the last Sunday in January, with an amazing range of seed potatoes on sale in 1 kg bags.

My pick of the FIRST EARLIES was Lady Christl, which produced a heavy crop of clean, white oval tubers with waxy flesh and a good taste. Red Duke of York always produces large tasty spuds, but did not give such a big crop as some varieties. I also grew first earlies Pentland Javelin, Swift and Winston.

Orla is a favourite of mine for its versatility and reliability. You can harvest it as a first early, a second early or even as a maincrop. It always produces a heavy crop, in the ground or in containers. The tubers are oval, white, and usually clean with no pests or diseases and shallow eyes. And pretty good to eat, however you cook them.

Among the SECOND EARLIES, all produced decent crops.

Charlotte produced a fine crop of salad potatoes.

Kestrel, as usual, gave pretty tubers in good quantities.

No complaints about Nadine or Wilja either.

I do like to grow something different, and the old variety Edzell Blue is rarely grown now. The skin is a lovely mauve colour. Unfortunately, the colour disguises any green areas, meaning you have to peel the potatoes before cooking. Also, the colour disappears on cooking, but leaves a grey tinge if the potatoes are boiled in their skins. They make great mash, though!

Picasso is my pick of the MAINCROP SPUDS this year. A heavy crop of attractive and tasty tubers, with lovely pink eyes, and plenty of baking-size ones.

Kingsman also produced a good crop of attractive, all-purpose tubers.

Ratte is a heavy cropping, long-shaped salad potato, tasty and useful also for chips and boiling. My only quibble is that it tends to produce tubers near the surface, which makes them easy to harvest, but prone to green patches which must be discarded.

Mary's Rose produced a decent crop of lovely oval tubers with pink patches, not huge in size, but plentiful and tasty.

Mayan Rose (below) was another new variety for me. It is a Phureja variety - Peruvian potatoes which are known for needing a third less cooking time than standard potato varieties. It produced long oval red parti-coloured tubers with yellow flesh. What I found particularly interesting was that the tubers were all clustered at the base of the compact haulm, making them easy to harvest and, I suspect, a good variety for container growing.



Above - Mayan Rose

Harmony was another white potato which produced a good crop, though it had some scab. Setanta was also very productive, with attractive, red-skinned, tasty tubers.

Sunset produced a good crop of attractive pink potatoes. Really, I would happily grow any of these varieties again. You may not agree with my comments, or you may have your own personal favourites. Do let us know!

So, plans for 2021? I won't have so much space to use. I've ordered Lady Christl, Charlotte and Picasso and perhaps a Sarpo Mira blight-resistant variety, via our trading secretary. I hope to pick up some Orla and Sunset, elsewhere.

Hilary Robinson

Planned Dates for your Diary Subject to Coronavirus Government Restrictions

<p>Alsager Gardens Association AGM <i>come along and hear what goes on behind the scenes and how we have spent various grants on improvements</i> ALL WELCOME <i>Seed potatoes and a small selection of seeds will be on sale</i></p>	<p>Tuesday 2nd March 2021 at Alsager Highfields Foundation Primary School commencing at 8 pm The main entrance from the Town Car Park will be open Free Light refreshments will be available</p>
<p>Trading Hut See opening hours and dates at the bottom of page</p>	<p>Opens Sunday 6th March 2021 <i>Allotment Holders Rents due Payable at the Trading Hut</i></p>
<p>Allotment Open Days 8 & 9 May 2021 <i>Please attend but also bring any spare plants etc for sale</i></p>	<p>All sites will have a member to advise <i>The main event will be at Cedar Avenue site for plant sales, refreshments etc</i></p>
Snowdrop Walks – Rode Hall	1 st February to 1 st March 2021
Spring Harrogate Flower Show	21 st April 2021
RHS Flower Show - Chatsworth	Cancelled for 2021
Royal Cheshire County Show Cheshire Showground - Knutsford.	22 nd to 23 rd June 2021
RHS Flower Show - Tatton Park,	21 st to 25 th July 2021
National Allotments Week	9 th – 15 th August 2021
Southport Flower Show	21 st – 22 nd August 2021
Nantwich Show	24 th July 2021
Alsager Gardens Association Committee Meetings, Guide Hut, Cedar Ave., Alsager	8.00 pm Normally Last Tuesday of the Month. Confirmed on web site <i>(Any member welcome to join us)</i>

Please reserve the date for the AGM – planned for March 2nd

The 68th Annual Show Saturday 6th September

Sunday Opening Hours	Trading Hut opening Hours	
(NB Note opening times)	1-3-21 to 16-5-21	10.00 – 12.00 noon
	23-5-21 to 31-10-21	10.30 – 11.30 a.m.