

Winter 2021

# Allotment News

Hotwells and District Allotment Association

## AGM - All welcome

**The HwDAA Annual General Meeting will be on 19 February 2022.** Unless things change again it will, thankfully, be back in the shop, face to face. Watch out for the agenda and annual accounts which will be put on the website in late January. All tenants are very welcome.

## Potato Day

**Our next Potato Day will be on Saturday 22 January.** Last year we had to cancel and our entire order was distributed to tenants by hand. We hope the coming Potato Day will be as close to normal as possible but are not yet sure if we will be able to offer soup. Watch out for details on our stock of earlies, maincrop and salad potatoes. We'll also be looking for volunteers to join in with the bagging up on the weekend of 15-16 January as well as some to help with the day itself so please check for space in your diaries. Julia Hammond is our new Potato Queen, contact her via: [HwDAA contact form](#)

## Volunteers

We're really pleased that Claire Greenfield, Bower Ashton, has taken over running the HwDAA website. She can also be contacted through the website: [HwDAA contact form](#)

We also need a volunteer events planner. In the past we've run various events including beginners courses, pruning workshops and cream teas. If you would like to take on this role we'd love to hear from you.

## Plot Inspection timetable

In the last edition we promised an approximate timetable for inspections in 2022. Inspections are meant to ensure that the ground is well used, well cultivated and productive, allowing for the seasons. They are not meant to be draconian checks designed to make life difficult. By the end of March site reps will contact tenants about any issues which need attention. After that site reps will work with inspectors to look at recurring problems in April, May and June. For more information contact your site rep or see the website: [www.hwdaa.co.uk](http://www.hwdaa.co.uk)

## New President Wanted

We are looking for a new president following the resignation of David Thornley who was our president for many years. The committee has agreed we need someone who is:

- An experienced vegetable grower and allotment supporter
- A supporter of HwDAA and Bristol Allotments
- Involved in wider food or growing initiatives in Bristol or the South West
- Willing and able to promote the interests of HwDAA with local or regional organisations
- Happy to take on some ceremonial functions for HwDAA such as presenting awards at the AGM.

The committee has a couple of names to put forward but would welcome suggestions about who might be willing and able to take on this role. Contact [chair@hwdaa.co.uk](mailto:chair@hwdaa.co.uk)

## Climate Emergency

One of our members has suggested, in the context of the debates during and following COP 26, that we think about the contribution of allotments to tackling the climate emergency. We know that 'growing our own' encourages consumption of vegetables, reduces waste, cuts down on food miles and much more. HwDAA has already stopped selling peat based composts and taken steps to reduce the use of plastic and bonfires. We hope to have a regular section in the newsletter for members' ideas about the ways in which allotments can play a part, however small. All thoughts and contributions welcome.

**Jenny Hendy, Chair,** [chair@hwdaa.co.uk](mailto:chair@hwdaa.co.uk)



Photo: Paul Finch

## Hornets' Nest

Have you ever seen a hornets' nest? Neither had I until a month ago.

I keep bees on White City allotments so any sighting of hornets is a concern as it might mean the arrival in the area of the Asian variety, classed as an 'invasive non-native alien species' which predates on honey bees. However, when I was told that hornets had built a nest inside the shed of a tenant a short distance from my plot, my fears vanished as Asian ones create their nests high up in trees. So, I put on my bee suit and accompanied by Julia, a fellow beekeeper from KL1, went to investigate.

Sure enough the large brown and yellow insects were instantly identifiable as European hornets (*Vespa crabro*). They were entering and leaving via a hole under the eaves of the roof, steadily taking off and landing like the jumbo jets of the insect world.

Once inside we could see their nest which had been built just above the door. It was a work of insect art, about 30cm in diameter, made from a paper which the clever hornets create by chewing bark, soft wood and plant matter, just as wasps do. I've seen many wasps' nests over the years but this was far more impressive with an undulating surface of swirling grey-brown patterns.



The expression 'to stir up a hornets' nest' hasn't done much to boost the popularity of these amazing creatures. They do sting but the venom is considered to be less potent than that of honey bees. Unlike their wasp cousins which enjoy making a nuisance of themselves around humans, European hornets are peaceable insects which

generally only sting when their nest is threatened. They are excellent pollinators and are comparatively rare in our area.

Like wasps, hornets die off when the temperature falls in late autumn and the nest is abandoned, the queen finding somewhere to hibernate until spring when she begins to lay. For more about hornets see: [www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk)

*John Holland, White City*

## Ways with Waste

There are plenty of alternative ways of disposing of allotment waste rather than burning it.

**Composting** produces ideal, peat-free soil conditioner and it's free. You could also dig a two foot deep trench and bury the waste which will help improve fertility.

**Bristol City Council has a green waste collection service** which costs £32 annually plus a one off charge of £21 for the bin or you can buy garden waste sacks which the council will collect. [www.bristol.gov.uk](http://www.bristol.gov.uk)

**At Avonmouth and St Philips there are council recycling centres** which take garden waste. You can only go to the recycling centre on certain days, based on the last number on your vehicle's number plate so check before you go. [www.bristol.gov.uk](http://www.bristol.gov.uk)

*Paul Finch, Environmental Rep*

## Build a Fence with prunings

I decided to build a fence, with my tree and other prunings. It's really simple and quick to do. I made two parallel lines of wood or metal stakes about two feet (60cm) between each stake and one foot (30cm) between the two lines, then laid the prunings along the gap and built it up breaking off any side branches so I could lay them easier. I've used metal grid panels on one side as it forms my front fence. A fence like this can also be good as a windbreak and for birds and insects. It will eventually become compost.



*Wendy Miller, White City*

## The Submarine and the Allotment

How the food crisis in the First World War stimulated the need for allotments and influenced the history of our association.

In May 1917 the Liverpool registered cargo ship the *Pilar de Larrinaga* was ploughing her way from Galveston, Texas, to Manchester carrying a cargo of wheat and mixed goods. She was sailing on her own as the convoy system had yet to be introduced by the Admiralty. The ship was torpedoed by a U-boat off the southeast coast of County Wexford, Ireland. Twenty crewmen died including the master. This was just one of hundreds of merchant ships sunk by German submarines in 1917. In June of that year 110 ships were sunk in the Western Approaches (the sea lanes leading to the UK's west coast) alone. Britain was in danger of severe food shortages if the German U-boat campaign continued to sink ships at this rate. Something had to be done.

William Anderson, the MP for Sheffield Attercliffe, raised the question of food supply and distribution in the House of Commons. He hinted at serious unrest if the problem was not fixed and said that since the outbreak of war the price of a 4lb loaf of bread in London had gone up from 5½d. to one shilling. Wheat prices were soaring. Oats were sold at Berwick at 66 shillings, which was the highest price on record. For other staple foods like potatoes there had been long queues in London and other towns, sometimes a quarter to half a mile long. He said that women and children could stand for hours and at the end find that there were none available. A deputation of women,

## Gardener's Challenge

Cauliflower have long been considered a gardener's challenge but by following a few simple rules it's possible for any grower to achieve decent results. My variety of choice is Aalsmeer, a very winter-hardy cauliflower which I've found consistently produces perfect heads.

Seeds should be sown in late April/early May under glass. Mark out a grid in the tray with a dibber rather than scattering the seeds, as you will be able to see your germination rate and pricking out will be easier. They should be ready to pot in two weeks, and can go into modules or 3" containers where they should be



many of them the wives of soldiers in the trenches, had approached the Lord Provost of Glasgow in order to tell him of their difficulties with regard to food shortages. The women were told to go home and mind their children.

Germany's campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare was intended to expose Britain and its allies to a food crisis. These countries relied heavily upon imported grain and the submarine campaign was a deadly threat. Although they attempted to increase their own food production, their main success was in introducing successful systems of rationing. The government also created propaganda campaigns encouraging people all over the country to start growing their own food. In 1914 there were somewhere between 450,000 and 600,000 allotments in England. As the severity of food supplies became worse there was a serious move to increase the number of allotments. Local authorities were given powers to turn any derelict land into allotments. By 1917 there were over 1.5 million of them.

*Bob Corfield, Kennel Lodge 1*

buried down to the first pair of leaves. From this point growth is rapid and within three-four weeks you should have a sturdy plug that is ready to go out.

The soil preparation and planting is extremely important. I rake one-two barrow loads of rotted



horse manure into a three metre raised bed and also add two cups of blood, fish & bone (BFB) and one of chicken manure pellets. It should be balanced but with a nitrogen bias. The soil should be reasonably heavy so don't add too much compost. Make a planting mix of compost and horse manure with a very small amount of BFB added, and use this to plant your caulis into the bed.

They should be at least 75cm from each other, 90cm is better. Don't be tempted to place them closer as they will fail. They should be planted as deep as possible so the first leaves are just above the soil level and the hole back-filled with the planting mix. Cover with some top soil, then the most crucial part - firm them in. And I don't just mean tap them in with your fingers - you have to stand on top with your toes almost touching the stem and stamp them in as firmly as possible - this is crucial.

Level the surface with more top soil if needed. Water and place a cabbage collar around the stem. Finally, cover with a tight fitting mesh for six weeks - my preference is enviromesh which allows almost nothing to get through. Later it can be changed to bird netting.



For the first two weeks after planting you may need to water them but after that they should need very little, if any.

All that remains to be done until the following April is to ensure they stay upright, remove dead leaves, side shoots, and keep pests under control. Copper tape can be fitted and beer traps installed and replaced every few weeks. At harvest time, the heads will appear very quickly. The curds should be protected from direct sun using a leaf until ready to harvest. The Aalsmeer variety frequently produces heads exceeding two kilos.

**Aniket Sardana, Alderman Moore**

## Wildlife on our Allotments

Many HwDAA plot holders strive to be as friendly to nature as possible whilst maintaining areas of a sufficient size to cultivate for crops. We can all do our bit by enriching the soil with homemade compost, using the green compost (now on most sites), not using pesticides and herbicides and growing some flowers which will attract bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

Earlier in the year we carried out wildlife surveys on Kennel Lodge 1 and Bower Ashton. In September we descended on Kennel Lodge 2 and White City. On KL2 we found eight ponds, two netted over specifically for fish so not strictly for wildlife. On White City there were eighteen - including an eye watering example in the community orchard garden.



On this site there seems to have been a newt migration from the Metro Bus groundworks. Both sites had a fair range of bird boxes and insect hotels with KL2 home to a bat box. There were active beehives on both sites.

Two most interesting finds were a comfrey farm on KL2 where the plant is harvested and turned into incredible liquid feed for the plot holders to use and on White City one tenant is managing a permaculture plot as part of a research study. Elsewhere, hidden away in an area of uncut grass, were six mats for slow worms with young worms noted.

This illustrates just how easy and relatively low-cost simple additions can have a positive impact on our wildlife friends. We should look after them. After all we need them – they don't need us. All the surveys are on the website: [Wildlife surveys](#)

**Martin Howard, Bower Ashton  
Paul Finch, Environmental Rep**

## Growing Sweet Peas

Sweet peas (*Lathyrus odoratus*) are an easy to grow, fragrant annual that's a great addition to the allotment. A few pounds spent on seed will give you armfuls of flowers in summer and the more you pick, the more they produce.



Seed is best sown in autumn or spring but you can sow sweet peas in winter, providing you have a well-lit frost free growing environment. Sow in 9cm pots (three to a pot) or in root trainers in a good quality, peat-free compost, and put in a warm place until germination takes place. Label your plants so you don't forget which varieties you're growing.

As soon as the seed has germinated, move to a cool, frost free environment such as a cold frame or greenhouse, where your seedlings can receive lots of light. Shorter daylight hours over winter, make it difficult to provide enough light for seedlings so keeping them on a windowsill after germination will result in spindly, leggy seedlings which will produce weak plants.

As soon as two pairs of leaves have developed pinch out the growing tip of the plant to encourage side growth. This will produce a bushy, strong plant with lots of flowering stems.

Sweet peas should be grown in an open, sunny position. They are twining vines so they will need a structure to climb up. Before planting out, prepare the ground by adding organic matter such as compost or manure. Seedlings should be hardened off gradually before planting to acclimatise them to outside temperatures.

In mid spring, when the risk of frost has passed, plant the seedlings 20cm apart and tie gently to your support structure to encourage the plant to twine. Water well and feed with liquid seaweed or tomato feed when buds begin to appear.

The allotment shop stocks some lovely varieties, including the classic old fashioned 'Cupani', a beautiful bi-coloured purple and magenta flower, 'Old Fashioned', a colourful mix of smaller bloomed, beautifully scented flowers and the more modern, 'Almost Black', a Grandiflora type which has very dark blooms and looks amazing in floral arrangements.

For more information see the National Sweet Pea Society website: [sweetpeas.org.uk](http://sweetpeas.org.uk)

*Anneke van Eijkern, Alderman Moore*

## Snippets

**We recently welcomed thirty artists from the Clifton Arts Group to Alderman Moore's so that they could paint and draw on the site.**

They all enjoyed themselves and we hope one day to see some of the results. They generously donated £75 to our funds as well. Here's organiser Steve Crossley's (unfinished) painting of our site entrance.



*Phil Cass, Alderman Moore*

**The National Allotment Society has produced a series of leaflets, in collaboration with the DRY research project, that address future concerns about water shortages and drought and how these may affect allotment growing.**

Topics include: Growing drought-resistant crops on allotments, Ground level rainwater collection on allotments and Climate predictions for allotments. Go to: [www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk)

**I inherited three fruit trees when I took over my plot** - a pear, a dessert apple and a large espaliered Bramley cooking apple. All needed some pruning, which I have attempted in the past couple of years, inexpertly and with trepidation. The cooker, especially, is far too big

and needs a reduction in height and spread. I mention this as I had a visit at the weekend from a friend who happens to be a tree surgeon and he noticed that a number of the fruit trees on the site were in need of a haircut, not just mine. He told me what to do but I know that as soon as I stand in front of the trees, with saw and secateurs in hand, it will all go out of my head. I would welcome a pruning masterclass.

**Bob Smyth, Kennel Lodge 1**

A number of plot holders have said the same thing. Does anyone know an expert who might like to run a class for HwDAA. Also if you have any ideas for other courses or events that would be useful or of interest to plot holders, contact [chair@hwdaa.co.uk](mailto:chair@hwdaa.co.uk)

**‘Allotments have the highest diversity of any urban habitat** - higher than gardens, cemeteries or city parks, higher even than city nature reserves. Allotments teem with life.’ Bristol University study.

**‘Many allotments produce the equivalent of twenty tons of food per hectare** - the main arable farmland crops in the UK, wheat and oilseed rape produce about eight and 3.5 tons per hectare respectively.’ Silent Earth by Professor Dave Goulson.

**These quotes appear in an article by Terry Dickinson in the latest National Allotment Society newsletter.** All members can read the quarterly newsletter online, via the link that is sent out by HwDAA email. Paper copies are also available free in our shop. The website has lots of useful growing information and advice. Go to: [National Allotment Society](http://National Allotment Society)

**Some of us on the Alderman Moore site got together and pressed apples to make cider.** A large number of apples were donated by other allotment holders, so thank you very much. We made five gallons of juice that is now turning into cider.



Another gallon or so was pressed and saved as juice. We bottled and pasteurised it and it is absolutely delicious.

The scratter is a device that turns apples into pulp which you then place into the press. Both the scratter and press were hand made, using plans found online.



**Jonathan Eve, Alderman Moore**

## Shop News

The latest order of seeds is about to reach the shop. There will be a good range of varieties for all the basic allotment veg and some interesting new trials. Buy soon to ensure you get your favourite varieties. Amongst other useful items the shop now sells tick removers.

**The shop will be closed from Monday 13 December - Friday 7 January. It re-opens, well stocked for all those Spring purchases on Saturday 8 January.**

The shop is on the Alderman Moore site. It is open on Saturdays and Sundays from 10.30am-12 noon.

## Learn More Grow Better

As well as learning from our allotment neighbours, there are plenty of opportunities in Bristol to learn more about growing and wildlife. We will let you know about some of these in each newsletter – and if you are already involved in any opportunities for sharing knowledge and expertise, please let us know. Here is our winter selection:

### The RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

If you fancy a mid-winter bird-spotting session on your plot with a cuppa and a notebook, put the dates 28-30 January in your diary. We have it on good authority that an allotment counts. To register and record your sightings go to: [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

### Incredible Edible Bristol Online event

Adam Jones will talk about his journey into the no dig method on 21 January, 7-8.30pm. For more details go to: [www.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

### Get Growing! Learn the building block of successful gardening and food growing.

This course, which is free for residents of BS3, is for beginner allotmenters and gardeners. It will cover soil, seeds, propagation, composting and how to work with nature as your natural pest control. The course is being run at Speedwell Allotments, Whitefield Road, Bristol, BS5 7TY. Friday, 11 March, 9.30am – 3.30pm. For more details go to: [www.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

*Martin Howard, Bower Ashton*

## Rules and Regs

**It is illegal to harm badgers or interfere with their setts.** You must not:

- intentionally capture, kill or injure a badger
- damage, destroy or block access to their setts
- disturb badgers in setts
- treat a badger cruelly
- deliberately send or intentionally allow a dog into a sett.

**Please remember that bonfires are completely banned** on all sites between 1 April and 31 October. Try to use alternative ways of getting rid of waste material.

**Cage traps should not be used** on the allotment sites.

For more advice and information on all policies go to the HwDAA website: [www.hwdaa.co.uk](http://www.hwdaa.co.uk)

## Recipe

### Celeriac, sage and chicken risotto

Serves 4

20g salted butter  
3 tbsp olive oil  
1 onion, finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced  
500g celeriac, peeled and chopped into 2cm pieces  
1 litre fresh chicken stock  
300g Arborio rice  
250ml white wine  
1 tsp salt  
2 large chicken breasts, cut into strips

Sage butter:

50g salted butter,  
10 sage leaves, finely chopped

Melt butter with 2 tbsp oil in a large pan. Add the onion, season and cook gently for 5 mins until softened. Add the garlic and cook for 1 min then add the celeriac. Mix, cover and cook for 10 mins over a low heat. Remove the lid, increase the heat to medium and cook for 5 mins to colour the celeriac. Bring the stock and 300ml water to a gentle simmer in a pan.

Add the rice to the celeriac and stir to coat. Stir in the wine and cook until most of it has evaporated. Gradually add the stock mixture, a ladleful at a time, stirring often, allowing the risotto to absorb the liquid before adding more. Cook until the rice is al dente and the sauce is rich and creamy (15-20 mins).

When the risotto is almost cooked, heat the remaining 1 tbsp oil in a pan; add the chicken breast strips. Season and cook over a medium heat for 6-8 mins until cooked through, the juices run clear and no pink meat remains. Stir into the risotto.

In a separate pan, put 50g butter over a low heat until it starts to brown. Add the sage; cook for a few seconds. Serve the risotto in warm bowls, drizzled with sage butter.

For a vegetarian version use vegetable stock when making the risotto and omit the chicken.

*Chris Hanmer, Kennel Lodge 1*

# Winter Jobs

## December

**If you haven't already, clean out greenhouses and polytunnels** with warm soapy water and a little disinfectant. Clean glass allows better light penetration.

**Check tall growing brassicas** such as kale and sprouting broccoli. If you can rock them, firm them back in with your foot and mound up an inch or two of soil on the stem.

**Keep kale, winter cabbages and other brassicas covered** with netting to protect them from hungry pigeons. Remove any yellowed leaves, so that fungal diseases such as grey mould and downy mildew don't take hold. Low light levels in December mean that even cold-tolerant brassicas can't maintain many functioning green leaves. Removing leaves also reduces the slug habitat.

**Harvest Brussels sprouts** when the heads are firm, green and around one to two inches in diameter. Pick from the base of the plant up, twisting them away from the plant.

**This is a good month to winter prune** apple and pear trees to control their shape and size, and to increase their productivity. You can also prune blackcurrants, gooseberries, redcurrants and whitecurrants and plant bare-root canes, bushes and trees.

**Turn compost heaps.** This adds air which is necessary for composting to occur. If it's too wet or becomes compacted the process is slower.



## January

**This is usually a quiet month and a good time to plan for next year's plot.** You could think about what went well this year and what didn't and also about rotating your crops. Sort out your seeds, throwing away empty or out-of-date packets and noting any to buy for the coming season. The allotment shop is a good place to start.

## February

**If you didn't plant garlic cloves last year** it's possible to plant in early spring. Get them in the ground before the end of February.

**After Valentines Day, 14 February, light is increasing fast** and some sowing can begin but there is no harm in starting later if the weather stays cold. Undercover - sow broad beans, cauliflower, spinach turnips radish parsley coriander dill. Sow calendula, cornflower Californian poppy and hardy annuals outside or in cool greenhouse.

**Chit first early potato tubers** by standing them in trays in a light, frost free place.

## Next Newsletter

The next edition will go out on 17 March Please let me have any contributions by 28 February.

We welcome relevant contributions from members of HwDAA. You don't have to produce a polished piece, a few sentences or draft notes are fine. The maximum for any article is 500 words and all items can be edited.

**Gillian Turner, Editor**

To email the editor [click here](#)

**Hotwells and District Allotment Association**

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