

## THE PLOTHOLDER No 3 - March 1999

First, thank you to the many people who've encouraged us by saying how they enjoyed our previous newsletters. Now let us have your contributions - drop your tips, recipes, reminiscences, comments in at the Seedstore's letter box, addressed to the Chairman of the Plotters' Committee.

Second, **COME AND CELEBRATE THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING** - see page 4.

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**THE PLOTHOLDERS' COMMITTEE A G M** was held on Friday 6 November 1998, and attended by fifty plotters. It was a lively and constructive meeting. Full minutes will be posted in the Seedstore, but the main points reported were these:

we have a new strimmer, bought with funds from the Management Committee, and have a quotation for a new mower;

the voluntary Millennium Fund stands at £60 [update - £109];

we have a supply of Roundup for tackling abandoned sites, and would also like to use the organic alternative weedkiller, black plastic sheeting. Does anyone know a cheap source of supply?

Action Areas, severely overgrown areas in need of clearing, have been identified. The first is near the Seedstore, and is already showing improvement;

the old shed near the main gate has been removed [and a new one put up];

the annual rent is to rise to £5 for ten rods, and £2.50 for five rods - a Management Committee decision unanimously endorsed by plotters at the AGM.

**Your committee for 1998-9 is:** Fred Adams, Stan Bastian, Roy Bennett, Tony Burton, Les Dickinson (Chairman), Richard Emerton, Alan Drake (Treasurer), George Harmsworth, Gill Hiley, Susan Saunders (Secretary), Tony Walker, Mick Veysey, Helga Foss.

**The prizewinners in the Best Kept Allotment Competition were:** Full plot, 1st Hans van der Meulen, 2nd W. Jones, 3rd F. Livingstone; Half plots, 1st Tony Walker, 2nd Ron Noel. Special prizes were awarded to Margaret Patient and Vera Longley in recognition of their exceptional contribution to the allotments last year.

The next AGM will be at Bullen Hall on Friday 5 November 1999 - note it in your diaries now.

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**TARGETS** The new Committee have set themselves eight targets to achieve during the year: \*All plots to the east of South Road to be cleared and let. \*Carry out inspections to ensure at least 80% of all plots let are in full cultivation. \*Two new Action Areas to be set up and tackled. \*All plots to be numbered. \*All paths and roadways to be clear, straight and tidy. \*A three-year budget to be drawn up. \*Publish four newsletters each year. \*Hold a social event [See bottom of page 4].

**ROUNDUP:** Information for new users *from Alan Drake, plot 174*

Roundup is a new weedkiller which is absorbed by leaves, and then moves through the whole plant. It will clear annual and perennial weeds, including grass, on weedy ground before planting, and will renovate overgrown areas. It is inactivated on contact with soil, so crops can be planted within a few days of treatment, but in my experience I think it is better to wait for the foliage to die back. This takes at least three weeks; there is no change in leaf colour before that, and it would be easy to assume that something has gone wrong. But after three weeks die-back is fast. Bindweed often returns after a couple of months, but is weaker, and can be controlled with a hoe.

Roundup is expensive stuff. Using a fine spray, infinitely more effective than a watering can, you can control the weeds on half a plot for about £10. Don't spray if it's likely to rain that day, and be careful about drift - you won't know for three weeks that you've killed things you wanted to keep, if you've been careless. I always keep a spray exclusively for Roundup.

The dead weeds make an excellent mulch - in fact I've stopped digging. Two of the experts on Gardeners' Question Time have too, for the same reason. The February issue of the RHS journal *The Garden* also recommends the no-dig approach for soil of our texture, but if you are taking over a totally neglected plot with soil compaction, there's probably no alternative to digging for the first year. Tumbleweed is another well-known weedkiller. They both contain glyphosphate in varying strengths, but they all seem to be effective.

**RUNNER BEANS** - sow them late, *suggests Alan.*

For several years I've been disappointed with the yield from my runner beans. I decided not to bother with them last year, but at the beginning of July I was still looking at the two packs I'd ordered from Marshalls in January, and it seemed a pity to waste them. So I planted them six to a six-inch pot and put them out at the end of July. From the fourth week in August, right through September, I had the most fantastic yield, and the quality was superb. And this in an area where I'd grown runner beans for ten years, and which hasn't been trenched for the last three. In fact the seedlings were planted on top of the old roots, each with a handful of fish, blood and bone. I gave them a light mulch when the plants were halfway up the sticks, and a weekly watering of Maxicrop when the flowers had set. And, of course, I killed off three-months' worth of weed growth with Roundup three weeks before planting.

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**THE SEEDSTORE IS OPEN AGAIN** and George Harmsworth has it stocked up with real bargains. For the benefit of newcomers, and a reminder to established ploholders: there are considerable discounts on seeds, fertilisers, onion sets and various garden accessories. Please support the Seedstore: membership only costs £1, payable when you shop there on Sunday mornings. We send our best wishes to George's wife Hazel (the provider of Sunday morning cups of tea), who hasn't been well recently. We look forward to seeing her back in the store when the weather warms up.

**A LOAD OF MANURE . .** Fred Adams continues to take orders for stable manure. Demand is high and he's booked up until April, so early notification is recommended. It costs £15 per load - no half-loads - so contact Fred on plot 116 if you're interested.

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**COMPANION PLANTING** *Les Dickinson says:* I recently saw the following tips on companion planting, which people might like to try: Grow onions and carrots together to deter carrot fly. Plant French marigolds with cabbages to deter whitefly. Grow beans in your sweetcorn: beans fix nitrogen from the air in their roots, and sweetcorn love nitrogen. (This is an old North American Indian trick.) And lastly, always plant one petunia in each bed of onions - if possible on 1st April . . .

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WINTER keeps us away from our plots, but to Les it offers opportunities to indulge in another of his favourite pastimes, reading - particularly poetry. One poem in particular caught his fancy. We hope you like it too:

#### **GRANDFATHER IN THE GARDEN**

Digging was always my worst work  
After ten minutes I would blow  
My scalding hands and watch him fork  
Quite effortlessly the rain-heavy clay  
Of a new garden, meticulous and slow  
Labour that soon tired a boy.

All his life a cultivator  
of the soil's best things, ingenious  
Exterminator of what opposed his sure  
Design. Summers wet or dry found him  
Aware of deep conspiracies of earth  
To damage or destroy the year's triumph.

Thus he squared his jaw, donned ancient  
Clothes, and set to digging out his  
Fears. Late evenings I'd be sent  
To call him in, a dark and elemental  
Shape by then, the ruins of a young man's face  
Still visible behind the years, the toil.

A labourer and architect,  
He taught patience in slow lessons  
And one man's dedication to a craft.  
From his cracked hands I watched the brittle seed  
Cast surely for the future, the unborn;  
Those acts of affirmation his deep need.

Robert Minhinnick

