

# THE PLOTHOLDER

ROYAL PADDOCKS ALLOTMENTS NEWSLETTER No 14 – September 2002

**It's that time of year again – a balanced diet is out of the question when the beans won't stop coming, and the courgettes inflate overnight if you turn your back on them. Neighbours brace themselves when they see you coming holding a carrier bag.** Who cares that only four parsnips germinated, when all the lettuces have come at once. You watch the branches of the plum tree spring skywards as you pick the plums, and when you realise what a weight they've been supporting you almost feel like patting the tree trunk, and murmuring 'thanks'. Almost, of course. Paddocks tenants don't really talk to trees – do we? Hard to believe that in another couple of months all this green will have gone, and it will be time for autumn digging and clearing.

Something else seems to be bearing fruit at last in our community – the idea of allotment gardening. All over the Borough it seems that allotment sites are filling up with new tenants, which is wonderful news. Here in the Paddocks there is nothing at all tempting left to let.

**This is a real opportunity for us all to raise the general standard of our site in support of the newcomers, some of whom have taken on a howling wilderness.** Walk over to South Road, and marvel at some of the ground-breaking work going on there. While they are bringing their plots under control, we established tenants can do our bit by keeping Rule 3: keeping a number on the plot, making sure paths and boundaries are neat and clear, and that the plot itself is in a reasonable state of cultivation. (It's all there in the Conditions of Tenancy.)



**High Summer is when the new cup winner is chosen, together with all the other prize-winners and runners-up. How do they do it?**

About three times a year a team of inspectors walks round the site, checking the plots. The area is divided into five sections, and each inspector makes notes on the plots in his or her area, based on the criteria in Rule 3: is the plot numbered? are its paths, and the roadway in front, maintained? what percentage of it is cultivated? They award A for over 75%, B between 50% and 75%, C between 25% and 50%, and D for less than 25%. At the midsummer inspection a shortlist of possible winners is drawn up, and the inspectors go round these plots again, usually on the first weekend in August. They award points for the variety and quality of crops, and the overall appearance of the plot, including its boundaries.

**Prizes are awarded in three classes: Best Full Plot, Best Half Plot, and Best Newcomer, both full and half plot, with first, second, third and runners-up in each class, if there are enough qualifiers.** A 'newcomer' is anyone who has been a tenant no longer than the previous October, and the criteria for them are different. Points are awarded for the most progress made during the year – a sort of 'value-added' award. **First prize for the Full Plot is, of course, the cup, and the winner's name will be engraved on it, joining the long list of winners each year since 1931.** We also give each winner and runner-up a certificate, and National Garden Tokens to the first, second and third in each class.

**Every year our tenants amaze us with what they can do.** Some concentrate on producing plenty of basic food crops, others experiment with exotics, or grow flowers for cutting. One person's plot is a leisure area, with table and chairs and perfumed plants, perhaps a vine, or a kite, while with another, sitting down is clearly the last thing on their mind.

**Sometimes an immaculate plot, bursting with produce, will be next to one looking as if it hasn't seen a hand's turn for a decade: Grade A cheek by jowl with Grade D.** But with almost all the plots let, it begins to look possible that we could get the whole site up to at least Grade B or above by this time next year. At least half-cultivated? Surely we can do it – let's go for it.

**SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE**

*THE OPEN DAY in June was a break with tradition – a Wet Day, and thus indistinguishable from many others this summer. It was windy too, and the advertising banner had to be restrained twice from disappearing into the stratosphere. Still, thanks to Helga and her family (husband, daughter, and son-in-law and grandchildren from Mexico) we had a hot meal and something to drink. Remarkably, we also let four very overgrown plots, and took £93 for our funds. So, character-building, and not a waste of time.*

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GITA RAE was a councillor member of our Management Committee for some years, and for 18 months its chair, after George Harmsworth retired. Gita and her father John Frith were also long-standing Paddocks tenants. Now both have retired, partly due to family ill-health, and plan to move to the West Country with Gita's husband and mother. We will miss Gita's calm, practical approach, and her deep concern for green issues, and wish her and her family well in their new home.

ACCORDING TO OUR CONSTITUTION we must have six local councillors on our Management Committee, as well as five Plotholder Committee members and a clerk. This committee, though it meets infrequently, is ultimately responsible for all dealings with outside bodies, setting and collecting rents, lettings and terminations of tenancies. After the council elections earlier this year the list of 'our' councillors remains the same apart from one change due to Gita's departure. They are: Cllrs Tony Arbour, Roger Avins, Martin Elengorn, Stephen Knight, James Mumford and Pat Parsons (deputy mayor).

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GET WELL SOON *George Harmsworth. Most tenants will know by now that George had a fall on his plot last month which resulted in a torn ligament and an operation. Luckily Bill Jones was close by and helped to get him to hospital. George is recovering, but at the time of writing no date can be set for the re-opening of the Seed Store. Roy Bennett, our chairman, has also had a year of ill-health, and has not been able to be on site as much as he would like to be. Both are key members of our organisation, and we wish them a speedy recovery.*

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WELCOME TO NEW TENANTS most of whom have taken on seriously over-grown plots. Sarah Colclough (39f), Simon O'Neill (100), Jamal Tassabehji (122), Richard East-burn-Hewitt and Angie Barker (123), Jo Franklin and Shervin Behzadi (124), Penny Branston (128), Bill Rutledge (131), Conway and Alison Langham (135), Ken Denaro (137), Melanie Clutterbuck (146), Scott Steel (150), Dan Read (155b), Ashley Catto (A), Hugh Williams (B), and Carol Irvine (E).

THANK YOU ONCE MORE to George Loosemore, Chris Taylor, Tony Walker, Hans van der Meulen, Martin Dawson and others for helping to keep common areas mowed and clear.

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**THE BONFIRE NOTICE** *appears from time to time, which means your Committee Clerk has had a complaint from a neighbour about smoke. Two have come from the same person recently. The position is that we are allowed to have bonfires, but have a duty not to annoy our neighbours with the smoke. So, burn only dry material on a fairly windless day, and if it's done towards evening when people are less likely to have their windows open, so much the better. ONCE A YEAR should be often enough to take care of non-compostable waste from one plot. Unless someone is clearing a lot of brambles, it's possible to stack couch and bindweed to dry on a grid, to wait for a windless autumn or winter afternoon, when a fire should give no trouble to anyone nearby.*

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**THE BUILDINGS PROJECT** has not ground to a halt – simply those involved have been busy all summer concentrating on their plots. We're extremely grateful to Nick Baylis for drawings of the office building, to Marina Lim and David Harnden for preparing a 'materials costing' document, and to Chris Pocock for the Centre for Alternative Technology-inspired design for a compost toilet. Anyone who has encountered the Elsan lately will know this is an initiative whose time has come. Similarly, work on the **PARKING AREA** will start again in autumn when we'll be calling together a team of levellers.

## NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS SITE NEWS

*RENTS ARE DUE IN OCTOBER to renew tenancy of all plots. Remember that rent for a full plot is now £10, and £5 for a half. Cost of keys remains the same - £2.50, which is the cost to the committee, but please don't get your own cut, as using keys not cut from the master can damage the lock, which gives enough trouble as it is.*

*. . . AND ON FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER, THE PLOTHOLDERS' ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, held as usual in Bullen Hall, Bennet Close, near Hampton Wick Library, between 7.30 and 9.30 p.m. We review the year, hear about the Committee's activities, and tenants' ideas for the future of the Paddocks. You can find out who won the cup, see pictures of the winning plots, and have a pre-business drink. BE THERE!*

### SPARE TIME – IS IT GOING OUT OF FASHION?

You probably think you haven't got time to join the Plotolders' Committee; perhaps, too, you think you have nothing to offer. The likelihood is that neither is true. The Committee doesn't want anyone to have more work to do than they can cope with – which means sharing it out in manageable parcels, so that we can be reliable about what we take on. Which means having enough committee members.

What do the committee do? They meet about ten evenings a year (not usually in January or August), on site in summer, and in the winter in the convivial surroundings of Teddington British Legion. They take a turn staffing the office on Sunday morning, about four times a year. Five of the committee inspect 'their' area three times a year, to pick the winners in August, to identify which plots are not coming up to scratch, and which tenants need help or a warning. A committee member may take over responsibility for a particular activity – we already have co-ordinators for publicity, website, socials and site maintenance. For some of these activities that committee member will recruit a team of plotholders to help. Much of this work is not highly visible, but is essential to keep this voluntary organisation running. We can all be grateful to those who do it. The more there are to help, the less time it takes. Think you could help? If so, we'd really like to hear from you.

ONE (OR MORE) ALLOTMENT PERSONS WENT TO MOW, using the Paddocks jointly-owned Mountfield mower. And that can be a bit of a problem. One operator gets to know the machine, but ours has to get used to various techniques and tasks, and from time to time it gets temperamental. It's been suggested by the few who know it best that we advise tenants not to try to cut the grass shorter than No.4, and only to take it over fairly smooth ground. Use the strimmer for anything rougher. The 'old' Mountfield is in the workshop at present, to see whether it's economically viable to get it going again; the 'new' Mountfield is working at the time of writing, thanks to some ingenuity by the experts.

When you use the equipment, please remember to sign out for it on the pad hanging to the right of the office door. This gives the committee a picture of patterns of use. Also, very importantly, when using any of our powered equipment, remember that **we are not insured for accidents to tenants**. This would be far too costly. If this is of concern to you we suggest you take out your own insurance.

WELL PRESERVED All over Hampton Wick and Teddington, tenants are busy filling their freezers and practising the arts of bottling and jam-making. If you've bottled out of bottling because you can't get the spares, the word is that Leifheit accessories will fit Kilner jars adequately. A version of Kilner spares is also available from Adams Ironmongers in Sutton Coldfield (tel.01213 544 822). Thanks to Margaret Patient for this information.

A SLATER IS A PILLBUG IS A SOWPIG – these are all vernacular names for woodlice, which I grew up knowing as cheeselogs – my grandmother's name for them. Can anyone add to this list? Editor.

*When you have an allotment to run, you really value your health and strength. Keep safe and in working order with some advice from Russ Knight, plot 82, who has done the St John Ambulance Brigade training.*

## FIRST AID ON THE ALLOTMENT

Gardening has the potential to be dangerous, but as with any other physical activity, a degree of care and thought will ensure a tremendous amount of trouble-free enjoyment.

The two most common injuries which can occur while gardening are:

1. Wounds to hands and feet. These can largely be prevented by wearing appropriate equipment.
2. Injuries caused when using powered equipment, particularly strimmers or rotovators, where the risk of injury is not only to the operator but also to persons nearby, who may be struck by flying debris.

Appropriate equipment would include the goggles provided for use with the Paddocks strimmer, together with gloves and stout shoes or wellingtons, which could withstand the whirling strimmer blade.

It makes sense to keep a small supply of sticking plasters in your gardening bag, but there are two well-equipped first aid kits on site for all tenants to use. One is in the small wooden shed by the main gate, and as this shed is not locked the kit is always available. The other kit is housed in the office. Please use the bottled water supplied in the kits for wound cleaning, as pump water is not suitable for this. If you use anything from the kits, or find something missing from one, please report the fact so that a replacement can be made.

These kits are for treating minor injuries only. Anything thought to be more serious should be referred to hospital, transport being by car where possible; otherwise the ambulance service should be called.

**Teddington Memorial Hospital** has a walk-in clinic for minor injuries, open Monday to Saturday between 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and on Sunday between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Kingston Hospital** has a 24 hour, 7 days a week Casualty department.

## TETANUS INJECTIONS

All gardeners are advised to be up to date with preventative injections against tetanus, or lockjaw, a serious, sometimes fatal, disease which is spread by spores in soil and manure. These injections are available free from your GP, and are normally effective for 10 years.

This article does not set out to instruct the principles of First Aid, and is not its intention. Further information, assistance and advice can be had from me, Russ Knight, Plot 82, a qualified member of St John Ambulance Brigade. Training courses in First Aid are run from the branch of the Brigade in Park Road, Teddington.

*Knowledge of First Aid is such a basic life skill that it seems extraordinary that it isn't taught in schools. We are very grateful to Russ for providing this information, getting us the First Aid Kits, and, most importantly, for the help he has provided from time to time to injured tenants.*  
Editor.

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THIS NEWSLETTER IS FOR OUR TENANTS. Are you moving? Let us know your new address, so we can deliver this to the right place.

..... THIS NEWSLETTER IS FOR OUR TENANTS. Is there a topic you'd like to see covered, or could write about yourself? Could you contribute a diary, handy hints, a poem, artwork, layout skills? Get in touch with the editor, Susan Saunders 8977 4675, [susan.saunders@fish.co.uk](mailto:susan.saunders@fish.co.uk).