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THE PLOTHOLDER No 4 - June 1999

Midsummer Social - see back page

KEEPING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER . . . The growing season is in full swing, the rate of applications for new plots has risen, and, earlier than last year, all reasonably decent plots have been let. But in recent weeks a number of plots, particularly those near the entrance gates, are getting overgrown, and once again we seem to have taken two steps forward and one back in our attempts to get the site fully in order. This is frustrating for your Committee - in Islington, there is a two year waiting list for an allotment, but here there are even a few new tenants who have taken a plot and not shown up at all. The next plot inspections will take place this month, and by now everyone should have had enough time to get organised, if they are serious about their tenancy. Don't forget that if we don't cultivate our site, we run the risk of losing it. Several people have asked for loan of the strimmer to help keep things tidy. Unfortunately because of insurance problems, its use must be limited to those committee members who have received proper instructions. But we are looking into this.

. . . AND SITE RULES There aren't many, but for those who have missed seeing them, here is a summary. 1. The year's rent is due on 1st October each year, and must be paid during that month. 2. Tenancy is normally to be terminated by three month's notice on either side. 3. The tenant undertakes to keep a legible number on the plot, cultivate the plot properly, and keep it, the path on either side, and half of the road in front, free from weeds which may injure surrounding plots. 4. If a dog or other animal is brought onto the site, it must be kept on a lead. 5. Subletting must only be done with consent of the Committee. 6. Follow any instructions the Committee may post on the notice board from time to time e.g. concerning bonfires. 7. Keep the gates closed to prevent theft. 8. Use the incinerator to destroy diseased material to avoid infecting other plots.

Please, save your Committee's time by keeping to these rules, especially regarding numbers, path maintenance, and bonfires, so that they can concentrate on other important matters.

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This issue of *The Plotholder* has generously been sponsored by **CHASE ORGANICS LTD**, of Riverdene Estate, Molesey Road, Hersham, KT12 4RG (tel. 01932 253666). They sell supplies of seed, plants and other items for organic gardeners through their catalogue, and offer a 10% discount on most items to members of the RHS and the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA). Many of their products are difficult to obtain elsewhere. If you send for their catalogue, don't forget to mention that you are a plotholder on the Royal Paddocks Allotments.

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THE CARLIN PEA - A BIT OF LIVING HISTORY IN THE PADDOCKS

The Carlin pea is an ancient maincrop pea, recorded in the reign of Elizabeth I [*writes Russ Knight, plot 181*]. It almost certainly originated in the monastic gardens of the early Middle Ages, when peas and beans formed the staple diet of the population. It grows strongly to about six feet high, with strikingly attractive purple and white blossom, and crops prolifically. The peas, which can be used fresh, or dried for winter use, have a distinctive flavour, described in my house as 'a mediaeval mushy pea.'

Carlin peas are better known in the north of England. In the Northeast traditionally children were given them to eat on Carlin Sunday, after a special church service, not unlike Harvest Festival. In Nottingham the cooked peas were sold at the annual Goose Fair until the late fifties.

Sadly, the Carlin pea is not generally available in seed catalogues. However, I shall be growing a batch for seed purposes this season, and will have pea seed available for the 2000 season. Those interested in carrying on this historic gardening tradition are more than welcome to some. Please let me know a.s.a.p. if you want some, so that I can gauge demand.

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SAVING SEED of old or rare varieties of vegetables is becoming increasingly important as the bigger seed companies concentrate on providing varieties for commercial growers, sometimes at the expense of gardeners. Try to save some seed, this year, of varieties that have done well in our conditions, for distribution to other ploholders - but remember that F1 and F2 hybrids cannot be saved as they don't breed true. Les Dickinson (plot 182) has a few seeds of a climbing french bean 'Giant Purple Climbing', which is both decorative and tasty, and also of pumpkin 'Lady Godiva', whose seeds are skinless and soft, making them ideal for saving to use with salads.

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SLUGS are *really* bad this year, and many of us are struggling to minimise the damage they do. There are various ways of tackling them, some environmentally friendly, some less so. 'Kinder' methods include beer traps (sunken containers of beer into which the slugs fall and drown), sprinkling the soil with sharp ash or broken eggshells, and handpicking at night - though the thought of bands of ploholders groping through the night to collect slugs stretches the imagination a bit. Wendy Valmori has opted for a more expensive but natural method of watering in nematode worms, a natural predator which attacks and kills slugs in the soil. Both the nematodes and the beer traps can be bought from Chase Organics.

But slug pellets are by far the most popular choice, so it's worth mentioning a couple of points about them. First, most people use them too thickly, and since part of the function of pellets is to attract the slugs this can be counterproductive. Six to ten pellets per plant are ample to do the job. Second, the pellets are harmful to birds and mammals, so whenever possible try to cover them up.

Destruction of the habitat which slugs like best can be an important means of control. They thrive in cool, damp, shady places, so the mowing of paths, and removal of stones, cans and old plastic is important, and not just a 'tidy-up' exercise. And, as avoiding action, start off as many plants as you can in modules, and transplant them when they have grown on. Not a foolproof method, but it does minimise the risk of losing rows of tiny seedlings that slugs love so much.

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CAR PARKING has presented some problems recently. The site rules are that there must be no parking at any time on the perimeter roads, except for deliveries, which should be completed as quickly as possible; and no parking is allowed on site on Sundays, again except for short-term loading and unloading.

The Committee recognises that there is an increased wish for parking space, and it is proposed to level two abandoned plots, one at either end of the site, to provide more space for cars. We need to strike a balance between our motorised society, and the peaceful and uncluttered nature of our site; meanwhile, we are all asked to keep to the rules.

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CRIME WAVE? For the first time in several years we have experienced theft (of seed potatoes) from a lockup, and the removal of a substantial amount of Roundup, bought for use by the Committee on overgrown plots. Fortunately not too much damage has been done, but we need to be vigilant. Challenge anyone who seems to be acting suspiciously, and keep the gates closed at all times. Equipment left on abandoned plots is not 'up for grabs' - it should be left for the incoming tenant.

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WATERING is made possible thanks to the efforts of George Harmsworth, who services our pumps. He makes sure we have the benefit of artesian well water, cheap, clean, chemical-free and never cut off during a drought. We hope this won't be a drought year - but there is a definite skill in the use of water, explained in various RHS publications, and supported by scientific studies. At the risk of teaching grannies to suck eggs, we pass on some of the RHS advice.

First, make the soil more water-retentive by enriching it with compost or manure. This is particularly important on our sandy soil. *Second*, water at the time of day when plants can make best use of it: evening for preference, followed by early morning. Watering in the middle of a hot day is a waste of time, and will provide only a dessertspoon of water per plant for every canful - most will evaporate. *Third*, water when the plants need it most - when they're flowering and setting fruit (peas, beans, tomatoes,), or when the fruit (marrows or raspberries, for instance) are swelling. Five cans per row of plants is the suggested amount, and a sunken plantpot close to the roots of marrows and tomatoes, or a trench made with an onion hoe around peas and beans, can help ensure that the water goes just where you want it to.

Of course, during a drought small seedlings, fruiting plants, and anything visibly suffering, all take priority, regardless of general rules.

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SOCIAL SCENE . . The Spring Social, our first attempt at such a venture, went very well, thanks to Helga Foss's sublime optimism (and tent), and the efforts of her and her team. The weather portents weren't good, and awareness of having made a big break with tradition caused a flutter in the heart of the Plotholders' Chairman. But all was well, and the outcome was a pleasant low-key event at which we could chat with each other, put faces to names, and put forward suggestions. We also covered our costs, thanks to some generous donations, and made a small profit of £2.07. The Committee are eternally grateful to the plotholder who paid the 7p!

It seems you'd like to do the same again - so we are, on Sunday 13 June (see our invitation below). Bring some plants to swap, some food to share - we had thought of barbecuing, but with no real idea of numbers it seemed a bit chancy.

. . . **AND DRINKS** If you enjoyed Susan Saunders' home-made *Elderflower Cordial* at the last social, now's the time to make your own - and here's the recipe: Into a large bowl put 3lb white sugar with 3 oz citric acid, and pour on 2 pints of boiling water. Stir till the sugar has dissolved, then grate in the zest of a lemon, slice the lemon and add that to the bowl too. Finally push in 20 large heads of elderflowers, cover the bowl and leave it all to steep overnight. Next day, strain the cordial through muslin, and bottle. Serve diluted, with sparkling water if you like it. Some recipes tell you to store the cordial in the fridge. I do this after opening it, but otherwise find it keeps quite well. If you find a ring of mould forming on top, or it seems to be fermenting, strain it again and bring it to the boil briefly - it doesn't seem to affect the taste or quality. Sterilising the bottles can help too.

To make *Elderflower Champagne*: To a gallon of cold water add 2 tablespoons of white wine vinegar, the juice and pared rind of a lemon, and a pound and a quarter of white sugar. Stir well, and push in three or four large open heads of elderflowers, gathered on a dry day and dusty with pollen. Cover the container, and leave in a cool place for 24 hours. Then strain and bottle in screw-capped glass bottles which have previously held a fizzy drink. Leave for two weeks in a cool dark place - after this, drink it, or at least vent the bottle caps, because this drink can be very explosive!

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**Meet your neighbours at a MIDSUMMER SOCIAL**  
on Sunday 13 June, between midday and 2 p.m. outside the Seed Store.  
Wine 70p per glass, soft drinks 40p, and free squash for children.  
Bring your surplus plants or seedlings to swap.  
If you'd like to picnic, bring a plate of food to share.

12p 60p  
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